

John 1:16-17

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes the superiority of grace and truth through Jesus Christ compared to the law given by Moses.

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31, John 1:17, Romans 1:17, Romans 8:2, Romans 9:4, 1 Corinthians 7:34, 2 Corinthians 3:11, Philippians 3:3, Hebrews 12:14

Topics: "Grace Abounds", "Christ's Redemption"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the abundance of grace received through Jesus Christ, contrasting it with the law given by Moses. He emphasizes that Jesus is the very Fountain of all good things, overflowing with blessings to all without diminishing His fullness. Chrysostom explains that believers have received grace upon grace, signifying a transition from old to new blessings like righteousness, faith, adoption, and sanctification. He further delves into the superiority of grace and truth brought by Jesus Christ compared to the law, highlighting the profound impact of Christ's sacrifice and redemption.

Transcript

And of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.

1. I said the other day, that John, to resolve the doubts of those who should question with themselves how the Lord, though He came after to the preaching, became before and more glorious than he, added, for He was before me. And this is indeed one reason. But not content with this, he adds again a second, which now he declares. What is it? And of his fullness, says he, have all we received, and grace for grace. With these again he mentions another. What is this? That

John 1:17

The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

And what means that, says he, Of His fullness have all we received? For to this we must for a while direct our discourse. He possesses not, says he, the gift by participation, but is Himself the very Fountain and very Root of all good, very Life, and very Light, and very Truth, not retaining within Himself the riches of His good things, but overflowing with them unto all others, and after the overflowing remaining full, in nothing diminished by supplying others, but streaming ever forth, and imparting to others a share of these blessings, He remains in sameness of perfection. What I possess is by participation, (for I received it from

another) and is a small portion of the whole, as it were a poor rain-drop compared with the untold abyss or the boundless sea; or rather not even can this instance fully express what we attempt to say, for if you take a drop from the sea, you have lessened the sea itself, though the diminution be imperceptible. But of that Fountain we cannot say this; how much soever a man draw, It continues undiminished. We therefore must needs proceed to another instance, a weak one also, and not able to establish what we seek, but which guides us better than the former one to the thought now proposed to us.

Let us suppose that there is a fountain of fire; that from that fountain ten thousand lamps are kindled, twice as many, thrice as many, oftentimes as many; does not the fire remain at the same degree of fullness even after its imparting of its virtue to such members? It is plain to every man that it does. Now if in the case of bodies which are made up of parts, and are diminished by abstraction, one has been found of such a nature, that after supplying to others something from itself it sustains no loss, much more will this take place with that incorporeal and uncompounded Power.

If in the instance given, that which is communicated is substance and body, is divided yet does not suffer division, when our discourse is concerning an energy, and an energy too of an incorporeal substance, it is much more probable that this will undergo nothing of the sort. And therefore John said, Of His fullness have all we received, and joins his own testimony to that of the Baptist; for the expression, Of his fullness have we all received, belongs not to the forerunner but to the disciple; and its meaning is something like this: Think not, he says, that we, who long time companied with Him, and partook of His food and table, bear witness through favor, since even John, who did not even know Him before, who had never even been with Him, but merely saw Him in company with others when he was baptizing cried out, He was before me, having from that source received all; and all we the twelve, the three hundred, the three thousand, the five thousand, the many myriads of Jews, all the fullness of the faithful who then were, and now are, and hereafter shall be, have received of His fullness.

What have we received? grace for grace, says he. What grace, for what? For the old, the new. For there was a righteousness, and again a righteousness, (Touching the righteousness which is in the law, says Paul blameless.) Philippians 3:6 There was a faith, there is a faith. (From faith to faith.) Romans 1:17 There was an adoption, there is an adoption. (To whom pertains the adoption.) Romans 9:4 There was a glory, there is a glory. (For if that which was done away was glorious, much more that which remains is glorious.) 2 Corinthians 3:11 There was a law, and there is a law. (For the law of the Spirit of life has made me free.)

Romans 8:2 There was a service, and there is a service. (To whom pertains the service Romans 9:4 and again: Serving God in the Spirit.) Philippians 3:3 There was a covenant, and there is a covenant. (I will make with you a new covenant, not according to the covenant which I made with your fathers.) Jeremiah 31:31 There was a sanctification, and there is a sanctification: there was a baptism, and there is a Baptism: there was a sacrifice, and there is a Sacrifice: there was a temple, and there is a temple: there was a circumcision, and there is a circumcision; and so too there was a grace, and there is a grace.

But the words in the first case are used as types, in the second as realities, preserving a sameness of sound, though not of sense. So in patterns and figures, the shape of a man scratched with white lines upon a black ground is called a man as well as that which has received the correct coloring; and in the case of statues, the figure whether formed of gold or of plaster, is alike called a statue, though in the one case as a model, in the other as a reality.

