

John 1:3

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon explains that the Son is the Creator of all things and is equal in honor to the Father, and that faith and a pure life are necessary to receive the gift of life and light.

Scripture: John 1:3-4, John 3:20, John 5:26, John 8:12, John 14:23, Romans 13:13, 1 Corinthians 1:9, Ephesians 5:12, Colossians 1:16

Topics: "Christology", "Spiritual Life"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the creation of all things by Christ, emphasizing that nothing was made without Him, including visible and invisible creations, while distinguishing the Son from the Spirit. He refutes heretical interpretations that suggest the Spirit or the Son was created, highlighting the precision of the Evangelist's teaching. Chrysostom explains the significance of Christ being the Life and the Light of men, shedding light on the darkness of sin and the need for a pure life to receive and retain the light of Christ. He urges believers to live honestly, avoid sin, and embrace the light of Christ to enjoy present and eternal blessings.

Transcript

All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.

1. Moses in the beginning of the history and writings of the Old Testament speaks to us of the objects of sense, and enumerates them to us at length. For, In the beginning, he says, God made the heaven and the earth, and then he adds, that light was created, and a second heaven and the stars, the various kinds of living creatures, and, that we may not delay by going through particulars, everything else. But this Evangelist, cutting all short, includes both these things and the things which are above these in a single sentence; with reason, because they were known to his hearers, and because he is hastening to a greater subject, and has instituted all his treatise, that he might speak not of the works but of the Creator, and Him who produced them all. And therefore Moses, though he has selected the smaller portion of the creation, (for he has spoken nothing to us concerning the invisible powers,) dwells on these things; while John, as hastening to ascend to the Creator Himself, runs by both these things, and those on which Moses was silent, having comprised them in one little saying, All things were made by Him. And that you may not think that he merely speaks of all the things mentioned by Moses, he adds, that without Him was not anything made that was made. That is to say, that of created things, not one, whether it be visible or intelligible was brought into being without the power of the Son.

For we will not put the full stop after not anything, as the heretics do. They, because they wish to make the Spirit created, say, What was made, in Him was Life; yet so what is said becomes unintelligible. First, it was not the time here to make mention of the Spirit, and if he desired to do so, why did he state it so indistinctly? For how is it clear that this saying relates to the Spirit? Besides, we shall find by this argument, not that the Spirit, but that the Son Himself, is created by Himself. But rouse yourselves, that what is said may not escape you; and come, let us read for a while after their fashion, for so its absurdity will be clearer to us. What was made, in Him was Life. They say that the Spirit is called Life. But this Life is found to be also Light, for he adds, And the Life was the Light of men. John 1:4 Therefore, according to them the Light of men here means the Spirit. Well, but when he goes on to say, that There was a man sent from God, to bear witness of that Light vers. 6, 7, they needs must assert, that this too is spoken of the Spirit; for whom he above called Word, Him as he proceeds he calls God, and Life, and Light. This Word he says was Life, and this Life was Light. If now this Word was Life, and if this Word and this Life became flesh, then the Life, that is to say, the Word, was made flesh, and we beheld Its glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father. If then they say that the Spirit is here called Life, consider what strange consequences will follow. It will be the Spirit, not the Son, that was made flesh; the Spirit will be the Only-Begotten Son.

And those who read the passage so will fall, if not into this, yet in avoiding this into another most strange conclusion. If they allow that the words are spoken of the Son, and yet do not stop or read as we do, then they will assert that the Son is created by Himself. Since, if the Word was Life, and what was made in Him was Life; according to this reading He is created in Himself and through Himself. Then after some words between, he has added, And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father. John 1:14 See, the Holy Spirit is found, according to the reading of those who assert these things, to be also an only-begotten Son, for it is concerning Him that all this declaration is uttered by him. See when the word has swerved from the truth, whither it is perverted, and what strange consequences it produces!

What then, says one, is not the Spirit Light? It is Light: but in this place there is no mention of the Spirit. Since even God (the Father) is called Spirit, that is to say, incorporeal, yet God (the Father) is not absolutely meant wherever Spirit is mentioned. And why do you wonder if we say this of the Father? We could not even say of the Comforter, that wherever Spirit (is mentioned), the Comforter is absolutely meant, and yet this is His most distinctive name; still not always where Spirit (is mentioned) the Comforter (meant). Thus Christ is called the power of God 1 Corinthians 1:24, and the wisdom of God; yet not always where the power and the wisdom of God are mentioned is Christ meant; so in this passage, although the Spirit does give Light, yet the Evangelist is not now speaking of the Spirit.

