

The purpose of marriage is for the couple in a spirit of mutual love and self-sacrifice to help and complement each other and for each to lead the other to salvation by encouraging each other to live a Christian way of life. Then God's blessing will remain on the married couple; their marriage will be happy and will be a comfort and joy.

St. John Chrysostom on Marriage, Especially on the Husband's Duty Towards his Wife

(Excerpts from *On Marriage and Family Life*,
St. Vladimir's Seminary Press)

The great Bishop and Father of the Church, St. John Chrysostom, lived in the Fourth Century. In his sermons on marriage he strove to teach the Christians living in a largely pagan society what God requires of them as husbands and wives. Today, so many centuries later, we find ourselves also in a pagan society, which either does not value marriage or does not see it in a Christian light. What St. John has to say is still important and valid for us now.

The love between husband and wife is powerful and is essential for the well-being of society. A certain wise man, when enumerating which blessings are most important included "a wife and husband who live in harmony" (Sir. 25:1). In another place he emphasized this: "A friend or companion never meets one amiss, but a wife with her husband is better than both." From the beginning God in His providence has planned this union of man and woman, and has spoken of the two as one: "male and female He created them" and "there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). There is no relationship between human beings so close as that of husband and wife, if they are united as they ought to be. When blessed David was mourning for Jonathan, who was of one soul with him, what comparison did he use to describe the loftiness of their love? "Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of woman" (2 Sam. 1:26). The power of this love is truly stronger than any passion; other desires may be strong, but this one alone never fades. This love is deeply planted within our inmost being. Unnoticed by us, it attracted the bodies of men and women to each other, because in the beginning woman came forth from man, and from man and woman other men and women proceed. Can you see how close this union is, and how God providentially created it from a single nature? He permitted Adam to marry Eve, who was more than sister or daughter; she was his own flesh! God

caused the entire human race to proceed from this one point of origin. He did not, on the one hand, fashion woman independently from man; otherwise man would think of her as essentially different from himself. Nor did He enable woman to bear children without man; if this were the case, she would be self-sufficient. Instead, just as the branches of a tree proceed from a single trunk, He made the one man Adam to be the origin of all mankind, both male and female, and made it impossible for men and women to be self-sufficient. . . .

The love of husband and wife is the force that welds society together. Men will take up arms and even sacrifice their lives for the sake of this love. St. Paul would not speak so earnestly about this subject without serious reason; why else would he say. "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord"? Because when harmony prevails, the children are raised well, the household is kept in order, and neighbors, friends and relatives praise the result. Great benefits, both for families and states, are thus produced. When it is otherwise, however, everything is thrown into confusion and turned upside down. When the generals of an army are at peace with each other, everything proceeds in an orderly fashion, and when they are not, everything is in disarray. . . .

Husbands are to wives as Christ is to the Church. Let us assume, then, that the husband is to occupy the place of the head, and the wife that of the body, and listen to what "headship" means: "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, His Body, and is Himself its Saviour. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands" (Eph. 5:23-24). Notice that after saying "the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church," St. Paul immediately says that the Church is Christ's Body, and He is Himself its Saviour. It is the head that upholds the well-being of the body. In his other epistles Paul has already laid the foundations of marital love, and has assigned to husband and wife each his proper place: to the husband the place of leader and provider, and to the wife the place of submission. Therefore, as the Church is subject to Christ—and the Church, remember, consists of both husbands and wives—so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands, as to God. . . .

"Husbands," he says, "love your wives, as Christ loved the Church." You have seen that the part of the wife; you want your wife to Church is to Christ? the same providential the Church. And even if

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obedience is necessary on now hear about love. Do be obedient to you, as the Then be responsible for care of her, as Christ is for it becomes necessary for you to give your life for

her, yes, even to endure and undergo suffering of any kind, do not refuse. Even though you undergo all this, you will never have done anything equal to what Christ has done. You are sacrificing yourself for someone to whom you are already joined, but He offered Himself up for one who turned her back on Him and hated Him. In the same way, then, as Christ honored the Church by putting at His feet one who turned her back on Him, who hated, rejected, and disdained Him, and He accomplished this not with threats, or violence, or terror, or anything else like that, but through His untiring love; so also you should behave toward your wife. Even if you see her belittling you, or despising and mocking you, still you will be able to subject her to yourself, through affection, kindness, and your great regard for her. There is no influence more powerful than the bond of love, especially for husband and wife. A servant can be taught submission through fear; but even he, if provoked too much, will soon seek his escape. But one's partner for life, the mother of one's children, the source of one's every joy, should never be fettered with fear and threats, but with love and patience. What kind of marriage can there be when the wife is afraid of her husband? What sort of satisfaction could a husband himself have, if he lives with his wife as if she were a slave, and not with a woman by her own free will? Suffer anything for her sake, but never disgrace her, for Christ never did this with the Church.

He gave Himself up for her that "He might cleanse and sanctify her . . ." So the Church was not pure. She had blemishes, she was ugly and cheap. Whatever kind of wife you marry, you will never take a bride like Christ did when He married the Church; you will never marry anyone estranged from you as the Church was from Christ. Despite all this, He did not abhor or hate her for her extraordinary corruption. Do you want her corruption described? Paul says, "For once you were in darkness." Do you see how black she was? Nothing is blacker than darkness. Think of her shamelessness; she passed her day in malice and envy, Paul says. Look at her impurity; she was foolish and disobedient. . . . But even though her wounds were numerous, Christ sacrificed Himself for her in her corrupted state, as if she were in the bloom of youth, as if she were dearly beloved, and a wonderful beauty. St. Paul marveled at this, and said, "Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man—though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:7-6). Though she was like this, Christ accepted her and made her beautiful. He washed her, and did not hesitate even to sacrifice Himself for her. . . .

