

# John 1:16 Commentary

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## JESUS' RISE FROM OBSCURITY FOLLOWED BY OPPOSITION IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

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## THE LIFE OF JESUS AS COVERED BY GOSPEL OF JOHN (shaded area)

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John 1:16 For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.

**Greek:** hoti ek tou pleromatos autou hemeis pantes elabomen, (1PAAI) kai charin anti charitos;

**Amplified:** For out of His fullness (abundance) we have all received [all had a share and we were all supplied with] one grace after another and spiritual blessing upon spiritual blessing and even favor upon favor and gift [heaped] upon gift.

**ESV:** And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

**KJV:** And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

**NLT:** We have all benefited from the rich blessings he brought to us--one gracious blessing after another.

**Phillips:** Indeed, every one of us has shared in his riches - there is a grace in our lives because of his grace.

**Wuest:** for out of His fulness as a source we all received, and grace in exchange for grace.

**Young's Literal:** and out of his fulness did we all receive, and grace over-against grace;

- **Of his:** Jn 3:34, Jn 15:1-5 Mt 3:11,14 Lk 21:15 Acts 3:12-16 Ro 8:9 1Co 1:4,5 Eph 4:7-12 Col 1:19, 2:3,9,10 1Pe 1:11
- **Grace upon grace:** Zec 4:7 Mt 13:12 Ro 5:2,17,20 Eph 1:6-8 2:5-10 4:7 1Pe 1:2

**Note:** Origen and Luther took these words as John the Baptist's words. Indeed, John the Baptist was just quoted in the preceding passage, but most modern scholars feel that Jn 1:16-18 represents John the Gospel writer's comments.

**For** - Always stop and interrogate this small but strategic **term of explanation**. Steven Cole favors John 1:16 as explaining John 1:14.

**Of His fullness** - To what does this refer? John has just stated that Jesus is "full of grace and truth," and it certainly is reasonable that these blessings are those to which John refers, especially in view of his repetition of "grace upon grace" a phrase which speaks of abundant, sufficient grace.

**Barclay** adds that **fullness** or **pleroma** is "the sum total of all that is in God." Christ is fully God (Col 2:9) and we are fully complete in Him (Col 2:10).

**Vincent** - John's meaning (of His fullness) is that Christians receive from the divine completeness whatever each requires for the perfection of his character and for the accomplishment of his work (compare Jn 15:15; Jn 17:22).

As discussed more below in the word study on pleroma, Christ is the **pleroma** of God, and we are filled with His **pleroma**. As John

MacArthur says "As a result of the Fall, man is in a sad state of **incompleteness**. He is **spiritually incomplete** because He is totally out of fellowship with God. He is **morally incomplete** because he lives outside of God's will. He is **mentally incomplete** because he does not know ultimate truth. At salvation, believers become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4) and are made complete. Believers are spiritually complete because they have fellowship with God. They are morally complete in that they recognize the authority of God's will. They are mentally complete because they know the truth about ultimate reality." (Colossians Commentary).

**Uteley** - The gnostic false teachers used it to describe the angelic aeons between the high god and lesser spiritual beings. Jesus is the only mediator between God and man (cf. Col. 1:19; 2:9; Eph. 1:23; 4:13) and the angelic levels. Here again it seems John the Apostle is attacking an early gnostic view of reality. ([John 1 Commentary](#))

**D A Carson** explains John's use of *pleroma* in this context - John 1:14 described the glory of God manifest in the incarnate Word as full of grace and truth. Picking up on the term, John says that it is from this fullness that we have received grace after grace. Thus '**fulness**' here bears no technical, gnostic sense.

**Fulness** (4138)(*pleroma* from *pleroo* = make full, fill, fill up) means fullness, full measure, abundance, completion or what fills. **Pleroma** describes a full measure or abundance with emphasis upon completeness. **Pleroma** is completion and describes what is fulfilled or is completed without any gap. The sum total. The totality. **Pleroma** speaks of the total quantity and emphasizes completeness.