When we have shut them out from these strange opinions, they who take all manner of pains to withstand the truth, say, (still clinging to the same reading,) Whatever came into existence by him was life, because, says one, whatever came into existence was life. What then do you say of the punishment of the men of Sodom, and the flood, and hell fire, and ten thousand like things? But, says one, we are speaking of the material creation. Well, these too belong entirely to the material creation. But that we may out of our abundance refute their argument, we will ask them, Is wood, life, tell me? Is stone, life? these things that are lifeless and motionless? Nay, is man absolutely life? Who would say so? He is not pure life, but is capable of receiving life.

2. See here again, an absurdity; by the same succession of consequences we will bring the argument to such a point, that even hence you may learn their folly. In this way they assert things by no means befitting of the Spirit. Being driven from their other ground, they apply those things to men, which they before

thought to be spoken worthily of the Spirit. However, let us examine the reading itself this way also. The creature is now called life, therefore, the same is light, and John came to witness concerning it. Why then is not he also light? He says that he was not that light John 1:8, and yet he belonged to created things? How then is he not light? How was he in the world, and the world was made by him? John 1:10 Was the creature in the creature, and was the creature made by the creature? But how did the world know him not? How did the creature not know the creature? But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God. John 1:12 But enough of laughter. For the rest I leave it to you to attack these monstrous reasonings, that we may not seem to have chosen to raise a laugh for its own sake, and waste the time without cause. For if these things are neither said of the Spirit, (and it has been shown that they are not,) nor of anything created, and yet they still hold to the same reading, that stranger conclusion than any which we before mentioned, will follow, that the Son was made by Himself. For if the Son is the true Light, and this Light was Life, and this Life was made in Him, this must needs be the result according to their own reading. Let us then relinquish this reading, and come to the recognized reading and explanation.

And what is that? It is to make the sentence end at was made, and to begin the next sentence with, In Him was Life. What (the Evangelist) says is this, Without Him was not anything made that was made; whatever created thing was made, says he, was not made without Him. See you how by this short addition he has rectified all the besetting difficulties; for the saying, that without Him was not anything made, and then the adding, which was made, includes things cognizable by the intellect, but excludes the Spirit. For after he had said that all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made, he needed this addition, lest some one should say, If all things were made by Him, then the Spirit also was made. I, he replies, asserted that whatever was made was made by Him, even though it be invisible, or incorporeal, or in the heavens. For this reason, I did not say absolutely, 'all things,' but 'whatever was made,' that is, 'created things,' but the Spirit is uncreated.

Do you see the precision of his teaching? He has alluded to the creation of material things, (for concerning these Moses had taught before him,) and after bringing us to advance from thence to higher things, I mean the immaterial and the invisible, he excepts the Holy Spirit from all creation. And so Paul, inspired by the same grace, said, For by Him were all things created. Colossians 1:16 Observe too here again the same exactness. For the same Spirit moved this soul also. That no one should except any created things from the works of God because of their being invisible, nor yet should confound the Comforter with them, after running through the objects of sense which are known to all, he enumerates also things in the heavens, saying, Whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; for the expression whether subjoined to each, shows to us nothing else but this, that by Him all things were made, and without Him was not anything made that was made.

But if you think that the expression by is a mark of inferiority, (as making Christ an instrument,) hear him say, You, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. Psalm 102:25 He says of the Son what is said of the Father in His character of Creator; which he would not have said, unless he had deemed of Him as of a Creator, and yet not subservient to any. And if the expression by Him is here used, it is put for no other reason but to prevent any one from supposing the Son to be Unbegotten. For that in respect of the title of Creator He is nothing inferior to the Father; hear from Himself, where He says, As the Father raises up the dead and quickens them, even so the Son quickens whom He will. John 5:21 If now in the Old Testament it is said of the Son, You, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, His title of Creator is plain. But if you say that the

Prophet spoke this of the Father, and that Paul attributed to the Son what was said of the Father, even so the conclusion is the same. For Paul would not have decided that the same expression suited the Son, unless he had been very confident that between Father and Son there was an equality of honor; since it would have been an act of extremest rashness to refer what suited an incomparable Nature to a nature inferior to, and falling short of it. But the Son is not inferior to, nor falls short of, the Essence of the Father; and therefore Paul has not only dared to use these expressions concerning Him, but also others like them. For the expression from Whom, which you decide to belong properly to the Father alone, he uses also concerning the Son, when he says, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increases with the increase of God. Colossians 2:19

