

John: 3:22–36

From Catena Aurea:

22. After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judæa; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.

23. And John also was baptizing in Ænon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.

24. For John was not yet cast into prison.

25. Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying.

26. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxix. 1) Nothing is more open than truth, nothing bolder; it neither seeks concealment, or avoids danger, or fears the snare, or cares for popularity. It is subject to no human weakness. Our Lord went up to Jerusalem at the feasts, not from ostentation or love of honour, but to teach the people His doctrines, and shew miracles of mercy. After the festival He visited the crowds who were collected at the Jordan. After these things came Jesus and His disciples into the land of Judæa; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxix. 1) As the Evangelist says afterwards, that Jesus baptized not but His disciples, it is evident that he means the same here, i. e. that the disciples only baptized.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xiii. c. 4) Our Lord did not baptize with the baptism wherewith He had been baptized; for He was baptized by a servant, as a lesson of humility to us, and in order to bring us to the Lord's baptism, i. e. His own; for Jesus baptized, as the Lord, the Son of God.

JEROME. (Hierom. Ep. c. xxiii. ad Evag.) It matters not whether it is called Salem, or Salim; since the Jews very rarely use vowels in the middle of words; and the same words are pronounced with different vowels and accents, by different readers, and in different places.

And they came, and were baptized.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxix. 1) Notwithstanding the disciples of Jesus baptized, John did not leave off till his imprisonment; as the Evangelist's language intimates, For John was not yet cast into prison.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xiii. c. 6) But why did John baptize? Because it was necessary that our Lord should be baptized. And why was it necessary that our Lord should be baptized? That no one might ever think himself at liberty to despise baptism.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xx. 1) But why did he go on baptizing now? Because, had he left off, it might have been attributed to envy or anger: whereas, continuing to baptize, he got no glory for himself, but sent hearers to Christ. And he was better able to do this service, than were Christ's own disciples; his testimony being so free from suspicion, and his reputation with the people so much higher than theirs. He therefore continued to baptize, that he might not increase the envy felt by his disciples against our Lord's baptism. Indeed, the reason, I think, why John's death was permitted, and, in his room, Christ made the great preacher, was, that the people might transfer their affections wholly to Christ, and no longer be divided between the two. For the disciples of John did become so envious of Christ's disciples, and even of Christ Himself, that when they saw the latter baptizing, they threw contempt upon their baptism, as being inferior to that of John's; And there arose a question from some of John's disciples with the Jews about purifying. That it was they who began the dispute, and not the Jews, the Evangelist implies by saying, that there arose a question from John's disciples, whereas he might have said, The Jews put forth a question.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xiii. c. 8) The Jews then asserted Christ to be the greater person, and His baptism necessary to be received. But John's disciples did not understand so much, and defended John's baptism. At last they come to John, to solve the question: And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, behold, the Same baptizeth.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxix. 2) Meaning, He, Whom thou baptizedst, baptizeth. They did not say expressly, Whom thou baptizedst, for they did not wish to be reminded of the voice from heaven, but, He Who was with thee, i. e. Who was in the situation of a disciple, who was nothing more than any of us, He now separateth Himself from thee, and baptizeth. They add, To Whom thou barest witness; as if to say, Whom thou shewedst to the world, Whom thou madest renowned, He now dares to do as thou dost. Behold, the Same baptizeth. And in addition to this, they urge the probability that John's doctrines would fall into discredit. All men come to Him.

3:27–30

27. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

28. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.

29. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.

30. He must increase, but I must decrease.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxix. 2) John, on this question being raised, does not rebuke his disciples, for fear they might separate, and turn to some other school, but replies gently, John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven; as if he said, No wonder that Christ does such excellent works, and that all men come to Him; when He Who doeth it all is God. Human efforts are easily seen through, are feeble, and short-lived. These are not such: they are not therefore of human, but of divine originating. He seems however to speak somewhat humbly of Christ, which will not surprise us, when we consider that it was not fitting to tell the whole truth, to minds prepossessed with such a passion as envy. He only tries for the present to alarm them, by shewing that they are attempting impossible things, and fighting against God.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xiii. c. 9) Or perhaps John is speaking here of himself: I am a mere man, and have received all from heaven, and therefore think not that, because it has been given me to be somewhat, I am so foolish as to speak against the truth.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxix. 2) And see; the very argument by which they thought to have overthrown Christ, To whom, thou barest witness, he turns against them; Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ; as if he said, If ye think my witness true, ye must acknowledge Him more worthy of honour than myself. He adds, But that I was sent before Him; that is to say, I am a servant, and perform the commission of the Father which sent me; my witness is not from favour or partiality; I say that which was given me to say.

