



Titus 3:1-7

Trinity 17, Oct. 12, 2025
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Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. ³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

C.S. Lewis wrote in his book, *Mere Christianity*, “A proud man is always looking down on people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.” And he’s right—spend enough time comparing yourself to other people and seeing yourself as better than them, you’re going to lose sight of what is above you—namely God! And that’s a danger, because if we lose sight of God while we’re looking down on others, well, then we might forget why it is exactly that we can stand before God at all!

But it’s hard not to do that comparison thing when we look around and see so much evil in the world today. So much hatred and murder and immorality—people call evil good and applaud those things that are opposed to God’s will. And in a nation that is so divided across political lines, where hate speech makes up the morning news—it’s hard not to join in. It’s hard not to think of ourselves and our opinions and our behavior as *better*—hard not to dismiss other people as being hopeless cases.

Nothing is new, though, I suppose. In Paul’s letter this morning, he’s writing to the young pastor Titus who is serving on the island of Crete just south of Greece, in the Mediterranean Sea. And the Cretans were a people that remind me much of Americans. In fact, Paul had quoted a proverb about Cretans earlier in this book, when he said, ***“Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.”*** (Titus 1:12) An ancient historian by the name of Polybius reported that, “The Cretans . . . owing to their ingrained lust of wealth are involved in constant broils both public and private, and in murders and civil wars.”

And so, Paul writes to young pastor Titus, giving him instructions to relay to the Cretan congregations. Much of what he writes about here in chapter three is how they are expected to live as members of such an evil society. And since their society was so similar to our present one, this is an important reminder for us as well. The theme we’ll be considering this morning is:

Living Among “Liars, Evil Beasts, and Lazy Gluttons”

I. By nature, you’re no better than *they* are

II. By Baptism, you’re now better than *you* were!

Paul begins with a reminder—this was something he had evidently taught before, and he wanted Titus to teach it again: ***“Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.”*** In other words, God expects the Christian to be a model citizen. That involves willing obedience and service toward the *government*—paying taxes, following laws,

praying for our leaders. That also involves dealing with your fellow citizens in a courteous manner—not arguing, not belittling anyone—your dealings with *everyone* are to be governed by genuine love for them in your heart! Easier said than done, of course.

And that was true for the Cretan Christians as well. They did live in that society that was filled with ***“liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons”***—self-love and selfishness and rebellion against authority was the status quo. And on top of that, their ruler at the time of Paul’s writing was the Roman Emperor Nero! Nero, that evil ruler that had executed several apostles, fed Christians to wild dogs in his circus, burned them as human torches to light his gardens at night. You could imagine the Cretan Christians seeing the example of the Cretan society around them and considering the terrible evils emanating from their seat of government and then asking, “Should we really be hospitable to a people and obeying a government so immoral as the ones we have?” And Paul answers, “Yes! You should!”

The reason for this is that ***“God our Savior . . . desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*** (1 Timothy 2:3-4) The Cretans, by their example in obedience to the government and in their consideration towards their neighbors, were to be shining lights pointing directly at their Savior. It’s as Jesus once said, ***“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”*** (Matthew 5:16)

I remember when I was young, my brothers and I would play wiffle ball in the side yard of our house. And we’d get really competitive, and we’d get really angry, and after striking out you’d throw the bat as far away as you could so your brother had to go get it, and we’d throw the balls at each other, and we’d argue with each other, and we’d tackle each other—it was not good. And our mom would reprimand us and remind us that every one of our neighbors knew that we were the kids that did *not* go to public school, that we went to a Christian Day School. And if they were ever watching us play wiffle ball, they wouldn’t think very highly of our church or our school or our *Savior* at all.

We’ve got a couple problems: we are *not* very good at letting our lights shine, and we *also* just don’t care about other people’s salvation as much as we should! Jesus invites *sinners*, ***“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*** (Matthew 11:28) And yet, by the way we often think about others and speak about others and disregard one another, we *treat* it as if Jesus is saying, “Come to me, all you who vote a certain way... Come to me, all you who go to church every Sunday... Come to me, all you who have never done something *really* bad, and I will give you rest.” As we ***Live Among “Liars, Evil Beasts, and Lazy Gluttons,”*** we look down our noses at them and say, ***“God, I thank you that I am not like other men.”*** (Luke 18:11) We are so quick to dismiss other people as hopeless cases, as if we are *better* than them and that’s why we are going to heaven.

But Paul reminded the Cretans, and us by extension: ***By nature, you’re no better than they are.*** He writes, ***“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.”*** It’s a dark picture he paints, and who could claim that it’s not true of us? You look through our lives, and the evidence of our sinfulness is painted in glaring colors. *We* have followed sinful passions in the pursuit of sinful pleasures; *we* have spent our days being jealous of one another, not rejoicing in another’s success, *resenting* them for it; *we* have spent our lives loving ourselves while hating everyone else.