3. And he is not content with this only, he stops your mouths in another way also, by applying to the Father the expression by whom, which you say is a mark of inferiority. For he says, God is faithful, by whom you were called unto the fellowship of His Son 1 Corinthians 1:9: and again, By His will 1 Corinthians 1:1, etc.; and in another place, For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things. Romans 11:26 Neither is the expression from whom, assigned to the Son only, but also to the Spirit; for the angel said to Joseph, Fear not to take unto you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. Matthew 1:20 As also the Prophet does not deem it improper to apply to the Father the expression in whom, which belongs to the Spirit, when he says, In God we shall do valiantly. Psalm 60:12 And Paul, Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey, in the will of God, to come unto you. Romans 1:10 And again he uses it of Christ, saying, In Christ Jesus. Romans 6:11, 23, etc. In short, we may often and continually find these expressions interchanged; now this would not have taken place, had not the same Essence been in every instance their subject. And that you may not imagine that the words, All things were made by Him, are in this case used concerning His miracles, (for the other Evangelists have discoursed concerning these;) he farther goes on to say, He was in the world, and the world was made by Him; (but not the Spirit, for This is not of the number of created things, but of those above all creation.)

Let us now attend to what follows. John having spoken of the work of creation, that All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made, goes on to speak concerning His Providence, where he says, In Him was Life. That no one may doubt how so many and so great things were made by Him, he adds, that In Him was Life. For as with the fountain which is the mother of the great deeps, however much you take away you nothing lessen the fountain; so with the energy of the Only-Begotten, however much you believe has been produced and made by it, it has become no whit the less. Or, to use a more familiar example, I will instance that of light, which the Apostle himself added immediately, saying, And the Life was the Light. As then light, however many myriads it may enlighten, suffers no diminution of its own brightness; so also God, before commencing His work and after completing it, remains alike indefectible, nothing diminished, nor wearied by the greatness of the creation. Nay, if need were that ten thousand, or even an infinite number of such worlds be created, He remains the same, sufficient for them all not merely to produce, but also to control them after their creation. For the word Life here refers not merely to the act of creation, but also to the providence (engaged) about the permanence of the things created; it also lays down beforehand the doctrine of the resurrection, and is the beginning of these marvelous good tidings. Since when life has come to be with us, the power of death is dissolved; and when light has shone upon us, there is no longer darkness, but life ever abides within us, and death cannot overcome it. So that what is asserted of the Father might be asserted absolutely of Him (Christ) also, that In Him we live and move and have our being. Colossians 1:16-17 As Paul has shown when he says, By Him were all things created, and by Him all things consist; for which reason He has

been called also Root and Foundation.

But when you hear that In Him was Life, do not imagine Him a compound Being, since farther on he says of the Father also, As the Father has Life in Himself, so has He given to the Son also to have Life John 5:26; now as you would not on account of this expression say that the Father is compounded, so neither can you say so of the Son. Thus in another place he says, that God is Light 1 John 1:5, and elsewhere (it is said), that He dwells in light unapproachable 1 Timothy 6:16; yet these expressions are used not that we may suppose a compounded nature, but that little by little we may be led up to the highest doctrines. For since one of the multitude could not easily have understood how His life was Life Impersonate, he first used that humbler expression, and afterwards leads them (thus) trained to the higher doctrine. For He who had said that He has given Him (the Son) to have life John 5:26; the Same says in another place, I am the Life John 14:6; and in another, I am the Light. John 8:12 And what, tell me, is the nature of this light? This kind (of light) is the object not of the senses, but of the intellect, enlightening the soul herself. And since Christ should hereafter say, that None can come unto Me except the Father draw him John 6:44; the Apostle has in this place anticipated an objection, and declared that it is He (the Son) who gives light John 1:9; that although you hear a saying like this concerning the Father, you may not say that it belongs to the Father only, but also to the Son. For, All things, He says, which the Father has are Mine. John 16:15

First then, the Evangelist has instructed us respecting the creation, after that he tells us of the goods relating to the soul which He supplied to us by His coming; and these he has darkly described in one sentence, when he says, And the Life was the Light of men. John 1:4 He does not say, was the light of the Jews, but universally of men: nor did the Jews only, but the Greeks also, come to this knowledge, and this light was a common proffer made to all. Why did he not add 'Angels,' but said, 'of men?''? Because at present his discourse is of the nature of men, and to them he came bearing glad tidings of good things.