THEOPHYLACT. Christ is the spouse of every soul; the wedlock, wherein they are joined, is baptism; the place of that wedlock is the Church; the pledge of it, remission of sins, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost; the consummation, eternal life; which those who are worthy shall receive. Christ alone is the

Bridegroom: all other teachers are but the friends of the Bridegroom, as was the forerunner. The Lord is the giver of good; the rest are the despisers of His gifts.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xiii. c. 12) As if He said, She is not My spouse. But dost thou therefore not rejoice in the marriage? Yea, I rejoice, he saith, because I am the friend of the Bridegroom.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxviii. 2) But how doth he who said above, Whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose, call himself a friend? As an expression not of equality, but of excess of joy: (for the friend of the Bridegroom is always more rejoiced than the servant,) and also, as a condescension to the weakness of his disciples, who thought that he was pained at Christ's ascendancy. For he hereby assures them, that so far from being pained, he was right glad that the Bride recognised her Spouse.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xiii) But wherefore doth he stand? Because he falleth not, by reason of his humility. A sure ground this to stand upon, Whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. Again; He standeth, and heareth Him. So then if he falleth, he heareth Him not. Therefore the friend of the Bridegroom ought to stand and hear, i. e. to abide in the grace which he hath received, and to hear the voice in which he rejoiceth. I rejoice not, he saith, because of my own voice, but because of the Bridegroom's voice. I rejoice; I in hearing, He in speaking; I am the ear, He the Word. For he who guards the bride or wife of his friend, takes care that she love none else; if he wish to be loved himself in the stead of his friend, and to enjoy her who was entrusted to him, how detestable doth he appear to the whole world? Yet many are the adulterers I see, who would fain possess themselves of the spouse who was bought at so great a price, and who aim by their words at being loved themselves instead of the Bridegroom.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxix. 3) Or thus; The expression, which standeth, is not without meaning, but indicates that his part is now over, and that for the future he must stand and listen. This is a transition from the parable to the real subject. For having introduced the figure of a bride and bridegroom, he shews how the marriage is consummated, viz. by word and doctrine. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Rom. 10:17) And since the things he had hoped for had come to pass, he adds, This my joy therefore is fulfilled; i. e. The work which I had to do is finished, and nothing more is left, that I can do.

THEOPHYLACT. For which cause I rejoice now, that all men follow Him. For had the bride, i. e. the people, not come forth to meet the Bridegroom, then I, as the friend of the Bridegroom, should have grieved,

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xiv. c. 3) Or thus; This my Joy is fulfilled, i. e. my joy at hearing the Bridegroom's voice. I have my gift; I claim no more, lest I lose that which I have received. He who would rejoice in himself, hath sorrow; but he who would rejoice in the Lord, shall ever rejoice, because God is everlasting.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxix. 3) He next dismisses the motions of envy, not only as regards the present, but also the future, saying, He must increase, but I must decrease: as if he said, My office hath ceased, and is ended; but His advanceth.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xxv. c. 4, 5) What meaneth this, He must increase? God neither increases, nor decreases. And John and Jesus, according to the flesh, were of the same age: for the six months' difference between them is of no consequence. This is a great mystery. Before our Lord came, men gloried in themselves; He came in no man's nature, that the glory of man might be diminished, and the glory of God exalted. For He came to remit sins upon man's confession: a man's confession, a man's humility, is God's pity, God's exaltation. This truth Christ and John proved, even by their modes of suffering: John was beheaded, Christ was lifted up on the cross. Then Christ was born, when the days begin to lengthen; John, when they begin to shorten. Let God's glory then increase in us, and our own decrease, that ours also may increase in God. But it is because thou understandest God more and more, that He seemeth to increase in thee: for in His own nature He increaseth not, but is ever perfect: even as to a man cured of blindness, who beginneth to see a little, and daily seeth more, the light seemeth to increase, whereas it is in reality always at the full, whether he seeth it or not. In like manner the inner man maketh advancement in God, and it seemeth as if God were increasing in Him; but it is He Himself that decreaseth, falling from the height of His own glory, and rising in the glory of God.

THEOPHYLACT. Or thus; As, on the sun rising, the light of the other heavenly bodies seems to be extinguished, though in reality it is only obscured by the greater light: thus the forerunner is said to decrease; as if he were a star hidden by the sun. Christ increases in proportion as he gradually discloses Himself by miracles; not in the sense of increase, or advancement in virtue, (the opinion of Nestorius,) but only as regards the manifestation of His divinity.

3:31–32

31. He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all.

32. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth;

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxx. 1) As the worm gnaws wood, and rusts iron, so vainglory destroys the soul that cherishes it. But it is a most obstinate fault. John with all his arguments can hardly subdue it in his disciples: for after what he has said above, he saith yet again, He that cometh from above is above all: meaning, Ye extol my testimony, and say that the witness is more worthy to be believed, than He to whom he bears witness. Know this, that He who cometh from heaven, cannot be accredited by an earthly witness. He is above all; being perfect in Himself, and above comparison.