But, did you notice, Paul says this is what we *were once*—emphasizing that this sickening reality is now behind us, because, thanks be to God, it's not what we *are* anymore. Yes, we still struggle against those same sins, and we still struggle to show consideration to all people. But what we now *are* is redeemed Children of God, righteous and holy in God's sight, set apart for eternal life. And how did that happen for us?

It wasn't because we just reformed our ways. You know, the world thinks that as long as you teach people to be better, that they'll be better. Teach people not to be racist, teach people to love one another, teach people to have compassion on those less fortunate—as if the reason for all our problems is that we're not educated enough. That's *not* the answer; we *cannot* change ourselves.

The answer is what Paul writes next: ***“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us.”*** The moment things began to change for you was when ***“God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”*** (Galatians 4:4-5) *Jesus* came, and the Son of God Himself **Lived Among “Liars, Evil Beasts, and Lazy Gluttons.”** As He lived among us, it was not with the attitude that He was *better* than us—even though by every conceivable measure He *is* better than us. No, Jesus came to *serve*, considering *His* life not worth more than ours. He came, showing *all* consideration to *all* people *all* the time. He came inviting *sinners* to come to Him, not dismissing *anyone* but forgiving.

And everything that Jesus did has now been given to each of you—His perfect courtesy towards sinners, His forgiveness, His redeeming love—it has been poured out upon each of you and made you better than *you were*! He has changed ***“Liars, Evil Beasts, and Lazy Gluttons”*** like us into ***“heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”*** And Jesus effected this change through your *baptisms*. That's what Paul says, ***“He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”***

We had a baptism here on Thursday. A three-day-old Brenna Ann Rovere was brought to the waters of baptism here at this baptismal font. I poured water on her head in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and through that application of water with the Word, God did something miraculous. He took a sinful child and adopted her into His family and gave her eternal life through Christ Jesus her Savior. That was a miracle that only God could do.

But after that baptism, I was thinking about some of the baptisms I've been able to do in the past. I was reminded of a number of the baptisms I performed when I was pastor in Florida. In Florida, there's a much higher presence of Baptists than we have around here, and of course, Baptists don't think we should be baptizing babies. And I remember a few times distinctly when we had visitors at church to watch their relatives get baptized, and as I explained to the church what baptism did for the child, I remember seeing some eyes rolling and some scoffing. And I remember being self-conscious about it; some people witnessing those baptisms *clearly* felt that what I was doing was weird.

But then, as I was remembering those baptisms and the responses they got from some, I realized, baptism *is* weird! Afterall, is it *normal* for God to pour out His Holy Spirit upon those who would have nothing to do with Him? Is it *normal* for God to grant new life to the living dead? Is it *normal* to be

connected to Christ's death on the cross and be given a share in His resurrection from the dead? Is it *normal* for God to look at a group of **"Liars, Evil Beasts, and Lazy Gluttons,"** and willingly adopt them into His family and give them a share in every good thing that He has to give? None of that is normal at all—"Lord, forgive me for ever thinking baptism is something normal!" And yet these things are exactly what God has done for you through your baptisms.

And the baptism of an infant like Brenna is a perfect illustration for how God works salvation for sinners. Brenna is less than a week old, which means there's not *anything* she can do for herself. She can't walk, she can't talk, she can't change positions if she's uncomfortable, she can't put on more clothes if she's cold, she can't change her diapers. She can eat, but that's just done by reflex, she's not thinking about it. Brenna needs everything to be done for her. And when she was baptized on Thursday, God *was* doing everything for her.

That's exactly the way it works for all of us. Just look at the last half of our text and see how much emphasis is placed on *God's* working in our salvation. ***"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."***

When you compare this work of God to that dark, sinful description of us in verse three, Paul's point is clear: those who were, by nature, unlovable—God loved. Those who would only separate themselves in malice and hatred from every person and authority—God brought into fellowship with Himself. Those who deserved only damnation—God saved. While we are busy showing self-centered inhumanity to our fellow man, God shows His love for man, that includes you, and that includes me.

"A proud man is always looking down on people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you." Rather than constantly looking down, I pray that we spend our days looking up and reminding ourselves why it is exactly that God would welcome *us* into heaven. And if God is willing reclaim **"Liars, Evil Beasts, and Lazy Gluttons,"** like us and give us new life in Christ—when we had no part to play in the matter—that really ought to change how we think about everyone else. Remember, the Lord is ***"not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."*** (2 Peter 3:9) We are living proof of that. So, may the Lord work in our hearts the same desire for our neighbors. God grant it to us, in Jesus' saving name. Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.