*Pleroma* was a recognized technical term in theology, denoting the totality of the Divine powers and attributes. (Lightfoot)

#### Other Lexicons-

- Vine's discussion of *pleroma*
- Thayer's discussion of *pleroma*

There are several nuances of **pleroma** in the NT uses...

(1) **Literally full or filled up** - contents. what fills something up (of earth and all it **contains** [that fills it] - 1 Cor 10:26, of baskets (Mk 8:20). In the Parable of the Patched Garment *pleroma* is translated "**to patch**" which means to complete or fill out the torn garment (Mt. 9:16; Mk 2:21) In classical Greek *pleroma* described a ship, as it is filled (manned) with sailors, rowers, and soldiers;

(2) **Figuratively** - fullness, a total quantity, with emphasis upon completeness, full number, full measure, fullness, completeness, totality (of divinity, the divine nature in Christ = present in totality! "The whole total of the Godhead" was pleased to dwell in Christ = Christ has ALL the divine attributes in himself. Col 1:19, Col 2:9), fullness of persons (Ro 11:25 full number of Gentiles; Eph 1:23 speaking of the Church, the body of Christ). Fulfillment of a goal (Eph 4:13 = Paul is speaking in the context of the believers in the Church, where God wants every believer to manifest the qualities of His Son, Who is Himself the standard for their spiritual maturity and perfection. Christ is the totality of God and that is every believer's goal in this life, which of course we can never attain, but toward which we continually strive [our part in sanctification] = the process of sanctification by the Spirit and the Word [God's provision for sanctification or growth in Christ-likeness, into the "fullness of Christ."].).

(3) **Fulfillment, full performance** (Ro 13:10 speaking of love);

(4) **Fulfillment of time** - the totality of a period of time, a period of time, when all intended within it has been accomplished (Gal 4:4, Eph 1:10). **Pleroma** means the full realization in time of God's predestined plans revealed in the Scripture.

(5) **As what is beyond measure** = overflowing amount, wealth, abundance (Ro 15:29);

**The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters** - Paul uses fullness (*pleroma*) with different shades of meaning in both the passive sense "that which is completed or filled" (as object) and the active sense "**that which completes or fills up**" (as subject). -- 1. **Totality of Space** - 1 Cor 10:26; 2. **Totality of Quantity** - "full inclusion" of Israel (Ro 11:12) after "the total number of the Gentiles have come in" (Ro 11:25); 3. **Totality of the Law** - Another passive use is Paul's reference to love as "the sum of the Law's demands" (Rom 13:10), which believers fulfill wholly because by God's provision in Christ through his Spirit (see Holy Spirit) sin has no more power over them (cf. Rom 8:4, 9-10); the immediate context shows his concern for obedience to the whole Torah (Rom 13:8-10). 4. **Fulfillment of Time** - Gal 4:4; 5. **Fullness of Essence** - Col 1:19, 2:9

**Pleroma** is a common term with the Greek philosophers and in the false teachings of Gnosticism ([Wikipedia Article](#)). Gnosticism used **pleroma** for the entire host of intermediary beings between God and man. The Gnostics taught Christ was kind of "halfway

house" to God, a link in the chain with other better links on ahead. Paul countered with the clear and indisputable truth that in Christ "all the **fullness** (pleroma) of Deity dwells (present tense = continually) in bodily form." (Col 2:9) Paul is saying that Christ is not some inferior emanation. In short, as mysterious and incomprehensible to our finite minds as this truth is, Jesus was fully God and fully Man and the great news is that we as believers are "been made complete" in Him (Col 2:10). Every believer possesses all of Jesus today that they will possess of Him for all eternity. The goal now of course is for Jesus to possess "all of our heart" today, which is the essence of the Spirit's work of daily, progressive sanctification (setting us apart from the world and unto God) in believers (cp Php 1:6). William Barclay adds that in Col 2:9, "**Pleroma** means fullness, completeness. This is the word which is needed to complete the picture. Jesus is not simply a sketch of God or a summary and more than a lifeless portrait of him. In him there is nothing left out; he is the full revelation of God, and nothing more is necessary." ([Colossians Commentary](#))