THEOPHYLACT. Christ cometh from above, as descending from the Father; and is above all, as being elected in preference to all.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxx. 1) And yet he was not altogether of the earth; for he had a soul, and partook of a spirit, which was not of the earth. What means he then by saying that he is of the earth? Only to express his own worthlessness, that he is one born on the earth, creeping on the ground, and not to be compared with Christ, Who cometh from above. Speaketh of the earth, does not mean that he spoke from his own understanding; but that, in comparison with Christ's doctrine, he spoke of the earth: as if he said, My doctrine is mean and humble, compared with Christ's; as becometh an earthly teacher, compared with Him, (Col. 2:3) in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xiv. c. 6) Or, speaketh of the earth, he saith of the man, i. e. of himself, so far as he speaks merely humanly. If he says ought divine, he is enlightened by God to say it: as saith the Apostle; Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. (1 Cor. 15:10) John then, so far as pertains to John, is of the earth, and speaketh of the earth: if ye hear ought divine from him, attribute it to the Enlightener, not to him who hath received the light.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxx. 1) Having corrected the bad feeling of his disciples, he comes to discourse more deeply upon Christ. Before this it would have been useless to reveal the truths which could not yet gain a place in their minds. It follows therefore, He that cometh from heaven.

GLOSS. That is, from the Father. He is above all in two ways; first, in respect of His humanity, which was that of man before he sinned: secondly, in respect of the loftiness of the Father, to whom He is equal.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxx. 1) But after this high and solemn mention of Christ, his tone lowers: And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth. As our senses are our surest channels of knowledge, and teachers are most depended on who have apprehended by sight or hearing what they teach, John adds this argument in favour of Christ, that, what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; meaning that every

thing which He saith is true. I want, saith John, to hear what things He, Who cometh from above, hath seen and heard, i. e. what He, and He alone, knows with certainty.

THEOPHYLACT. When ye hear then, that Christ speaketh what He saw and heard from the Father, do not suppose that He needs to be taught by the Father; but only that that knowledge, which He has naturally, is from the Father. For this reason He is said to have heard, whatever He knows, from the Father.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xiv. c. 7) But what is it, which the Son hath heard from the Father? Hath He heard the word of the Father? Yea, but He is the Word of the Father. When thou conceivest a word, wherewith to name a thing, the very conception of that thing in the mind is a word. Just then as thou hast in thy mind and with thee thy spoken word; even so God uttered the Word, i. e. begat the Son. Since then the Son is the Word of God, and the Son hath spoken the Word of God to us, He hath spoken to us the Father's word. What John said is therefore true.

3:32–36

32. —and no man receiveth his testimony.

33. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.

34. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.

35. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.

36. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxx. 1) Having said, And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth, to prevent any from supposing, that what he said was false, because only a few for the present believed, he adds, And no man receiveth his testimony; i. e. only a few; for he had disciples who received his testimony. John is alluding to the unbelief of his own disciples, and to the insensibility of the Jews, of whom we read in the beginning of the Gospel, He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xiv. c. 8) Or thus; There is a people reserved for the wrath of God, and to be condemned with the devil; of whom none receiveth the testimony of Christ. And others there are ordained to eternal life. Mark how mankind are divided spiritually, though as human beings they are mixed up together: and

John separated them by the thoughts of their heart, though as yet they were not divided in respect of place, and looked on them as two classes, the unbelievers, and the believers. Looking to the unbelievers, he saith, No man receiveth his testimony. Then turning to those on the right hand he saith, He that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxx. 2) i. e. hath shewn that God is true. This is to alarm them: for it is as much as saying, no one can disbelieve Christ without convicting God, Who sent Him, of falsehood: inasmuch as He speaks nothing but what is of the Father. For He, it follows, Whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xiv. c. 8) What is it, that God is true, except that God is true, and every man a liar? For no man can say what truth is, till he is enlightened by Him who cannot lie. God then is true, and Christ is God. Wouldest thou have proof? Hear His testimony, and thou wilt find it so. But if thou dost not yet understand God, thou hast not yet received His testimony. Christ then Himself is God the true, and God hath sent Him; God hath sent God, join both together; they are One God. For John saith, Whom God hath sent, to distinguish Christ from himself. What then, was not John himself sent by God? Yes; but mark what follows, For God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him. To men He giveth by measure, to His only Son He giveth not by measure. To one man is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge: one has one thing, another another; for measure implies a kind of division of gifts. But Christ did not receive by measure, though He gave by measure.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxx. 2) By Spirit here is meant the operation of the Holy Spirit. He wishes to shew that all of us have received the operation of the Spirit by measure, but that Christ contains within Himself the whole operation of the Spirit. How then shall He be suspected, Who saith nothing, but what is from God, and the Spirit? For He makes no mention yet of God the Word, but rests His doctrine on the authority of the Father and the Spirit. For men knew that there was God, and knew that there was the Spirit, (although they had not right belief about His nature;) but that there was the Son they did not know.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xiv. c. 11) Having said of the Son, God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him; he adds, The Father loveth the Son, and farther adds, and hath given all things into His hand; in order to shew that the Father loveth the Son, in a peculiar sense. For the Father loveth John, and Paul, and yet hath not given all things into their hands. But the Father loveth the Son, as the Son, not as a master his servant: as an only, not as an adopted, Son. Wherefore He hath given all things into His hand; so that, as great as the

Father is, so great is the Son; let us not think then that, because He hath deigned to send the Son, any one inferior to the Father has been sent.