2. Do not then, because the same words are used, suppose that the things are identical, nor yet diverse either; for in that they were models they did not differ from the truth; but in that they merely preserved the outline, they were less than the truth. What is the difference in all these instances? Will you that we take in hand and proceed to examine one or two of the cases mentioned? Thus the rest will be plain to you; and we shall see that the first were lessons for children, the last for high-minded full-grown men; that the first laws were made as for mortals, the latter as for angels.

Whence then shall we begin? From the sonship itself? What then is the distinction between the first and second? The first is the honor of a name, in the second the thing goes with it. Of the first the Prophet says, I have said, You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High Psalm 82:6; but of the latter, that they were born of God. How, and in what way? By the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost. For they, even after they had received the title of sons, retained the spirit of slavery, (for while they remained slaves they were honored with this appellation,) but we being made free, received the honor, not in name, but in deed.

And this Paul has declared and said, For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. Romans 8:15 For having been born again, and, as one may say, thoroughly remade, we so are called sons. And if one consider the character of the holiness, what the first was and what the second, he will find there also great difference. They when they did not worship idols, nor commit fornication or adultery, were called by this name; but we become holy, not by refraining from these vices merely, but by acquiring things greater.

And this gift we obtain first by means of the coming upon us of the Holy Ghost; and next, by a rule of life far more comprehensive than that of the Jews. To prove that these words are not mere boasting hear what He says to them, You shall not use divination, nor make purification of your children, for you are a holy people. So that holiness with them consisted in being free from the customs of idolatry; but it is not so with us. That she may be holy, says Paul, in body and spirit. 1 Corinthians 7:34 Follow peace, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord Hebrews 12:14: and, Perfecting holiness in the fear of God. 2 Corinthians 7:1 For the word holy has not force to give the same meaning in every case to which it is applied; since God is called Holy, though not as we are.

What, for instance, does the Prophet say, when he heard that cry raised by the flying Seraphim? Woe is me! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips Isaiah 6:5; though he was holy and clean; but if we be compared with the holiness which is above, we are unclean. Angels are holy, Archangels are holy, the Cherubim and Seraphim themselves are holy, but of this holiness again there is a double difference; that is, in relation to us, and to the higher powers.

We might proceed to all the other points, but then the discussion would become too long, and its extent too great. We will therefore desist from proceeding farther, and leave it to you to take in hand the rest, for it is in your power at home to put these things together, and examine their difference, and in the same way to go over what remains. Give, says one, a starting place to the wise, and he becomes wiser. Proverbs 9:9 , Septuagint The beginning is from us, but the end will be from you. We must now resume the connection.

After having said, Of His fullness have all we received, he adds, and grace for grace. For by grace the Jews were saved: I chose you, says God, not because you were many in number, but because of your fathers. Deuteronomy 7:7, Septuagint If now they were chosen by God not for their own good deeds, it is manifest that by grace they obtained this honor. And we too all are saved by grace, but not in like manner;

not for the same objects, but for objects much greater and higher. The grace then that is with us is not like theirs. For not only was pardon of sins given to us, (since this we have in common with them, for all have sinned,) but righteousness also, and sanctification, and sonship, and the gift of the Spirit far more glorious and more abundant. By this grace we have become the beloved of God, no longer as servants, but as sons and friends. Wherefore he says, grace for grace. Since even the things of the law were of grace, and the very fact of man being created from nothing, (for we did not receive this as a recompense for past good deeds, how could we, when we even were not? But from God who is ever the first to bestow His benefits,) and not only that we were created from nothing, but that when created, we straightway learned what we must and what we must not do, and that we received this law in our very nature, and that our Creator entrusted to us the impartial rule of conscience, these I say, are proofs of the greatest grace and unspeakable lovingkindness. And the recovery of this law after it had become corrupt, by means of the written (Law), this too was the work of grace. For what might have been expected to follow was, that they who falsified the law once given should suffer correction and punishments; but what actually took place was not this, but, on the contrary, an amending of our nature, and pardon, not of debt, but given through mercy and grace. For to show that it was of grace and mercy, hear what David says; The Lord executes righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed; He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel Psalm 103:6-7: and again; Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will He give laws to them that are in the way. Psalm 25:8

3. Therefore that men received the law was of pity, mercies, and grace; and for this reason he says, Grace for grace. But striving yet more fervently to (express) the greatness of the gifts, he goes on to say,

Ver. 17 . The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

Do you see how gently, by a single word and little by little, both John the Baptist and John the Disciple lead up their hearers to the highest knowledge, having first exercised them in humbler things? The former having compared to himself Him who is incomparably superior to all, thus afterwards shows His superiority, by saying, has become before me, and then adding the words, was before me: while the latter has done much more than he, though too little for the worthiness of the Only-Begotten, for he makes the comparison, not with John, but with one revered by the Jews more than John, with Moses. For the law, says he, was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