**Wayne Detzler** - Originally **pleroma** had several practical meanings in Greek. It spoke of the cargo of a ship. A ship was filled with grain, for instance. On a slightly different tack, the word referred to the crew of a ship: a ship was "fully manned." It is easy to see the literal meaning of "fullness." This word referred to a full container, but it also had abstract meanings. A person was "full of years," meaning that he was very old. On the other end of the scale a baby was spoken of as being "full term." The sea was "full" of riches, including fish. The Bible uses both aspects of the word. It speaks of a container or a vessel which is full. The Bible also speaks of fullness in an abstract sense. Both of these focuses appear on these pages.

**Vincent's Note on Pleroma** - The word **fullness** is found here only in John, but frequently occurs in the writings of Paul, whose use of it in Ephesians and Colossians illustrates the sense in John; these being Asiatic churches which fell, later, within the sphere of John's influence. The word is akin to **pleres**, full (John 1:14), and to **pleroun**, to fill or complete; and means that which is complete in itself, plenitude, entire number or quantity. Thus the crew of a ship is called **pleroma**, its complement. Aristophanes ("Wasps," 660), "the **sum-total** of these, is nearly two thousand talents." Herodotus (iii., 22) says that the **full term** of man's life among the Persians is eighty years; and Aristotle ("Politics," iv., 4) refers to Socrates as saying that the eight classes, representing different industries in the state, constitute the **pleroma** of the state (see Plato, "Republic," 371). In Ephesians 1:23, Paul says that the church is the **pleroma** of Christ: i.e., the plenitude of the divine graces in Christ is communicated to the Church as His body, making all the body, supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, to increase with the increase of God (Col 2:19; compare Eph 4:16). Similarly he prays (Eph 3:19) that the brethren may be filled unto all the **pleroma** of God: i.e., that they may be filled with the fullness which God imparts. More closely related to John's use of the term here are Col 1:19, "It pleased the Father that in Him (Christ) should all **the fullness** dwell;" and Colossians 2:9, Colossians 2:10, "In Him dwells all the **pleroma** of the Godhead bodily (i.e., corporally, becoming incarnate), and in Him ye are **fulfilled**." This declares that the whole aggregate of the divine powers and graces appeared in the incarnate Word, and corresponds with John's statement that "the Word became flesh and tabernacled among men, full of grace and truth," while "you have been made complete (**pleroo**)" answers to John's "of His fullness we all received." Hence John's meaning here is that Christians receive from the divine completeness whatever each requires for the perfection of his character and for the accomplishment of his work (compare John 15:15; John 17:22). ([Vincent's Word Studies](#))

**Pleroma** - 17x in 17v in the NAS - **NAS Usage** = all...contains(1), fulfillment(2), full(2), fullness(10), patch(2).

Mt 9:16 But no one puts a **patch** of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results.

Mk 2:21 "No one sews a **patch** of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results.

Mk 6:43 and they picked up twelve **full** baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish.

Mk 8:20 "When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets **full** of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they \*said to Him, "Seven."

Jn 1:16 For of His **fullness** we have all received, and grace upon grace.

Ro 11:12 Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their **fulfillment** be!

**W E Vine** - what still greater blessings will accrue from their ultimate national restoration? The Divine riches will then be bestowed not merely on individuals as now but upon the nations of the world as a whole. The word **pleroma**, here applied to Israel, indicates the time when as a nation they will all be converted (Ed: Those that believe will be converted - 1/3 will believe, 2/3's will not - see Zech 13:8), in contrast to the present existence of a remnant. Here again the significance is full and national prosperity.

**Comment:** Pleroma is that which has been filled and thus refers to that which is complete, the completeness of Israel referring here to its return to God at the second Advent of the Messiah when all Israel would be saved (cp Ro 11:26). Paul uses **pleroma** in Ro 11:25-note to describe the fulness of the Gentiles.