THEOPHYLACT. The Father then hath given all things to the Son in respect of His divinity; of right, not of grace. Or; He hath given all things into His hand, in respect of His humanity: inasmuch as He is made Lord of all things that are in heaven, and that are in earth.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxxi. 1) He means not here, that to believe on the Son is sufficient to gain everlasting life, for elsewhere He says, Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 7) And the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is of itself sufficient to send into hell. But we must not think that even a right belief on Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is sufficient for salvation; for we have need of a good life and conversation. Knowing then that the greater part are not moved so much by the promise of good, as by the threat of punishment, he concludes, But He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. See how He refers to the Father again, when He speaketh of punishment. He saith not, the wrath of the Son, though the Son is judge; but maketh the Father the judge, in order to alarm men more. And He does not say, in Him, but on Him, meaning that it will never depart from Him; and for the same reason He says, shall not see life, i. e. to shew that He did not mean only a temporary death.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xiv. c. 13) Nor does He say, The wrath of God cometh to him, but, abideth on him. For all who are born, are under the wrath of God, which the first Adam incurred. The Son of God came without sin, and was clothed with mortality: He died that thou mightest live. Whosoever then will not believe on the Son, on him abideth the wrath of God, of which the Apostle speaks, We were by nature the children of wrath. (Eph. 2:3).

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

3:22 Jesus Goes into Judea

Jesus Not Afraid to Go to Judea.

Chrysostom: Nothing can be clearer or bolder than truth.... It neither seeks concealment nor avoids danger, it fears no plots or cares for popularity. It is subject to no human weakness.... Our Lord went up

to Jerusalem at the feasts to teach the people and help them through his miracles. After the festival he often visited the crowds who were gathered at the Jordan, choosing the most crowded places, not ostentatiously or out of love of honor but because he wanted to help the greatest number of people. Homilies on the Gospel of John 29.1.

Jesus' Disciples Baptized.

Chrysostom: The Evangelist says further on that Jesus did not baptize, but his disciples did.... He had not yet given the Spirit, and so there was a good reason why he did not baptize. But his disciples did because they wanted to bring as many to faith as possible. Homilies on the Gospel of John 29.1.

3:23–24 John Was Not Yet Imprisoned

3:25 A Dispute Among John's Disciples

Why Did John Continue to Baptize?

Chrysostom: Why, when the disciples of Jesus were baptizing, didn't John stop baptizing? Why did he continue even until he was led to prison?... He would have made the disciples of Jesus seem the more revered if he had stopped when they began.... But he did so because he did not want to excite his own disciples to an even stronger rivalry and contention than there already was between the two. For even if he had proclaimed Christ ten thousand times and given him the chief place, making himself much more the inferior, he still would not have been able to persuade his disciples to run to Christ. In fact, they would have most likely become more hostile. This is why Christ began to preach more constantly once John was removed. Indeed, the reason, I think, why John's death was permitted and Christ was made the great preacher in his place was so that the people might transfer their affections entirely to Christ and no longer be divided between the two....

Instead, by continuing to preach, John received no glory for himself but sent hearers to Christ. And he was better able to do this service than Christ's own disciples were. This is because his testimony was so free from suspicion and his reputation with the people so much higher than theirs....

But if anyone asks how the disciples' baptism was better than John's, we reply that it was not. Both alike were without the gift of the Spirit, both parties alike had one reason for baptizing, that is, to lead the

baptized to Christ.... That the baptisms had no superiority over one another is shown by what follows [in the dispute]....

For the disciples of John did become so envious of Christ's disciples, and even of Christ himself, that when they saw the latter baptizing, they threw contempt on their baptism as being inferior to that of John's. And they tried to persuade one of those who were baptized of this but were not successful. That it was they who began the dispute, and not the Jews, the Evangelist implies by saying that "there arose a question from John's disciples with a certain Jew," instead of saying, "A certain Jew posed a question." Homilies on the Gospel of John 29.1.

John's Disciples Defend John's Baptism.

Augustine: John baptized, Christ baptized. John's disciples were moved; there was a running after Christ, people were coming to John. Those who came to John, he sent to Jesus to be baptized. But those who were baptized by Christ were not sent to John. John's disciples were alarmed and began to dispute with the Jews, as usually happens. The Jews then asserted Christ to be the greater person and his baptism necessary to be received. But John's disciples did not yet understand as much and defended John's baptism. At last they come to John to solve the question....

