

COMMENTARY ON JOHN

LESSON NUMBER 7

“ JOHN 1:15 *John bare witness of Him, and cried, saying, This was He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for He was before me.* ¹⁶*And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.* ¹⁷*For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*”

.....John 1:15-17)

THE WITNESS, PREFERENCE, AND FULNESS OF CHRIST JESUS

INTRODUCTION

The superiority of Christ is confirmed by those who truly knew Him, and to whom He was most fully revealed. John is such a person. No individual should turn to a person of the world to learn about Jesus. Josephus the Jewish historian, for example, is not a reliable witness of Jesus of Nazareth. Although he lived during the time of Jesus (born in 37-38 AD, and died sometime after 100 AD), he was not even one of His disciples. Whatever information he provides is novel, and completely unrelated to faith. John the Baptist was chosen and empowered by God to prepare the way for the Messiah, and Jesus Himself chose the twelve who were designated His “*witnesses*” (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8). This by no means suggests that believers should not testify to the Person and purpose of Jesus Christ – **but only if they bear confirmation of their testimony in their own lives**. Any person who himself is not living for the Lord, cannot give a credible testimony of Him.

Thus, we come to the testimony of John the Baptist, who is preparing the way of the Lord, testifying to the nature of the Messiah, and instructing people to get ready to receive Him. In order to fulfill his ministry, John was “*in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel*” (Luke 1:80). He was not personally totally unacquainted with of Jesus of Nazareth, as is evident by him saying “*I have need to be baptized of Thee*” (Matt 3:14). He said this **before** he knew Jesus was “*the Son of God*” (John 1:32-33). Now, as it is with all who are sent forth by God, John the Baptist will exhibit his understanding of the One whose way he is preparing. This is a revealed Divine characteristic – **to enable men who have understanding to speak, transmitting to others the things God desires to be known**. Those who speak for Him do not speak like mindless robots, unknowledgeable of what they are saying. It appears to me that this is a requirement for speaking for God. It is not enough to merely say what is correct without possessing more than cursory knowledge, like even a child might have.

JOHN BARE WITNESS OF HIM

“ John 1:15 *John bare witness of Him, and cried, saying, This was He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for He was before me.*”

JOHN BARE WITNESS OF HIM. Other versions read, “*testifies concerning Him,*” ^{NIV} “*testified to Him,*” ^{NRSV} “*bore witness to Him,*” ^{RSV} “*gave witness about him,*” ^{BBE} “*declared*

the truth about him," ^{GWN} "pointed him out," ^{LIVING} and "telling the truth about him." ^{IE} **And what was it that John said about Jesus?**

1. "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." (Matt 3:11; Lk 3:16).
2. "Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor" (Matt 3:12a; Lk 3:17a).
3. He will "gather His wheat into the garner" (Matt 3:12b; Lk 3:17b).
4. "He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Mat 3:12c; Lk 3:17c).
5. "He it is, who coming after me . . ." (John 1:26a).
6. "He is preferred before me" (John 1:26b).
7. "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).
8. "He should be made manifest to Israel" (John 1:31).
9. "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him" (John 1:32).
10. "This is the Son of God" (John 1:34).

This is what John the Baptist testified **about** Jesus. But this is not what this text is affirming when it states John "*bare witness of Him.*" Rather, this is telling us of John **pointing out precisely who this person was** – Jesus of Nazareth.

HE CRIED, SAYING, THIS IS HE OF WHOM I SPAKE. Other versions read, "*crying out,*" ^{CEB} "*exclaimed,*" ^{CSB} "*said loudly,*" ^{GWN} "*shouted to the crowds,*" ^{NLT} "*cried aloud,*" ^{IE} and "*pointed Him out and called.*" ^{MESSAGE} This is the "*witness*" of which our text speaks – not what He said **about** Jesus, but identifying the Person of whom He spake. **When He saw Jesus, He told the people, "This is the One!"**

This is the same kind of identity that was proclaimed on the day of Pentecost. The people were seeing certain things take place, and did not know what it was. Peter stepped forward and said, "***This is that*** which was spoken by the prophet Joel . . ." John had prepared the people by affirming what the Messiah would do, and how they were to prepare for it. Then, when the One of whom He was speaking showed up, He said, "***This is the One!***"