Ro 11:25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the **fullness** of the Gentiles has come in;

**Comment:** Distinguish "**fullness of the Gentiles**" ([See Chart comparing the Times versus the Fullness of the Gentiles](#)) from "times of the Gentiles" ([See discussion of times of the Gentiles](#)). **Pleroma** is that which has been filled and thus refers to that which is to a sum total, to a complete amount, or a full number, in this case the "full number" of Gentiles who will come to belief in Messiah. The NET Bible conveys the meaning clearly rendering it "A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in." (NET Bible)

Ro 13:10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the **fulfillment** of the law.

Ro 15:29 I know that when I come to you, I will come in the **fullness** of the blessing of Christ.

**Comment:** In Romans 15:29 the passive sense is used to refer to Paul's desire that the Roman believers share in "the full abundance" of Christ's blessing" through their financial collection, not just to bring relief to the famine-stricken in Jerusalem, but also to strengthen the bond between Jews and Gentiles in the church (Rom 15:24–33). (Dictionary of Paul and his letters)

1 Co 10:26 for the earth is the Lord's, and **all it contains**. (NET "and its abundance")

Gal 4:4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,

**Detzler** - fulfillment of time. The Lord Jesus was born of the virgin, according to Galatians 4:4, 'when the time had fully come'. There is a marvelous sense of completion in that phrase. All of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament reached its climax in the Lamb of God. Prophecy likewise found its fulfillment par excellence in the person of Christ. In fact, there are more than thirty references to the fulfillment of prophecy in the person of Christ as the story is found in the Gospels.

Eph 1:10 with a view to an administration suitable to the **fullness** of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him

**Comment:** Here **pleroma** refers to the fulfillment, full end, or completion of time, the full period

Eph 1:23 which is His body, the **fullness** of Him who fills all in all.

**MacArthur** - The church is the fulness or complement (**pleroma**) of Christ. As a head must have a body to manifest the glory of that head, so the Lord must have the church to manifest His glory (Ep 3:10).

**Henry Alford** - Here, the simple and primary meaning is by far the best,—'the thing filled,'—'the filled up receptacle' ... the meaning being, that the church being the Body of Christ, is dwelt in and filled by God: it is His **pleroma** in an especial manner—His fulness abides in it, and is exemplified by it" (3:87).

**John Eadie** - "The word (**pleroma**), we apprehend, is rightly taken in a passive sense—that which is filled up." And then he concludes: "So the church is named **pleroma**, or fulness, because it holds or contains the fulness of Christ" (p. 113).

**Wuest** - The word "**fulness**" is **pleroma**. Thayer gives the following: "that which is or has been filled; used of a ship inasmuch as it is filled (i.e., manned) with sailors, rowers, and soldiers; in the NT, the body of believers, as that which is filled with the presence, power, agency, riches of God and of Christ." Alford says, "the meaning being, that the Church, being the Body of Christ, is dwelt in and filled with God: it is His **pleroma** (fulness) in an especial manner—His fulness abides in it and is exemplified by it."

**Salmond** (Expositor's Greek Testament) **Pleroma** is to be taken in the passive sense here, as is done by most commentators, and the idea is that the Church is not only Christ's body but that which is filled by Him. In Col 1:19, 2:9, the whole **pleroma** or every plenitude of the Godhead, the very fulness of the Godhead, the totality of the divine powers and qualities, is said to be recognized as Framer and Governor of the world, and there is neither need nor place for any intermediate beings as agents in those works of creating, upholding and administering. Here the conception is that this plenitude of the divine powers and qualities which is in Christ is **imparted** by Him to His Church, so that the latter is **pervaded** by His presence, **animated** by His life, **filled** with His gifts and energies and graces. He is the sole Head of the universe, which is supplied by Him with all that is needed for its being and order. He is also the sole Head of the Church, which receives from Him what He Himself possesses, and is endowed by Him with all that it requires for the realization of its vocation." "The all things" is "the whole system of things, made by Christ, and having in Him the ground of its being, its continuance, its order (Heb. 1:3, Col. 1:16, 17, 1Cor. 8:6), 'with all things,'...the universe itself and all the things that make its fulness." ([Commentary](#))

Eph 3:19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the **fulness** of God.