Observe his wisdom. He makes enquiry not concerning the person, but the things; for these being proved, it was probable that even the senseless would of necessity receive from them a much higher judgment and notion respecting Christ. For when facts bear witness, which cannot be suspected of doing so either from favor to any, or from malice, they afford a means of judging which cannot be doubted even by the senseless; for they remain to open view just as their actors may have arranged them, and therefore their evidence is the least liable to suspicion of any. And see how he makes the comparison easy even to the weaker sort; for he does not prove the superiority by argument, but points out the difference by the bare words, opposing grace and truth to law, and came to was given. Between each of these there is a great difference; for one, was given, belongs to something ministered, when one has received from another, and given to whom he was commanded to give; but the other, grace and truth came, befits a king forgiving all offenses, with authority, and himself furnishing the gift. Wherefore He said, Your sins be forgiven you Matthew 9:2; and again, But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins (He says to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up your bed, and go unto your house. Matthew 5:6

Do you see how grace comes by Him? Look also to truth. His grace the instance just mentioned, and what happened in the case of the thief, and the gift of Baptism, and the grace of the Spirit given by Him declare, and many other things. But His truth we shall more clearly know, if we understand the types. For the types like patterns anticipated and sketched beforehand the dispensations which should be accomplished under the new covenant, and Christ came and fulfilled them. Let us now consider the types in few words, for we cannot at the present time go through all that relates to them; but when you have learned some points from those (instances) which I shall set before you, you will know the others also.

Will you then that we begin with the Passion itself? What then says the type? Take a lamb for a house, and kill it, and do as he commanded and ordained. Exodus 12:3 But it is not so with Christ. He does not command this to be done, but Himself becomes It, by offering Himself a Sacrifice and Oblation to His Father.

4. See how the type was given by Moses, but the Truth came by Jesus Christ. Exodus 17:12

Again, when the Amalekites warred in Mount Sinai, the hands of Moses were supported, being stayed up by Aaron and Hur standing on either side of him Exodus 17:12; but when Christ came, He of Himself stretched forth His Hands upon the Cross. Have you observed how the type was given, but the Truth came?

Again, the Law said, Cursed is every one that continues not in all things that are written in this book. Deuteronomy 27:26, Septuagint But what says grace? Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest Matthew 11:28; and Paul, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. Galatians 3:13

Since then we have enjoyed such grace and truth, I exhort you that we be not more slothful by reason of the greatness of the gift; for the greater the honor of which we have been deemed worthy, the greater our debt of excellence; for one who has received but small benefits, even though he makes but small returns, does not deserve the same condemnation; but he who has been raised to the highest summit of honor, and yet manifests groveling and mean dispositions, will be worthy of much greater punishment.

May I never have to suspect this of you. For we trust in the Lord that you have winged your souls for heaven, that you have removed from earth, that being in the world you handle not the things of the world; yet though so persuaded, we do not cease thus continually to exhort you. In the games of the heathen, they whom all the spectators encourage are not those who have fallen and lie supine, but those who are exerting themselves and running still; of the others, (since they would be doing what would be of no use, and would not be able to raise up by their encouragements men once for all severed from victory,) they cease to take any notice.

But in this case some good may be expected, not only of you who are sober, but even of those who have fallen, if they would but be converted. Wherefore we use every means, exhorting, reproving, encouraging, praising, in order that we may bring about your salvation. Be not then offended by our continual admonishing concerning the Christian conversation, for the words are not the words of one accusing you of sloth, but of one who has very excellent hopes respecting you. And not to you alone, but to ourselves who speak them, are these words said, yea, and shall be said, for we too need the same teaching; so though they be spoken by us, yet nothing hinders their being spoken to us, (for the Word, when it finds a man in fault, amends him, when clear and free, sets him as far off from it as possible,) and we ourselves are not pure from transgressions.

The course of healing is the same for all, the medicines are set forth for all, only the application is not the same, but is made according to the choice of those who use the medicines; for one who will handle the remedy as he ought, gains some benefit from the application, while he who does not place it upon the wound, makes the evil greater, and brings it to the most painful end. Let us then not fret when we are being healed, but much rather rejoice, even though the system of discipline bring bitter pains, for hereafter it will show to us fruit sweeter than any.

Let us then do all to this end, that we may depart to that world, cleared of the wounds and strokes which the teeth of sin make in the soul, so that having become worthy to behold the countenance of Christ, we may be delivered in that day, not to the avenging and cruel powers, but to those who are able to bring us to that inheritance of the heavens which is prepared for them that love Him; to which may it come to pass that we all attain, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

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