How this ministry is needed today! False Christ's have arisen (Matt 24:24). Some have arisen and affirmed they have the answer to the human dilemma (Matt 24:5). However, they have not declared the truth, for what Jesus does is not being done in them. Masses of professing Christians have been produced that are not the work of the reigning Christ. Some one must declare "*the record God has given of His Son*" (1 John 5:10-11). Then, when faith and love are perceived in the people (Eph 1:15; Col 1:4; 1 Thess 1:3) – when people are "*filled with the fruits of righteousness*" (Phil 1:11), someone with insight needs to shout out, "***This was He of whom I spake!***"

This is why carnality in the church is so wrong. It is why not going on to perfection is so serious. It is, in a sense, a form of denying God and Christ – wearing the name of Christ, while lacking the evidence of His presence. This is the matter Paul addressed when he wrote to Titus, "*They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*" (Titus 1:16).

HE IS PREFERRED BEFORE ME. Other versions read, "*has a higher rank,*" ^{NASB} "*has surpassed me,*" ^{NIV} "*ranks ahead of me,*" ^{NRSV} and "*has priority over me.*" ^{AMPLIFIED} This is the way it is in the Kingdom of God. They yield to the **greater** one. They take advantage of the **best** benefit. What yields the least is forfeited in favor of what yields the **most**. Those who live by faith are not simply looking for something good. They want what is "*better.*"

HE WAS BEFORE ME. The Person of Jesus was before John in time – even though

John was born before Him. He is the Word that *"became flesh."* He was also first in ranking, or before God. John saw this, and yielded to the Son of God. Two disciples that were with John *"heard him speak, and they followed Jesus"* (John 1:37). They understood what John had said.

We cannot bind this on people, just as John did not bind it on all of his followers at that time. However, when we perceive something better, we ought to leave the inferior behind – not despising it, like the disciples that left John did not despise him. However, when they perceived the superior, they could no longer endure the inferior. Those who have been sitting in relative spiritual squalor need to get up and go where more resources are being provided. Some of John's disciples remained with him, but they would not be able to justify that decision after they had been exposed to the One for whom John was preparing them.

OF HIS FULNESS HAVE WE ALL RECEIVED

"1:16 And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."

Since the text is speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ, and His indispensable role in salvation, the language will be unique. The kind of thing that is here depicted as passing from one Person to another cannot be said of anyone but the Lord Jesus Christ. No strictly human relationships can possibly participate in this kind of thing.

These are not the words of John the Baptist, but of John the apostle. They are a post-New Covenant perspective, and could not be said at the time John the Baptist was ministering. They postulate a glorified Christ, mediating and ministering as our *"Great High Priest."* The benefits of which this text speak were simply not in place prior to Christ's death.

OF HIS FULNESS. Other versions read, *"from the fullness of His grace,"* ^{NIV} *"from His fulness,"* ^{NRSV} *"From His full measure,"* ^{BBE} *"of His plenitude,"* ^{MRD} *"From His abundance,"* ^{NLT} *"out of His fulness,"* ^{YLT} *"We have all benefitted from the rich blessings,"* ^{LIVING} *"from His bounty,"* ^{WILLIAMS} *"out of His fulness,"* ^{ABP} *"Because of all that the Son is,"* ^{CEV} *"the Word was full of grace and truth, and from Him,"* ^{ERV} and *"We all live off His generous bounty."* ^{MESSAGE}

What is *"His fulness?"* Technically, it is that with which the Lord is filled. Our text has already declared that He is *"full of grace and truth."* In the aggregate, the church is to *"all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"* (Eph 4:13). That is, it is to be filled with the same spiritual substance that fills Christ. From the standpoint of our text, what fills us has come **from** Christ, who has poured into us what He Himself has and can transfer. This is involved in becoming *"partakers of the Divine nature,"* although the Deity, or Godhood, of Jesus cannot be conferred on what is created. Receiving of Christ's *"fulness"* is also involved in being *made "partakers of Christ"* (Heb 3:14).