**MacArthur** - To be filled up to all the fulness of God therefore means to be totally dominated by Him, with nothing left of self or any

part of the old man. By definition, then, to be filled with God is to be emptied of self. It is not to have much of God and little of self, but all of God and none of self. This is a recurring theme in Ephesians. Here Paul talks about the fulness of God; in 4:13 it is "the fulness of Christ"; and in 5:18 it is the fulness of the Spirit.

Eph 4:13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Col 1:19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the **fulness** to dwell in Him,

**J B Lightfoot on pleroma** - On the one hand, in relation to Deity, He is the visible image of the invisible God. He is not only the chief manifestation of the Divine nature: He exhausts the godhead manifested. In Him resides the totality of the Divine powers and attributes. For this totality Gnostic teachers had a technical term, the **pleroma** or plenitude....In contrast to their doctrine, [Paul] asserts and repeats the assertion, that the **pleroma** abides absolutely and wholly in Christ as the Word of God. The entire light is concentrated in Him.

**Dictionary of Biblical Imagery** - The reference to fullness here is an intentional slap at the false teachers, who apparently used the same word, **pleroma**, to denote the totality of all the thousands of divine emanations of lesser gods. The sense is that Jesus is not one of the lesser gods of the fullness. He is the Fullness. Colossians 2:9 puts it even more explicitly: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (NIV). Fullness denotes the totality of divine power and attributes in Christ. Knowledge of this fullness is part of the gnōsis for which Paul prayed for the Colossians. Divine fullness establishes Christ's superiority beyond doubt. And with this, his adequacy to meet every believer's need fills his followers: "and you have been given fullness in Christ" (Col 2:10NIV). Christ can hold all the fullness of deity, believers cannot. But believers are full of his fullness. This grand motif then informs the section on practical living.

Col 2:9 For in Him all the **fulness** of Deity dwells in bodily form,

**Salmond** (Expositor's Greek Testament) - The false teachers represented the fulness of the Godhead as distributed among the angels, and thus led their victims captive. Paul's warning against the false doctrine thus rests on the fact that it was in Christ that the whole fulness dwelt. ([Commentary](#))

**Barclay** - In Colossians 2:9 he says in Christ there dwelt the **pleroma** of deity in a bodily form. He meant that in Jesus there dwelt the totality of the wisdom, the power, the love of God. Just because of that Jesus is inexhaustible. A man can go to Jesus with any need and find that need supplied. A man can go to Jesus with any ideal and find that ideal realized. In Jesus the man in love with beauty will find the supreme beauty. In Jesus the man to whom life is the search for knowledge will find the supreme revelation. In Jesus the man who needs courage will find the pattern and the secret of being brave. In Jesus the man who feels that he cannot cope with life will find the Master of life and the power to live. In Jesus the man who is conscious of his sin will find the forgiveness for his sin and the strength to be good. In Jesus the **pleroma**, the fullness of God, all that is in God, what Westcott called "the spring of divine life," becomes available to men.

**Pleroma** - 13v in non-apocryphal Lxx -

1Chr. 16:32 Ps. 24:1 Ps. 50:12 Ps. 89:11 Ps. 96:11 Ps. 98:7 Eccl. 4:6 Cant. 5:12 Jer. 8:16 Jer. 47:2 Ezek.  
12:19 Ezek. 19:7 Ezek. 30:12

**Wayne Detzler - ILLUSTRATIONS of Pleroma** - Some years ago a documentary film showed the remarkable capabilities of a submarine. When the chambers were filled with water the submarine sank slowly beneath the waves and disappeared. At the command of the skipper the same tanks were filled with air; as air forced out water, the craft surfaced. So it is with Christians. The Holy Spirit forces sin out of our lives as He fills us, and we rise to new levels of spiritual life.

