

John 1:1 - Part 3

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes the eternal nature of the Word and the co-eternality of the Son and the Father, highlighting the importance of recognizing the distinction between the Creator and the creature.

Scripture: Psalm 102:27, Isaiah 43:10, Luke 6:37, John 1:1, Ephesians 4:26, Hebrews 1:3

Topics: "Eternal Existence", "Divine Nature"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the eternal existence of the Word, emphasizing the importance of understanding the Son's co-eternity with the Father and His role in creation. He challenges the notion of the Son being younger than the Father, highlighting the Son's infinite life and the fallacy of assigning a beginning to the Eternal. Chrysostom urges his audience to control their anger, illustrating the destructive nature of wrath and the importance of meekness and forgiveness in reflecting God's character.

Transcript

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.

1. When children are just brought to their learning, their teachers do not give them many tasks in succession, nor do they set them once for all, but they often repeat to them the same short ones, so that what is said may be easily implanted in their minds, and they may not be vexed at the first onset with the quantity, and with finding it hard to remember, and become less active in picking up what is given them, a kind of sluggishness arising from the difficulty. And I, who wish to effect the same with you, and to render your labor easy, take little by little the food which lies on this Divine table, and instill it into your souls. On this account I shall handle again the same words, not so as to say again the same things, but to set before you only what yet remains. Come, then, let us again apply our discourse to the introduction.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. Why, when all the other Evangelists had begun with the Dispensation ; (for Matthew says, The Book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David; and Luke too relates to us in the beginning of his Gospel the events relating to Mary; and in like manner Mark dwells on the same narratives, from that point detailing to us the history of the Baptist;) why, when they began with these matters, did John briefly and in a later place hint at them, saying, the Word was made flesh John 1:14; and, passing by everything else, His conception, His birth, His bringing up, His growth, at once discourse to us concerning His Eternal Generation?

I will now tell you what the reason of this is. Because the other Evangelists had dwelt most on the accounts of His coming in the flesh, there was fear lest some, being of grovelling minds, might for this reason rest in these doctrines alone, as indeed was the case with Paul of Samosata. In order, therefore, to lead away from this fondness for earth those who were like to fall into it, and to draw them up towards heaven, with good reason he commences his narrative from above, and from the eternal subsistence. For while Matthew enters upon his relation from Herod the king, Luke from Tiberius Cæsar, Mark from the Baptism of John, this Apostle, leaving alone all these things, ascends beyond all time or age. Thither darting forward the imagination of his hearers to the was in the beginning, not allowing it to stay at any point, nor setting any limit, as they did in Herod, and Tiberius, and John.

And what we may mention besides as especially deserving our admiration is, that John, though he gave himself up to the higher doctrine, yet did not neglect the Dispensation; nor were the others, though intent upon the relation of this, silent as to the subsistence before the ages. With good cause; for One Spirit It was that moved the souls of all; and therefore they have shown great unanimity in their narrative. But you, beloved, when you have heard of The Word, do not endure those who say, that He is a work; nor those even who think, that He is simply a word. For many are the words of God which angels execute, but of those words none is God; they all are prophecies or commands, (for in Scripture it is usual to call the laws of God His commands, and prophecies, words; wherefore in speaking of the angels, he says, Mighty in strength, fulfilling His word) Psalm 103:20, but this Word is a Being with subsistence, proceeding without affection from the Father Himself. For this, as I before said, he has shown by the term Word. As therefore the expression, In the beginning was the Word, shows His Eternity, so was in the beginning with God, has declared to us His Co-eternity. For that you may not, when you hear In the beginning was the Word, suppose Him to be Eternal, and yet imagine the life of the Father to differ from His by some interval and longer duration, and so assign a beginning to the Only-Begotten, he adds, was in the beginning with God; so eternally even as the Father Himself, for the Father was never without the Word, but He was always God with God, yet Each in His proper Person.

How then, one says, does John assert, that He was in the world, if He was with God? Because He was both with God and in the world also. For neither Father nor Son are limited in any way. Since, if there is no end of His greatness Psalm 145:3, and if of His wisdom there is no number Psalm 147:5, it is clear that there cannot be any beginning in time to His Essence. You have heard, that In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth Genesis 1:1; what do you understand from this beginning? Clearly, that they were created before all visible things. So, respecting the Only-Begotten, when you hear that He was in the beginning, conceive of him as before all intelligible things, and before the ages.

But if any one say, How can it be that He is a Son, and yet not younger than the Father? Since that which proceeds from something else needs must be later than that from which it proceeds; we will say that, properly speaking, these are human reasonings; that he who questions on this matter will question on others yet more improper; and that to such we ought not even to give ear. For our speech is now concerning God, not concerning the nature of men, which is subject to the sequence and necessary conclusions of these reasonings. Still, for the assurance of the weaker sort, we will speak even to these points.