Salvation involves the transference of what fills Jesus to those who have been joined to Him. Where this is not taking place, there has been no salvation. There are measures of this, to be sure, which means we cannot be judges of the validity of the measure in others. But it is our business to examine ourselves, to see if we are in the faith (2 Cor 13:5). **Can what is found in Jesus be found in me – that is the question.** This has particular regard to *"grace and truth,"* which are like summations of the entirety of what is found in Christ, being there in full and unhindered measure.

HAVE WE ALL RECEIVED. Other versions read, *"we have all received,"* ^{NKJV} *"we all received,"* ^{ASV} *"we have all been given,"* ^{BBE} *"Each of us has received,"* ^{GWN} *"We have all*

benefitted, ^{LIVING} and *"all had a share and we were all supplied with."* ^{AMPLIFIED}

No member of the body of Christ is excluded from this reception. The *"newness of life"* which we experience from the very beginning of life in Christ Jesus involves a reception of Christ's *"fulness."* This reception not only has to do with character, but with ministry as well – a particular placement in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:18). Receiving of Christ's fulness is what enables us to minister in His name, or be used by the Lord.

AND GRACE FOR GRACE. Other versions read, *"grace upon grace,"* ^{NASB} *"one blessing after another,"* ^{NIV} *"one gift after another,"* ^{GWN} *"grace in place of grace,"* ^{NAB} *"one gracious gift after another,"* ^{NET} *"one gift replacing another,"* ^{NJB} *"grace over-against grace,"* ^{YLT} *"favor upon favor,"* ^{ABP} *"grace on top of grace,"* ^{LITV} *"gift after gift after gift,"* ^{MESSAGE} and *"spiritual blessing upon spiritual blessing and even favor upon favor and gift [heaped] upon gift."* ^{AMPLIFIED}

I am not satisfied with the translations of this expression, or the view of commentaries upon it. It seems to me that the point is not simply an abundance of grace, although that is involved. Neither is it saying that one level of grace replaces another. It seems to me that the point is the accumulation of grace that results in growth, advancement in understanding, and increased participation in Kingdom activity. This is another view of being changed *"from glory unto glory"* (2 Cor 3:18), or growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15), or going *"on to perfection"* (Heb 6:1). From the standpoint of the body of Christ – the saints in the aggregate – all of the advances come from *"grace and truth,"* with not a single facet of the advance of the church being aided by human wisdom, or the things of this world. From the stand point of the individual, it is the same. There is no aspect of spiritual life – not a single one – that can be commenced, fueled, or advanced, apart from receiving of the fulness of Christ – the grace and the truth with which He is filled. No effective qualities or likenesses can be obtained from any other source.

When it comes to effectiveness in the Kingdom of God, nothing that is part and parcel of the world is of any genuine value. That is, the will of the Lord cannot be helped along by the wisdom of men, in any form. Learning how to speak, and how to think in a disciplined manner is not wrong, but it does not increase spiritual effectiveness. For that kind of impact to be wrought, there must be a receiving of grace upon grace – grace that continues to expand its borders, making the individual more competent and effective. At the point one seeks to accomplish things without the grace that comes from Christ, failure is certain.

GRACE AND TRUTH CAME BY CHRIST

^{1:14c} ***For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.***

FOR. Now the Spirit shows **why** Jesus is superior, and **why** we have received of His fulness, instead of from some other source. The word *"for"* introduces an inspired explanation. It is finishing a thought that was, of itself, partial. Most versions use the word *"for,"* with a few using *"as,"* ^{CEB} *"because,"* ^{NAB} *"though,"* ^{IE} and *"that is."* ^{ERV}

THE LAW WAS GIVEN BY MOSES. Other versions read, *"the law was given through Moses,"* ^{NKJV} *"the law indeed was given through Moses,"* ^{NRSV} *"as the Law was given,"* ^{CEB} *"because while the law was given,"* ^{NAB} *"For Moses gave us only the Law with its rigid demands and merciless justice,"* ^{LIVING} and *"We got the basics from Moses."* ^{MESSAGE}

John is still completing his reasoning on this matter. He will show us that what we receive from Jesus could not be received through the Law. The Law approached Divine acceptance and righteousness from a different perspective, offering it on the basis of

perfectly fulfilling its requirements. As it is written, *"For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them"* (Rom 10:5).