Blaise Pascal, famous French mathematician and philosopher, spoke of the "God-shaped vacuum" in every person. There is a void in the life of every person which can only be filled by God. To attempt to fill it with things, or fame, or even culture, is of no avail. Only when Christ Jesus fills that place is there true satisfaction.

In preaching I am often compelled to fly. Actually it is a very pleasant means of travel. When the pilot takes off from Denver for Chicago, he has a flight plan. During the next two hours he flies exactly according to that plan, and when he has fulfilled it, we arrive safe and sound at O'Hare Field in Chicago. God has a plan for our lives, and He will fulfill it if we allow Him to. At the end we shall arrive safe and sound in heaven.

There is yet another fulfillment of significance to each Christian. This is the fullness of the Holy Spirit. A former president of Wheaton College, V. Raymond Edman, loved to speak about the Holy Spirit. Of Him Dr. Edman wrote: "The Spirit-filled life is no mystery revealed to a select few, no goal difficult of attainment. To trust and to obey is the substance of the whole matter."



Dr. Edman used to put the point simply in this way. "What happens," he would ask, "if you are carrying a cup of water and you are jostled?" "Well," we would answer, "the water spills."

"Correct," Dr. Edman said. "By the same token, if you are filled with the joy of the Lord and you are jostled, only the joy of the Lord can spill over."

Bible paraphraser J.B. Phillips explained the fullness of the Holy Spirit in another way: "Every time we say, 'I believe in the Holy Spirit,' we mean that we believe that there is a living God, able and willing to enter human personality and change it."

Speaking of the entire church of Jesus Christ, British preacher and writer John Stott said: "Before Christ sent the church into the world, He sent the Spirit into the church. The same order must be observed today." (New Testament Words in Today's Language)

**We have all received** (lambano) - John is not advocating universalism, the false teaching that everyone is a child of God, that everyone will go to heaven and that no one will go to hell. John has just used **received** (lambano) in Jn 1:12 of those who **received** Jesus Christ as Savior and who thereby became **children of God**. **All** of those who **received** Jesus, **receive** His grace upon grace. Remember that salvation is not something we **achieve** but something we **receive**. By grace we receive it and by grace we live it out (grace upon grace, so to speak).

**Kent Hughes** - Scripture says we have **"all"** received his **"fullness."** It is simply a matter of receiving grace upon grace upon grace, allowing God to put it to work within us. But at the same time receiving grace is not a matter of just lying there and saying, "Overflow me with your grace." We have to take hold of grace and believe that we will receive the promised abundance of divine favor and provision. May we learn to receive grace upon grace, so our lives will become richer and more beautiful and more joyful through grace! May we be people who receive grace upon grace and who then give out grace upon grace in response to the effects of sin, misery, and horror in this world! God wants us to be filled with all his fullness and to possess it. Grace is ours. May God help us to appropriate this power! (Preaching the Word).

## **GRACE UPON GRACE**

**Grace upon grace** - Christ can supply **grace upon grace** because He is **"full of grace and truth."** (Jn 1:14) The simple picture is of grace piled upon grace. All that we will ever need is in Christ so that Paul could say "I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me (by His grace)." (Php 4:13) and because His grace is sufficient His power is perfected in my weakness (2Cor 12:9-10)

**Illustration of grace upon grace** - Years ago, Amy Carmichael shared some helpful insights about the phrase, "grace for grace." Drawing from the writings of Bishop Moule (1841-1920), she wrote that the Greek word translated "for" literally means "instead of." He illustrated the meaning by describing a river. "Stand on its banks," he wrote, "and contemplate the flow of waters. A minute passes, and another. Is it the same stream still? Yes. But is it the same water? No." The old water, he explained, had been displaced by new—"water instead of water." (See full devotional below)

**Upon** is the preposition **anti** (see Vincent's note and NET notes below) - Anti has two basic meanings - instead of or opposed to. Because of this preposition commentators have argued over the meaning of grace upon grace (discussed below), but most common people are not able to "nuance" the Greek and take God's Word with simple minds and humble hearts, which is why I favor the interpretation of grace piled upon grace, always enough no matter the need! Indeed, this is Amazing Grace!