"And they came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, he that was with you beyond the Jordan, behold, the same baptizes.' " ... In other words, "What do you say? Shouldn't they be stopped so that the people come to you instead?" Tractates on the Gospel of John 13.8-9.

3:26 All Are Going to Him

The One John Baptized, Now Baptizes.

Chrysostom: "He whom you baptized, baptizes," John's disciples in effect say, although not in so many words. They add, "To whom you bore witness," as if to say that the one you showed to the world, the one you made famous now dares to do as you do. They did not say "whom you baptized," because they did not want to be reminded of the voice from heaven and of the descent of the Spirit. And so, instead they said, "He who was with you ..."—that is, the one who held the rank of a disciple and who was nothing more than any of us—he now separates himself from you and baptizes. They thought they would make

John jealous, not only by this but by asserting that their own reputation was now diminishing. “All,” they say, “come to him.” Homilies on the Gospel of John 29.2.

3:27 John’s Answer

Christ’s Works Testify They Are from Heaven.

Chrysostom: When this question is raised, John does not rebuke his disciples for fear they might leave and turn to some other school. Rather, he replies gently, “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.” Do not be surprised that he seems to speak somewhat humbly of Christ, especially when you consider that it was not appropriate to tell the whole truth to minds prepossessed with such a passion as envy. He only tries at present to alarm them by showing them that they are making war against none other than God himself when they attack Christ.... It is as if he said it is no wonder that Christ does such excellent works and that everyone comes to him when you consider that the one who does it all is God. Human efforts are easily seen through, are feeble and short-lived. These actions of Jesus are not like that. They are not therefore of human but of divine origin. Homilies on the Gospel of John 29.2.

John Speaks of Himself.

Augustine: John is speaking here about himself. “As a man, I have only received” he said, “what I have from heaven.” ... You also realize the kind of testimony I provided for him. And now I am supposed to say that he was not the one who I said he was? Because I received something from heaven in order to be something, do you want me now to throw out everything I have received by speaking against the truth? Tractates on the Gospel of John 13.9.

What Do You Have That You Did Not Receive?

Cyril of Alexandria: He says that there is nothing good in humankind, but everything is a gift of God. It is therefore fitting for the creation to hear, “What do you have that you did not receive?” I think then that we ought to be content with the measures allotted to us and to rejoice in the honors assigned to us from heaven. But, by no means, should we stretch out beyond what has been given us, nor in our desire of things greater, appear to be unthankful or to despise the decree from above and fight against the judgment of the Lord.... Whatever God shall deign to honor us with, [let us] value that highly. Commentary on the Gospel of John 2.1.

3:28 You Witness That I Am Not the Christ

John Testifies to His Own Servant Role.

Chrysostom: If then you hold to my testimony—and you even now produce it when you say “to whom you bore witness”—not only is he undiminished by receiving my witness, but he is increased by it. Besides, the testimony was not mine. It was God’s. And so, if you think I am trustworthy, I said this among the other things, that “I am sent before him.” See how he shows little by little that the voice was divine? For he is saying, in effect, “I am a servant speaking the words of the one who sent me. I did not give the testimony as a gift; I spoke what I was sent to speak. Do not think I am someone great just because of this. In actuality he is the great one. He is the Lord of all.” Homilies on the Gospel of John 29.2.

3:29 The Bridegroom Has the Bride

Christ Is the Husband of the Church.

Ambrose: This means he alone is the husband of the church, he is the expectation of the nations, and the prophets removed their sandals while offering to him a union of nuptial grace. He is the bridegroom; I am the friend of the bridegroom. I rejoice because he is coming, because I hear the nuptial chant, because now we do not hear the harsh penalties for sinners, the harsh torments of the law, but the forgiveness of offenses, the cry of joy, the sound of cheerfulness, the rejoicing of the nuptial feast. On the Patriarchs 4.22.

The Friend of the Bridegroom.

Chrysostom: But how does he who said, “whose sandals I am not worthy to unloose,” now call himself his “friend”? It is not to exalt himself or to boast that he says this. Rather, it is from [his] desire to show that he too very much looks forward to this (i.e., the exaltation of Christ) and that these things happen not against his will or to his disadvantage. Rather, he desires and is eager for them. It was with a special view to these very things that all his actions had been performed. He has very wisely shown this by the term “friend.” For on occasions like marriages, the servants of the bridegroom are not as glad and joyful as his “friends” are. It was not from any desire to prove equality of honor (away with the thought) that he calls himself friend, but only due to his great pleasure and from condescension to their weakness. For he previously declared his service by saying, “I am sent before him.” On this account and because they

thought that he was troubled at what had taken place, he called himself the “friend of the Bridegroom” to show not only that he was not troubled, but that he was actually quite happy over the whole turn of events. Homilies on the Gospel of John 29.2.

John Rejoices.