2. Tell me, then, does the radiance of the sun proceed from the substance itself of the sun, or from some other source? Any one not deprived of his very senses needs must confess, that it proceeds from the substance itself. Yet, although the radiance proceeds from the sun itself, we cannot say that it is later in point of time than the substance of that body, since the sun has never appeared without its rays. Now if in

the case of these visible and sensible bodies there has been shown to be something which proceeds from something else, and yet is not after that from whence it proceeds; why are you incredulous in the case of the invisible and ineffable Nature? This same thing there takes place, but in a manner suitable to That Substance. For it is for this reason that Paul too calls Him Brightness Hebrews 1:3; setting forth thereby His being from Him and His Co-eternity. Again, tell me, were not all the ages, and every interval created by Him? Any man not deprived of his senses must necessarily confess this. There is no interval therefore between the Son and the Father; and if there be none, then He is not after, but Co-eternal with Him. For before and after are notions implying time, since, without age or time, no man could possibly imagine these words; but God is above times and ages.

But if in any case you say that you have found a beginning to the Son, see whether by the same reason and argument you are not compelled to reduce the Father also to a beginning, earlier indeed, but still a beginning. For when you have assigned to the Son a limit and beginning of existence, do you not proceed upwards from that point, and say, that the Father was before it? Clearly you do. Tell me then, what is the extent of the Father's prior subsistence? For whether you say that the interval is little, or whether you say it is great, you equally have brought the Father to a beginning. For it is clear, that it is by measuring the space that you say whether it is little or great; yet it would not be possible to measure it, unless there were a beginning on either side; so that as far as you are concerned you have given the Father a beginning, and henceforth, according to your argument, not even the Father will be without beginning. See you that the word spoken by the Saviour is true, and the saying everywhere discovers its force? And what is that word? It is He that honors not the Son, honors not the Father. John 5:23

And I know indeed that what now has been said cannot by many be comprehended, and therefore it is that in many places we avoid agitating questions of human reasonings, because the rest of the people cannot follow such arguments, and if they could, still they have nothing firm or sure in them. For the thoughts of mortal men are miserable, and our devices are but uncertain. Wisdom 9:14 Still I should like to ask our objectors, what means that which is said by the Prophet, Before Me there was no God formed, nor is there any after Me? Isaiah 43:10 For if the Son is younger than the Father, how, says He, Nor is there any after me? Will you take away the being of the Only-Begotten Himself? You either must dare this, or admit one Godhead with distinct Persons of the Father and Son.

Finally, how could the expression, All things were made by Him, be true? For if there is an age older than He, how can that which was before Him have been made by Him? Do you see to what daring the argument has carried them, when once the truth has been unsettled? Why did not the Evangelist say, that He was made from things that were not, as Paul declares of all things, when he says, Who calls those things which be not as though they were; but says, Was in the beginning? Romans 4:17 This is contrary to that; and with good reason. For God neither is made, nor has anything older; these are words of the Greeks. Tell me this too: Would you not say, that the Creator beyond all comparison excels His works? Yet since that which is from things that were not is similar to them, where is the superiority not admitting of comparison? And what mean the expressions, I am the first and I am the last Isaiah 44:6; and, before Me was no other God formed? Isaiah 43:10 For if the Son be not of the same Essence, there is another God; and if He be not Co-eternal, He is after Him; and if He did not proceed from His Essence, clear it is that He was made. But if they assert, that these things were said to distinguish Him from idols, why do they not allow that it is to distinguish Him from idols that he says, the Only True God? John 17:3 Besides, if this was said to distinguish Him from idols, how would you interpret the whole sentence? After Me, He says, is no other God. In saying this, He does not exclude the Son, but that After Me there is no idol God, not that

there is no Son. Allowed, says he; what then? And the expression, Before Me was no other God formed, will you so understand, as that no idol God indeed was formed before Him, but yet a Son was formed before Him? What evil spirit would assert this? I do not suppose that even Satan himself would do so.

Moreover, if He be not Co-eternal with the Father, how can you say that His Life is infinite? For if it have a beginning from before, although it be endless, yet it is not infinite; for the infinite must be infinite in both directions. As Paul also declared, when he said, Having neither beginning of days, nor end of life Hebrews 7:3; by this expression showing that He is both without beginning and without end. For as the one has no limit, so neither has the other. In one direction there is no end, in the other no beginning.

3. And how again, since He is Life, was there ever when He was not? For all must allow, that Life both is always, and is without beginning and without end, if It be indeed Life, as indeed It is. For if there be when It is not, how can It be the life of others, when It even Itself is not?