**Grace** ([5485](#)) (**charis**) in simple terms is God's unmerited favor and supernatural enablement and empowerment for salvation and for daily sanctification. Grace is everything for nothing to those who don't deserve anything. Grace is what every man needs, what none can earn and what God Alone can and does freely give (see Ro 8:32-note where "freely give" is charizomai [word study] from charis = a grace gift!). Grace addresses man's sin, while mercy addresses man's misery. The gift of grace makes men fit for salvation, miraculously making separated strangers into God's beloved sons.

**Webster's 1828 Dictionary** definition of **grace** - unmerited love and favor of God which is the spring and source of all benefits men receive from Him, including especially His assistance given man for his regeneration or sanctification. (Grace is) a virtue from God influencing man, renewing his heart and restraining him from sin.

**Charles Allen** offers a succinct synopsis of grace noting that "In the Bible there are three distinctive meanings of grace; it means the mercy and active love of God; it means the winsome attractiveness of God; it means the strength of God to overcome."

**NET Note** - The meaning of the phrase **charin anti charitos** could be: (1) love (grace) under the New Covenant in place of love (grace) under the Sinai Covenant, thus replacement; (2) grace "on top of" grace, thus accumulation; (3) grace corresponding to grace, thus correspondence. The most commonly held view is (2) in one sense or another, and this is probably the best explanation.

**Wiersbe** - **Grace** is God's favor and kindness bestowed on those who do not deserve it and cannot earn it. If God dealt with us only according to truth, none of us would survive; but He deals with us on the basis of grace and truth. Jesus Christ, in His life, death, and resurrection, met all the demands of the Law; now God is free to share fullness of grace with those who trust Christ. Grace without truth would be deceitful, and truth without grace would be condemning.

**Vincent** - The preposition *anti* originally means over against; opposite; before (in a local sense). Through the idea of placing one thing over against another is developed that of exchange. Thus Herodotus (iii., 59), "They bought the island, for (*anti*) money." So Mt 5:38, "An eye for (*anti*) an eye," etc. This idea is at the root of the peculiar sense in which the preposition is used here. We received, not New Testament **grace** instead of Old Testament grace; nor simply, **grace added to grace**; but new grace imparted as the former measure of grace has been received and improved. "To have realized and used one measure of grace, was to have gained a larger measure (as it were) in exchange for it." Consequently, continuous, unintermittent grace. The idea of the development of one grace from another is elaborated by Peter (2Peter 1:5). Winer cites a most interesting parallel from Philo. "Wherefore, having provided and dispensed the first **graces** before their recipients have waxed wanton through satiety, he subsequently bestows different **graces** in exchange for (*anti*) those, and a third supply for the second, and ever new ones in exchange for the older."

**Steven Cole** - we do need to consider what John means by the phrase, "**grace upon grace**." John uses a Greek preposition, *anti*, that means that one thing is replaced by another or put in the place of another. In light of verse 17, many reputable commentators understand it to mean that the grace of the law was replaced by the grace of Jesus Christ (Carson, p. 132; Andreas Kostenberger, John [Baker], pp. 46-47; this view goes back to several early church fathers). They contend that if John had meant "grace upon grace," he would have used another preposition, *epi*. In light of God's revelation to Moses of His grace in Exodus 33 & 34, this may be what John means for us to understand. But it strikes me as a bit subtle, especially since the law itself was not noted for dispensing grace. The Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon [University of Chicago Press], 2nd ed., p. 73) says that in John 1:16, *anti* means "grace pours forth in ever new streams." (In the same vein, see A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament [Broadman Press], p. 574.) Another scholar, Murray J. Harris (The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology [Zondervan], ed. by Colin Brown, p. 1179) says that the preposition in this verse "denotes a perpetual and rapid succession of blessings, as though there were no interval between the arrival of one blessing and the receipt of the next." When you add in the idea of Jesus' fullness, at the very least John wants us to see that in Him we get all the grace that we need. It's an inexhaustible supply. ([Why You Should Believe in Jesus John 1:15-18](#))

**John MacArthur** - Because in Christ "all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col. 2:9), He provides for all His people's needs (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 4:12-13; Col. 1:28; 2:10; 2 Peter 1:3). That abundant supply will never be exhausted or diminished; grace will continually follow grace in a limitless, never-ending flow (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9; Eph. 2:7).