The Law given by Moses is the best of all moral codes. Man cannot produce a law that is even equal to the one given by Moses. The question may still be posed, *"And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?"* (Deut 4:8). Where is there a better set of statutes and judgments? Yet, it is also written, *"The Law made nothing perfect"* (Heb 7:19). This is because it was *"weak through the flesh," "weakened by the sinful nature,"* ^{NIV} and *"it lacked the power to make the old nature cooperate."* ^{CJB}

Through the Law – the best and most thorough law of its kind – not a single resource passed from the Lord to men. Not a single facet of the sinful nature passed from men, and not a single virtue was conferred upon men by means of the Law. If men would have perfectly kept it, the Law would have said they could live. But they did not live up to it, and so the Law condemned them, pronouncing them sinners and unrighteous before the Lord, and subjects of His wrath.

And what can be said of the efforts of men to shape people up through a law or routine of their own making? Are their boasts of being successful true? Have they really managed to do what the superior Law of Moses could not do? And will they dare to trace their imagined success back to the grace of God and faith, when neither of those are functional under a system of Law, for *"the Law does not rest on faith [does not require faith, has nothing to do with faith], for it itself says, He who does them [the things prescribed by the Law] shall live by them [not by faith]"* (Gal 3:12, ^{AMPLIFIED BIBLE}).

BUT GRACE AND TRUTH CAME BY JESUS CHRIST. Other versions read, *"came through Christ,"* ^{NKJV} *"were realized through,"* ^{NASB} *"grace and the true way of life are ours,"* ^{BBE} *"grace and truth came into being,"* ^{CEB} *"grace and truth subsists [exist],"* ^{DARBY} *"the reality and grace was by,"* ^{MRD} *"Christ brought us loving forgiveness as well,"* ^{LIVING} and *"grace (unearned, undeserved favor and spiritual blessing) and truth."* ^{AMPLIFIED}

The word *"came"* does not mean that grace and truth merely became available. Rather it is that through Christ they are actually realized – virtues that reside in Him in their fulness come to be realized in copious measures by those who receive Him. This *"grace and truth"* are essential to the transformation of the individual, and the proper readying for death and the day of judgment. Nothing required in salvation can be accomplished without grace and truth. Grace cannot be joined to fiction, or something that is not real, as God counts realness. Truth can neither be received or be productive independently of grace.

Grace saves (Eph 2:5,8), justifies (Rom 3:24; Tit 3:7), equips (1 Cor 15:10; Eph 3:7; Col 4:18; 1 Pet 4:10), strengthens (2 Tim 2:1), is the environment in which we stand (Rom 5:2), and reigns through righteousness (Rom 5:21). Behold the marvelous scope of grace. It is a thorough enabler and supplier. However, it only comes through Jesus Christ – more specifically through us being joined to Him (1 Cor 5:17), partaking of Him (Heb 3:14), and our fellow with Him (1 Cor 1:9). If people live at a practical distance from the Lord, without Him being in their thoughts, and without His priorities being their priorities, no grace will be, or can be, realized.

If a person wants to know the truth which, when known, makes men free, then that truth will have to come from Jesus. It is essential that we be *"taught by Him"* (Eph 4:21), *"learn"* from Him (Matt 11:29), and be *"given"* an understanding by Him (1 John 5:20), else the truth will not be known. The truth cannot be attained by mere study,

although study is required. However, one can “study” with an aim to prove a point, or justify a theological position, or just for the sake of being a student. However, these motives, and others like them, are not noble enough to obtain the truth of God. Jesus is the repository for all ultimate truth – that is, the truth that liberates the individual, and, when obeyed, purifies the soul (1 Pet 1:22). This is the truth that *“leads to righteousness”* (Tit 1:1 ^{NIV}). Such reality is found in Christ alone, and He alone dispenses it.