Augustine: She is not my spouse, John says. But do you still rejoice in the marriage, John? “Yes, I rejoice,” he says, “because I am the friend of the bridegroom.” Tractates on the Gospel of John 13.12.

The Fullness of Joy.

Chrysostom: But what does it mean: “He who stands and hears him rejoices greatly, because of the bridegroom’s voice”? He transfers the expression from the parable to the subject at hand. For after mentioning the bridegroom and the bride, he shows how the bride is brought home, that is, by a “voice” and by teaching. For this is how the church is wedded to God. Therefore Paul also says, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” At this “voice,” he says, “I rejoice.” And he adds “who stand,” in order to show that his office had ceased, that he had given over to him “the bride” and must for the future himself stand and hear him. He was a servant and minister, and his hope and joy are now realized. Therefore he says, “This, my joy, therefore, is fulfilled.” Homilies on the Gospel of John 29.3.

John, the Bridegroom’s Friend, a Model of Humility.

Augustine: There were prophets before John, and many of them, and great ones, worthy of God, full of God, who foretold the Savior and bore witness to the truth. Yet for all that, of none of them could it be said, as was said of John, “Among those born of women, none has arisen greater than John the Baptist.” So what is the meaning of such greatness, sent before the great One? It is a testimonial to extraordinary humility. After all, he was so great that people could think he was the Christ. John could have taken advantage of the people’s mistake, and he would not have had to work hard to persuade them he was the Christ, because those who heard and saw him had already thought this without his saying it. There was no need for him to sow the seeds of the error; all he would have to do would be to confirm it.

He, however, as the bridegroom’s friend, is jealous for the bridegroom. And he does not put himself forward as an adulterer in the bridegroom’s place but bears witness to his friend and commends the one who really was the bridegroom to the bride. He wants to be loved in him and hates the idea of being loved

instead of him. “The one who has the bride,” he says, “is the bridegroom.” And if you were to say, “What about you?” he would respond, “But the friend of the bridegroom stands and hears and joyfully rejoices because of the bridegroom’s voice.” “Stands and hears.” The disciple hears the master; because he hears, he stands, because if he does not hear, he falls. It is here that John’s greatness is supremely brought to our notice; that when he could be thought to be the Christ, he preferred to bear witness to the Christ, to bring him to our notice. He preferred to humble himself rather than to be taken for the Christ and taken in by himself. Sermon 288.2.

3:30 He Must Increase, but I Must Decrease

God Increases As He Lives in Us.

Augustine: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” What is this? He must be exalted, but I must be humbled. How is Jesus to increase? How is God to increase? The perfect does not increase. God neither increases nor decreases. For if he increases, he is not perfect; if he decreases, he is not God. And how can Jesus increase, being God? ... This is a great mystery! Before the Lord Jesus came, people were glorifying themselves; he came as a man to lessen human glory and to increase the glory of God... For this is what the apostle says, this is what holy Scripture says: “He that glories, let him glory in the Lord.”

Will you glory in yourself? You will grow; but you will grow worse in your evil. For whoever grows worse is justly decreased. Let God, then, who is ever perfect, grow and grow in you. For the more you understand God and apprehend him, he seems to be growing in you; but in himself he does not grow, being always perfect.... Do but examine the nature of humanity: a person is born and grows, he learns the customs of people. What does he know but earth and things of the earth? He speaks the things of people, knows the things of people and minds the things of people. Carnal, he judges carnally, conjectures carnally. Everything is about humanity! Let the grace of God come and enlighten his darkness, as it said, “You will lighten my candle, O Lord; my God, enlighten my darkness”; let it take the mind of humanity and turn it toward its own light. Immediately [John] begins to say, as the apostle says, “Yet not I, but the grace of God that is with me,” and “Now I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me.” That is to say, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” Tractates on the Gospel of John 14.4–6.

3:31 The One from Above Is Above All

One from Above Is Naturally Above Everything Else.

Cyril of Alexandria: It is no big thing, and not all that wonderful either, if Christ surpasses the glory of human nature. For the boundaries of his glory don't only extend so far—in fact, they extend over all creation just as God is above everything that has been made and in no way numbered among them. He, as the exception to everything, is divinely placed over everything. And then John explains why, which silences anyone who might disagree. “He who comes from above,” he says, “is born of the root that is from above, preserving in himself by nature the Father’s natural goodness. Such a person will most assuredly possess an existence that surpasses everything. For, it would be impossible for the Son not to appear altogether to be the same kind of being as the one who begot him is conceived of. And this is only right. For how can the Son, who excels because he is of the same nature and is the Brightness and express Image of the Father—how can he be inferior to his [Father] in glory? Or will not the property of the Father be dishonored in the Son, and do we not insult the Image of the Begotten, if we consider him to be inferior? But this I suppose will be clear to everyone. This is why it is also written that everyone should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father. Whoever is glorified with equal honor with God the Father, because he exists from him by nature, has to be conceived of as surpassing the essence of things originate. For this is what “above all” means. Commentary on the Gospel of John 2.12.