**Cambridge** - Literally, Grace in the place of grace, one grace succeeding another and as it were taking its place. There is no reference to the New Testament displacing the Old. Possibly the **anti** may imply that one grace leads on to another, so that the second is, as it were, a reward for the first. Winer, p. 456. ([John 1 - Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary](#))

**Expositor's Greek Testament** - "ever and anon fresh grace appears over and above that already received"... "Where in the history of mankind can we find anything resembling this, that men who had eaten and drunk with their Master should glorify Him, not only as the Revealer of God, but as the Prince of Life, as the Redeemer and Judge of the world, as the living power of its existence, and that a choir of Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, wise and foolish, should along with them immediately confess that out of the fulness of this one man they have received grace for grace?" ([John 1 - The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**J C Ryle** - All we who believe in Jesus have received an abundant supply of all that our souls need out of the full store that resides in Him for His people. It is from Christ and Christ alone, that all our spiritual wants have been supplied.

- Constable's discussion of grace upon grace - [John Commentary Notes](#)
- Barclay - [Barclay's Daily Study Bible](#)

**Peter** spoke of this full supply of grace this way...

seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. (2Pet 1:3)

**Criswell** - The Christian's experience of grace begins with the reception of the riches of His grace ("fullness") and is progressive and limitless. Its source is Christ's abundant Person (cf. Phil. 4:19). Indeed there was grace in the Law which came through Moses, but the grace of God which appeared at the incarnation overwhelms all previous manifestations.

**Steven Cole** - John Calvin applies John 1:16 in three ways. He says that **first** it shows us that while we're all spiritually destitute, the abundance that exists in Christ "is intended to supply our deficiency, to relieve our poverty, to satisfy our hunger and thirst." **Second**,



if we depart from Christ, “it is in vain for us to seek a single drop of happiness” elsewhere. The world can never give us the lasting joy we find in Christ. **Third**, we have no reason to fear lacking anything if we draw on Christ’s fullness, because He is “a truly inexhaustible fountain.” He points out that John includes himself in John 1:16 to make it plain that no one is excepted. All who believe have received grace upon grace. ([Why You Should Believe in Jesus John 1-15-18](#))

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### **Fresh Daily By Joanie Yoder**

I once heard someone describe his troublesome life like this: “Each day is just yesterday warmed up!” Yes, life sometimes dishes up a diet of old problems disguised as new ones. It’s like the frugal housewife who feeds her family for a week on leftovers from Sunday dinner, serving the same old food in different disguises.

It was into such a tiresome, troublesome world that Jesus came. The apostle John said that Jesus is full of grace and truth, and He supplies us with “grace for grace” (1:14,16).

Years ago, Amy Carmichael shared some helpful insights about the phrase, “grace for grace.” Drawing from the writings of Bishop Moule (1841-1920), she wrote that the Greek word translated “for” literally means “instead of.” He illustrated the meaning by describing a river. “Stand on its banks,” he wrote, “and contemplate the flow of waters. A minute passes, and another. Is it the same stream still? Yes. But is it the same water? No.” The old water, he explained, had been displaced by new—“water instead of water.”

The same is true of grace. Your life today may carry yesterday’s problems, but remember, God’s grace is new each morning, exactly what you need to meet each new challenge. It is an inexhaustible and ever-fresh supply. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Each day God sends His loving grace  
To strengthen you and me;  
We need but use this day’s supply  
And let tomorrow be.  
—Anon.

God gives special grace for each trial we face.