How then, says one, does John lay down a beginning by saying, 'In the beginning was'? Tell me, have you attended to the In the beginning, and to the was, and do you not understand the expression, the Word was? What! When the Prophet says, From everlasting and to everlasting You are Psalm 90:2, does he say this to assign Him limits? No, but to declare His Eternity. Consider now that the case is the same in this place. He did not use the expression as assigning limits, since he did not say, had a beginning, but was in the beginning; by the word was carrying you forward to the idea that the Son is without beginning.

Yet observe, says he, the Father is named with the addition of the article, but the Son without it. What then, when the Apostle says, The Great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ Titus 2:13; and again, Who is above all, God? Romans 9:5 It is true that here he has mentioned the Son, without the article; but he does the same with the Father also, at least in his Epistle to the Philippians Philippians 2:6, he says, Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; and again to the Romans, Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:7 Besides, it was superfluous for it to be attached in that place, when close above it was continually attached to the Word. For as in speaking concerning the Father, he says, God is a Spirit John 4:24, and we do not, because the article is not joined to Spirit, yet deny the Spiritual Nature of God; so here, although the article is not annexed to the Son, the Son is not on that account a less God. Why so? Because in saying God, and again God, he does not reveal to us any difference in this Godhead, but the contrary; for having before said, and the Word was God; that no one might suppose the Godhead of the Son to be inferior, he immediately adds the characteristics of genuine Godhead, including Eternity, (for He was, says he, in the beginning with God,) and attributing to Him the office of Creator.

For by Him were all things made, and without Him was not anything made that was made; which His Father also everywhere by the Prophets declares to be especially characteristic of His own Essence. And the Prophets are continually busy on this kind of demonstration, not only of itself, but when they contend against the honor shown to idols; Let the gods perish, says one who have not made heaven and earth Jeremiah 10:11: and again, I have stretched out the heaven with My hand Isaiah 44:24; and it is as declaring it to be indicative of Divinity, that He everywhere puts it.

And the Evangelist himself was not satisfied with these words, but calls Him Life too and Light. If now He was ever with the Father, if He Himself created all things, if He brought all things into existence, and keeps together all things, (for, this he meant by Life,) if He enlightens all things, who so senseless as to say, that the Evangelist desired to teach an inferiority of Divinity by those very expressions, by which, rather than by

any others, it is possible to express its equality and not differing?

Let us not then confound the creation with the Creator, lest we too hear it said of us, that they served the creature rather than the Creator Romans 1:25; for although it be asserted that this is said of the heavens, still in speaking of the heavens he positively says, that we must not serve the creature, for it is a heathenish thing.

4. Let us therefore not lay ourselves under this curse. For this the Son of God came, that He might rid us from this service; for this He took the form of a slave, that He might free us from this slavery; for this He was spit upon, for this He was buffeted, for this He endured the shameful death. Let us not, I entreat you, make all these things of none effect, let us not go back to our former unrighteousness, or rather to unrighteousness much more grievous; for to serve the creature is not the same thing as to bring down the Creator, as far at least as in us lies, to the meanness of the creature. For He continues being such as He is; as says the Psalmist, You are the same, and Your years shall not fail. Psalm 102:27 Let us then glorify Him as we have received from our fathers, let us glorify Him both by our faith and by our works; for sound doctrines avail us nothing to salvation, if our life is corrupt. Let us then order it according to what is well-pleasing to God, setting ourselves far from all filthiness, unrighteousness, and covetousness, as strangers and foreigners and aliens to the things here on earth. If any have much wealth and possessions, let him so use them as one who is a sojourner, and who, whether he will or not, shall shortly pass from them. If one be injured by another, let him not be angry forever, nay rather not even for a time. For the Apostle has not allowed us more than a single day for the venting of anger.

Let not, says he, the sun go down upon your wrath Ephesians 4:26; and with reason; for it is matter for contentment that even in so short a time nothing unpleasant take place; but if night also overtake us, what has happened becomes more grievous, because the fire of our wrath is increased ten thousand times by memory, and we at our leisure enquire into it more bitterly. Before therefore we obtain this pernicious leisure and kindle a hotter fire, he bids us arrest beforehand and quench the mischief. For the passion of wrath is fierce, fiercer than any flame; and so we need much haste to prevent the flame, and not allow it to blaze up high, for so this disease becomes a cause of many evils. It has overturned whole houses, it has dissolved old companionships, and has worked tragedies not to be remedied in a short moment of time. For, says one, the sway of his fury shall be his destruction. Sirach 1:22 Let us not then leave such a wild beast unbridled, but put upon him a muzzle in all ways strong, the fear of the judgment to come. Whenever a friend grieves you, or one of your own family exasperates you, think of the sins you have committed against God, and that by kindness towards him you make that judgment more lenient to yourself, (Forgive, says He, and you shall be forgiven) Luke 6:37, and your passion shall quickly skulk away.