John Repeats Himself to Subdue His Disciples’ Pride.

Chrysostom: As the worm gnaws through the wood from which it is born, and rust destroys the iron from which it came, and moths consume fleece, so pride destroys the soul that nourishes it. Therefore we need perseverance to get rid of it. John himself can hardly subdue it in his disciples even with all of his cogent arguments. He has to say again what he has said above, “He that comes from above is above all.” ... He means: you make much of my testimony and say that the witness is more worthy to be believed than Jesus to whom I bear witness. Know this, that it is impossible for the one who comes from heaven to be accredited by an earthly witness.... He is above all, being perfect in himself and above comparison. Homilies on the Gospel of John 30.1.

John's Teaching Is Simple Compared with That of Jesus.

Chrysostom: "Speaks of the earth" does not mean that John spoke from his own understanding but that, in comparison with Christ's doctrine, he spoke of the earth. It is as if he said, my doctrine is simple and humble when compared with Christ's. While it is appropriate for an earthbound teacher, there is no comparison with the one in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.... And yet John was not altogether earthly, for he had a soul and a spirit, and these were not of the earth. What does he mean then by saying that he is "earthly"? He says this only to express his own worthlessness and that he is one born on the earth, creeping on the ground. There is no comparison with Christ, who comes from above. Homilies on the Gospel of John 30.1.

John Speaks of God When He Is Enlightened.

Augustine: Then how does he speak of the earth? He said this about human beings. So far as relates to their being human, they are of earth and speak of the earth. And when human beings speak divine things it is because they are enlightened by God. For if they were not enlightened, they would be earth speaking of earth. God's grace is one thing, the nature of human beings is another ... as the apostle says, "Yet not I, but the grace of God that is with me." ... Thus John, as regards John, is of the earth and speaks of the earth. Whatever you have heard from John that is divine comes from him who enlightens, not him who receives. Tractates on the Gospel of John 14.6.

3:32 Testifying of What He Has Seen and Heard

Christ Testifies to Things Our Senses Cannot Comprehend.

Chrysostom: After this high and solemn mention of Christ, John's tone again lowers. For the expression "what he has heard and seen" is suited more for a mere man. What he knew, he knew not because he learned by sight or hearing but because everything is already in his nature, having come forth perfect from the bosom of his Father and needing no one to teach him.... As our senses are our surest channels of knowledge and teachers are most dependent on those who have apprehended by sight or hearing what they teach, John adds this argument in favor of Christ, that which he has seen and heard—meaning that everything that Jesus said is true, none of it is false. Homilies on the Gospel of John 30.1.

3:33 God Is True

The Believers' Assent Witnesses that God Is True.

Cyril of Alexandria: There was no other possible way of showing the impiety of those who do not believe except by making known the glorious achievement of the believers. Evil is a lot easier to see when it is contrasted with good. When you know there is something better out there, it only puts what is worse in starker contrast. If anyone then, John says, has assented to the words of the one who comes from above, he has sealed and confirmed by his understanding that truth is ever near and dear to the divine nature. The opposite is just as obvious because anyone who throws away the faith will most certainly testify, against himself, that God is not true. Commentary on the Gospel of John 2.3.

3:34 Uttering the Words of God

God Spoke the Word.

Augustine: What has the Son heard from the Father? Could it be that the Son has heard the Word of the Father? No, the Son is the Word of the Father.... When you conceive a word to speak it, you intend to speak something, and the very conception of that something is already a word in your heart waiting to be expressed. [As, in fact, you have in your heart the word that you speak], so God gave out his Word, that is, he begat the Son. You beget the Word in your heart according to time. God begat outside of time the Son by whom he created all times. While, therefore, the Son is the Word of God and the Son did not speak his own word to us but the word of the Father, he still also wanted to speak himself to us as well when he was speaking the word of the Father. This is what John said, as was appropriate and necessary. Tractates on the Gospel of John 14.7.

Christ Has the Spirit Without Measure.

Ammonius: As the fount of the Spirit, [Christ] imparts him. He is speaking of the working of the Spirit, which people receive in some measure. For the Son himself has the full working of the Spirit in its entirety. Truly, the Son has the entire Spirit in essence and not in some measure, as a created being might have. Therefore, he himself imparts the Spirit, and by their petitions the saints make Christ supply the Spirit. Fragments on John 105.

The Spirit Is of Infinite Measure in Christ.

Chrysostom: But why does he say, “God gives not the Spirit by measure”? He wants to demonstrate that we all have received the operation of the Spirit by measure (for in this place, by “Spirit” he means the operation of the Spirit, for this is what is divided). And yet, Christ has all its operation without measure and complete. Now if his operations are without measure, his essence is even more so. Do you not see that the Spirit is infinite? How then can he who has received all the operation of the Spirit, who knows the things of God, who says, “We speak what we have heard, and testify what we have seen”—how can anyone suspect anything he says? He says nothing that is not “of God” or that is not of “the Spirit.” And, for a while, he utters nothing concerning God the Word but makes all his doctrine credible by reference to the Father and the Spirit. Homilies on the Gospel of John 30.2.