And the light shines in darkness. John 1:5 He calls death and error, darkness. For the light which is the object of our senses does not shine in darkness, but apart from it; but the preaching of Christ has shone forth in the midst of prevailing error, and made it to disappear. And He by enduring death has so overcome death, that He has recovered those already held by it. Since then neither death overcame it, nor error, since it is bright everywhere, and shines by its proper strength, therefore he says,

And the darkness comprehended it not. For it cannot be overcome, and will not dwell in souls which wish not to be enlightened.

4. But let it not trouble you that It took not all, for not by necessity and force, but by will and consent does God bring us to Himself. Therefore do not thou shut your doors against this light, and you shall enjoy great happiness. But this light comes by faith, and when it has come, it lights abundantly him that has received it; and if you display a pure life (meet) for it, remains indwelling within continually. For, He says, He that loves Me, will keep My commandments; and I and My Father will come unto him, and make Our abode with him. John 14:23; slightly varied As then one cannot rightly enjoy the sunlight, unless he opens his eyes; so neither can one largely share this splendor, unless he have expanded the eye of the soul, and rendered it in every way keen of sight.

But how is this effected? Then when we have cleansed the soul from all the passions. For sin is darkness, and a deep darkness; as is clear, because men do it unconsciously and secretly. For, every one that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light. John 3:20 And, It is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. Ephesians 5:12 For, as in darkness a man knows neither friend nor foe,

but cannot perceive any of the properties of objects; so too is it in sin. For he who desires to get more gain, makes no difference between friend and enemy; and the envious regards with hostile eyes the man with whom he is very intimate; and the plotter is at mortal quarrel with all alike. In short, as to distinguishing the nature of objects, he who commits sin is no better than men who are drunk or mad. And as in the night, wood, lead, iron, silver, gold, precious stones, seem to us all alike on account of the absence of the light which shows their distinctions; so he who leads an impure life knows neither the excellence of temperance nor the beauty of philosophy. For in darkness, as I said before, even precious stones if they be displayed do not show their luster, not by reason of their own nature, but because of the want of discernment in the beholders. Nor is this the only evil which happens to us who are in sin, but this also, that we live in constant fear: and as men walking in a moonless night tremble, though none be by to frighten them; so those who work iniquity cannot have confidence, though there be none to accuse them; but they are afraid of everything, and are suspicious, being pricked by their conscience: all to them is full of fear and distress, they look about them at everything, are terrified at everything. Let us then flee a life so painful, especially since after this painfulness shall follow death; a deathless death, for of the punishment in that place there will be no end; and in this life they (who sin) are no better than madmen, in that they are dreaming of things that have no existence. They think they are rich when they are not rich, that they enjoy when they are not enjoying, nor do they properly perceive the cheat until they are freed from the madness and have shaken off the sleep. Wherefore Paul exhorts all to be sober, and to watch; and Christ also commands the same. For he who is sober and awake, although he be captured by sin, quickly beats it off; while he who sleeps and is beside himself, perceives not how he is held prisoner of it.

Let us then not sleep. This is not the season of night, but of day. Let us therefore walk honestly as in the day Romans 13:13; and nothing is more indecent than sin. In point of indecency it is not so bad to go about naked as in sin and wrong doing. That is not so great matter of blame, since it might even be caused by poverty; but nothing has more shame and less honor than the sinner. Let us think of those who come to the justice-hall on some account of extortion, or overreaching; how base and ridiculous they appear to all by their utter shamelessness, their lies, and audacity. But we are such pitiable and wretched beings, that we cannot bear ourselves to put on a garment awkwardly or awry; nay, if we see another person in this state, we set him right; and yet though we and all our neighbors are walking on our heads, we do not even perceive it. For what, say, can be more shameful than a man who goes in to a harlot? What more contemptible than an insolent, a foul-tongued or an envious man? Whence then is it that these things do not seem so disgraceful as to walk naked? Merely from habit. To go naked no one has ever willingly endured; but all men are continually venturing on the others without any fear. Yet if one came into an assembly of angels, among whom nothing of the sort has ever taken place, there he would clearly see the great ridicule (of such conduct). And why do I say an assembly of angels? Even in the very palaces among us, should one introduce a harlot and enjoy her, or be oppressed by excess of wine, or commit any other like indecency, he would suffer extreme punishment. But if it be intolerable that men should dare such things in palaces, much more when the King is everywhere present, and observes what is done, shall we if we dare them undergo severest chastisement. Wherefore let us, I exhort you, show forth in our life much gentleness, much purity, for we have a King who beholds all our actions continually. In order then that this light may ever richly enlighten us, let us gladly accept these bright beams, for so shall we enjoy both the good things present and those to come, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom, and with whom, to the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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