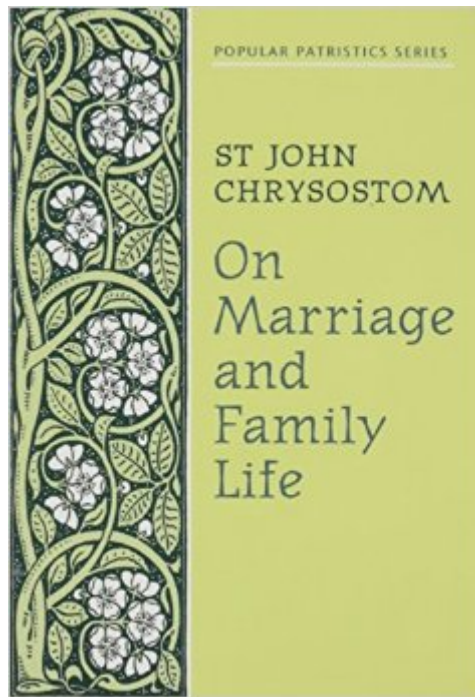


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# On Marriage And Family Life



## Synopsis

Christian tradition often seems to give only grudging approval to the married life, particularly its sexual aspect. In these sermons of St John Chrysostom we find an important corrective to this view. Although himself a monk, Chrysostom had a profound understanding of the needs of his congregation. Inspired by the epistles to the Corinthians and Ephesians, he discusses the reasons God instituted marriage: primarily to promote holiness of the husband and wife, and only secondarily to produce children. Chrysostom goes on to discuss sexual relations, the mutual responsibilities of marriage, and parenting. While parts of Chrysostom's sermons may seem limited to his own time, the vast majority of his advice has timeless relevance for the Christian family.

## Book Information

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A. Overview This treasure of wisdom brings together the homilies of John Chrysostom, a great apologist for Christian marriage. As explained in the book's introduction, the teaching of the Orthodox Church, which in the First Council of Nicaea (325) upheld the ordination of married men, is that "the marriage bed is undefiled" (p. 8). Chrysostom's defends this view while presenting marriage as "both a great mystery in itself" as well as the representation of "a greater mystery, the unity of redeemed mankind in Christ" (p. 10). The homilies published in this volume deal above all with love, that "force that welds society together" (Homily 20, p. 44). Chrysostom counsels couples on the need to live simply rather than in excess and luxury; to hold a wedding celebration that before all things invites Christ to be present; to raise children around the Scriptures and daily readings of the Bible; and for single men and women to seek first virtuous character and the love of

Christ rather than wealth or status when choosing a partner for life.<sup>1</sup> On Choosing a Wife Chrysostom, in his sermon "How to Choose a Wife," writes that we should "seek just one thing in a wife, virtue of soul and nobility of character, so that we may enjoy tranquility, so that we may luxuriate in harmony and lasting love" ("How to Choose a Wife," p. 97-8). Based on this, we should not "investigate our bride's money, but the gentleness of her character and her piety and chastity. A wife who is chaste, gentle, and moderate, even if she is poor, can make poverty better than wealth.

Want old time religion, say, 398AD? Want wisdom in the bedroom and in the bank? Read this book. Goldenmouth (Chrysostom) John remains one of the most sex positive, pro boot knocking preachers in the church. Soulful romps in the bedroom are good. But smart ways with money are good, too, he says. He explains how separate property attitudes are destructive and stupid for married couples. And he thinks husbands and wives who secretly boast of their "purity" making like monks and nuns with their abstinence are equally dumb. Very contemporary issues addressed here. It is true what is said in the rather surprising words on the jacket copy from the St. Vladimir's Press folk. His 4th century contemporary, St. Jerome, was anything but "very positive" and once went so far in his anti-marriage and anti-anything but baby making sex talk to praise marriage only because it "produced virgins". Yes, the only reason to have sex is to produce those who improve on the situation and don't! Ugh. Indeed, Church tradition is replete with Jerome-like grudging approval to the married state, particularly the sex part. Yet Chrysostom makes it clear that the main reason to marry in the first place is not for children as emphasized by those haled in the Latin West, but holiness; including the importance and strength of the sexual bond. St. John portrays marriage is a gift to both spouses to help them develop "a more beautiful soul"; as a gift to God and a gift to one's beloved. You'd think this monk/bishop/celibate of Constantinople had a girlfriend or two before his tonsure! And a checkbook. He's smart about both sex and money. "In very positive terms Chrysostom tells us that the pleasure of sex in marriage is good," says the jacket copy.

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