And besides, consider this, whether there has been a time when thou were being carried away into ferocity, and controlled yourself, and another time when you have been dragged along by the passion. Compare the two seasons, and you shall gain thence great improvement. For tell me, when did you praise yourself? Was it when you were worsted, or when you had the mastery? Do we not in the first case vehemently blame ourselves, and feel ashamed. even when none reproves us, and do not many feelings of repentance come over us, both for what we have said and done; but when we gain the mastery, then are we not proud, and exult as conquerors? For victory in the case of anger is, not the requiting evil with the like, (that is utter defeat,) but the bearing meekly to be ill treated and ill spoken of. To get the better is not to inflict but to suffer evil. Therefore when angry do not say, certainly I will retaliate, certainly I will be revenged; do not persist in saying to those who exhort you to gain a victory, I will not endure that the man

mock me, and escape clear. He will never mock you, except when you avenge yourself; or if he even should mock you he will do so as a fool. Seek not when you conquer honor from fools, but consider that sufficient which comes from men of understanding. Nay, why do I set before you a small and mean body of spectators, when I make it up of men? Look up straight to God: He will praise you, and the man who is approved by Him must not seek honor from mortals. Mortal honor often arises from flattery or hatred of others, and brings no profit; but the decision of God is free from this inequality, and brings great advantage to the man whom He approves. This praise then let us follow after.

Will you learn what an evil is anger? Stand by while others are quarreling in the forum. In yourself you cannot easily see the disgrace of the thing, because your reason is darkened and drunken; but when you are clear from the passion, and while your judgment is sound, view your own case in others. Observe, I pray you, the crowds collecting round, and the angry men like maniacs acting shamefully in the midst. For when the passion boils up within the breast, and becomes excited and savage, the mouth breathes fire, the eyes emit fire, all the face becomes swollen, the hands are extended disorderly, the feet dance ridiculously, and they spring at those who restrain them, and differ nothing from madmen in their insensibility to all these things; nay, differ not from wild asses, kicking and biting. Truly a passionate man is not a graceful one.

And then, when after this exceedingly ridiculous conduct, they return home and come to themselves, they have the greater pain, and much fear, thinking who were present when they were angry. For like raving men, they did not then know the standers by, but when they have returned to their right mind, then they consider, were they friends? Were they foes and enemies that looked on? And they fear alike about both; the first because they will condemn them and give them more shame; the others because they will rejoice at it.

And if they have even exchanged blows, then their fear is the more pressing; for instance, lest anything very grievous happen to the sufferer; a fever follow and bring on death, or a troublesome swelling rise and place him in danger of the worst. And, what need (say they) had I of fighting, and violence, and quarreling? Perish such things. And then they curse the ill-fated business which caused them to begin, and the more foolish lay on wicked spirits, and an evil hour, the blame of what has been done; but these things are not from an evil hour, (for there is no such thing as an evil hour,) nor from a wicked spirit, but from the wickedness of those captured by the passion; they draw the spirits to them, and bring upon themselves all things terrible.

But the heart swells, says one, and is stung by insults. I know it; and that is the reason why I admire those who master this dreadful wild beast; yet it is possible if we will, to beat off the passion. For why when our rulers insult us do we not feel it? It is because fear counterbalances the passion, and frightens us from it, and does not allow it to spring up at all. And why too do our servants, though insulted by us in ten thousand ways, bear all in silence? Because they too have the same restraint laid upon them.

And think thou not merely of the fear of God, but that it is even God Himself who then insults you, who bids you be silent, and then you will bear all things meekly, and say to the aggressor, How can I be angry with you? There is another that restrains both my hand and my tongue; and the saying will be a suggestion of sound wisdom, both to yourself and to him. Even now we bear unbearable things on account of men, and often say to those who have insulted us, Such an one insulted me, not you.

Shall we not use the same caution in the case of God? How else can we hope for pardon? Let us say to our soul, It is God who holds our hands, who now insults us; let us not be restive, let not God be less honored by us than men. Did you shudder at the word? I wish you would shudder not at the word only, but at the deed. For God has commanded us when buffeted not only to endure it, but even to offer ourselves to suffer something worse; and we withstand Him with such vehemence, that we not only refuse to offer ourselves to suffer evil, but even avenge ourselves, nay often are the first to act on the offensive, and think we are disgraced if we do not the same in return.

Yes, and the mischief is, that when utterly worsted we think ourselves conquerors, and when lying undermost and receiving ten thousand blows from the devil, then we imagine that we are mastering him. Let us then, I exhort you, understand what is the nature of this victory, and this kind of nature let us follow after. To suffer evil is to get the crown. If then we wish to be proclaimed victors by God, let us not in these contests observe the laws of heathen games, but those of God, and learn to bear all things with longsuffering; for so we may get the better of our antagonists, and obtain both present and promised goods, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom and with whom to the Father and the Holy Spirit be glory, power, and honor, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/john-11-part-3/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net