The Spirit Measured Out in Us.

Augustine: What does this mean when he says, “For not by measure does God give the Spirit”? We find that God does give the Spirit by measure. Listen to the apostle when he says, “According to the measure of the gift of Christ.” To people he gives by measure; to the only Son he does not give by measure. How does he give to people by measure? “To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit.” ... This person has one gift, that person another; and what that person has, this one does not: there is a measure, a certain division of gifts.... But Christ, who gives, receives not by measure. Tractates on the Gospel of John 14.10.

3:35 The Loving Father Gives His Son Everything

The Father’s Love for His Son Is Unique.

Augustine: He added “has given all things into his hands” so that you might know also here with what distinction it is said, “The Father loves the Son.” And why? Doesn’t the Father love John? And yet he has not given all things into his hand. Doesn’t the Father love Paul? And yet he has not given all things into his hand. “The Father loves the Son,” but as a father loves, not as master loves a servant. He loves him as the only Son, not as an adopted son, and so he “has given all things into his hand.” What does “all things” mean? That the Son should be such as the Father is. He begot him to equality with himself—he in whom it was no robbery to be in the form of God and equal to God. “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.” Therefore, having deigned to send us the Son, let us not imagine that it is something

less than the Father that is sent to us. The Father, in sending the Son, sent his other self. Tractates on the Gospel of John 14.11.

The Son Has Eternally What the Father Has Eternally.

Athanasius: This passage does not demonstrate that the Son, at one time, did not have these prerogatives [that were given him by the Father]. For he who is the only Word and Wisdom of the Father in essence has eternally what the Father has. For doesn't Christ elsewhere say, "All that the Father has are mine," and whatever things are mine are the Father's? For if the things of the Father are the Son's and the Father always has them, it is plain that what the Son has, being the Father's, were always in the Son. This is not because there was a time when he did not have them, but because, even though the Son has eternally what he has, he still has them from the Father. Discourses Against the Arians 3.27.35.

The Son, as Man, Receives All Things at Second Coming.

Ammonius: The Father loves the world too, but not in the same way as he loves the Son, whom he loves exceedingly because of his incarnation as his own Word and Wisdom and Holiness. [His giving all things over to his Son] will be fulfilled at the time of his second coming when "every knee will bow to him," as everyone rejects the evil to which they are now clinging. Here he calls his power his "hand." The Son has this power by nature and not just to a certain degree. That is because every good thing really belongs to the Father and the Son is perceived to have this full power. And he will also receive as a man the authority which he had also had before his incarnation. Fragments on John 105.

3:36 Eternal Life or No Life at All

Faith Without Works Is Dead.

Chrysostom: See how he refers to the Father again when he speaks of punishment. He did not say, "the wrath of the Son," although the Son is the judge. Rather, he makes the Father the judge in order to alarm them more. He does not mean here that to believe on the Son says everything that needs to be said concerning gaining everlasting life, for elsewhere he says, "Not every one that says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." And the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is of itself sufficient to send someone into hell.... But we must not think that even a right belief in Father, Son and Holy Spirit is all there is to salvation ... for our [faith] also has need of a good life and conversation. Knowing then that

the greater part are not moved so much by the promise of good, as by the threat of punishment, he concludes, "But he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him." ... And he does not say "in him" but "on him," meaning that the wrath will never depart from him. And for the same reason he says, "shall not see life," that is, to show that he did not mean only a temporal death! Homilies on the Gospel of John 31.1.

Belief Makes God's Wrath Cease.

Ambrose: The wrath that remains on him certainly had its beginning from some offence, in other words, first of all, that he did not believe. When, then, anyone believes, the wrath of God departs and life arrives. To believe, then, in Christ is to gain life, for "He who believes in him is not judged." Concerning Repentance 1.12.53.

The Wrath of God Remains on Him.

Augustine: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life." Why? Because he has done the work of God, seeing that this is the work of God that you should believe in the one whom he has sent. "But whoever does not believe in the Son will not have life, but the wrath of God remains on him"; not "will come upon him" but "remains on him." He is abandoned, not healed. Sermon 130a.7.

Unbelievers Resurrected but Not Living.

Cyril of Alexandria: He says that the believer shall have everlasting life, but the word has a different significance for the unbeliever. For he does not say that [the unbeliever] shall not have life since he too shall be raised by the common law of the resurrection. But he says that he shall not see life, that is, he shall not even so much as glimpse the life of the saints, he shall not touch their blessedness, and he shall not taste of their life spent in bliss. For that is indeed life. But to exist in punishment is far more bitter than any death, holding the soul in the body only for the sensation of suffering. Commentary on the Gospel of John 2.4.