How to choose a wife. . . . Don't expect your wife to have things that are beyond her power. Remember that the Church received everything from her Lord's hands: by Him she was made glorious, by Him she was purified and freed from blemish. Don't turn your back on your wife because

she is not beautiful. Listen to what Scripture says: "The bee is small among flying creatures, but her product is the best of sweet things." Your wife is God's creation. If you reproach her, you are not condemning her, but Him who made her. What can the woman do about it? If your wife is beautiful, don't praise her for it. Praise, hatred, and even love based on outward beauty come from impure souls. Seek beauty of soul, and imitate the Bridegroom of the Church. . . .

Look for affection, gentleness, and humility in a wife; these are the tokens of beauty. But let us not seek lovely physical features, nor reproach her for lacking things over which she has no control. No; let us not reproach her for anything, or be impatient or sullen. Haven't you seen how many men, living with beautiful wives, have ended their lives in misery, and how many who have lived with those of no great beauty, have lived to extreme old age with great enjoyment? Let us wipe off the "spot" and smooth the "wrinkle" that is within, as it is written; let us do away with the blemishes that are on the soul. Such is the beauty God requires. Let us make her fair in God's sight, not in our own. . . .

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How to love one's wife. . . . St. Paul says, "husbands should love their wives"—because such love is an obligation, not a favor—as their own bodies." Why? "For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it." That is, he takes particular care of it. How is she his flesh? Listen: "This at last is bone of my bone," said Adam, "and flesh of my flesh!" and also, "They become one flesh." So he nourishes and cherishes his own flesh, "as Christ does the Church." The Saint returns here to his first comparison: ". . . because we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones" (Eph. 5:30). How is this true? Because Christ was born from our matter, just as Eve was fashioned from Adam's flesh. St. Paul does well here to speak of flesh and bones, for the Lord has exalted our material substance

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by partaking of it Himself: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same nature." It is obvious that He shares our nature, but how do we share His? How are we members of His flesh? We are truly members of Christ because through Him we were created, and we are truly members of His flesh because we are recreated by partaking of His Mysteries. . . . Adam was fashioned from matter and Christ was born in the same. From Adam's side came the bearer of corruption, but from Christ's side came life. Death blossomed in Paradise, but was slain on the Cross. The Son of God shares our nature so we can share His; as He has us in Him, so we have Him in us.

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” There is another aspect of marital obligation: Paul shows that a man leaves his parents, who gave him life, and is joined to his wife, and that one flesh—father, mother, and child—results from the commingling of the two. The child is born from the union of their seed, so the three are one flesh. Our relationship to Christ is the same; we become one flesh with Him through Communion, more truly one with Him than our children are one with us, because this has been His plan from the beginning.

Don’t make excuses for yourselves; surely you realize that your body has many defects. One person is lame, another has deformed feet or hands, another is sick in one way or another, yet never is anyone so grief-stricken that he cuts off his afflicted member. Instead, he pays more attention to it than to the rest of his body; naturally, since it is part of him. A man should love his spouse as much as he loves himself, not merely because they share the same nature; no, the obligation is far greater, because they are no longer two bodies, but one: he is the head, she the body. Paul says elsewhere, “The head of Christ is God,” and I say that the husband and wife are one body in the same way as Christ and the Father are one. . . .

“Let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” Indeed, of all actions, it is a mystery, a great mystery indeed, that a man should leave him who gave life to him and brought him up and her who suffered in labor and childbirth. For a man to leave those who have favored him with so many blessings, those with whom he has been in such close contact, and be united to one whom he has not always known and who often has nothing in common with him, and should honor her more than all others—that is a mystery indeed. . . .

It is a husband’s duty to love his wife. The wife is a second authority. She should not demand equality, for she is subject to the head; neither should the husband belittle her subjection, for she is the body. If the head despises the body, it will itself die. Rather, let the husband counterbalance her obedience with his love. Let the hands, the feet, and all the rest of the body’s parts be dedicated to the service of the head; but let the head provide for the body, for the head is responsible for all the members. Nothing can be better than a union like this. . . . If a man loves his wife, he will bear with her even when she isn’t very obedient. How difficult it is to have harmony when husband and wife are not bound together by the power of love! . . . “And what if my wife refuses to obey me?” a husband will ask. Never mind! Your obligation is to love her; do your duty! Even when we don’t receive our due from others, we must always do our duty. St. Paul says: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for

Christ." If your spouse doesn't obey God's law, you are not excused. A wife should respect her husband even when he shows her no love, and a husband should love his wife even when she shows him no respect. Then they will both be found to lack nothing, since each has fulfilled the commandment given to him.

How to attain a well-ordered household. This, then, is what it means to marry in Christ. . . . "A man shall leave his father and mother," St. Paul says; but he does not say, "he shall dwell with," but instead, "he shall cling to" his wife, thus demonstrating the closeness of the union and the sincerity of the love. And St. Paul is not satisfied even with this, but goes further, explaining the subjection of the wife in the context of the two being no longer two. He does not say "one spirit" or "one soul" (union like this is possible for anyone), but he says "one flesh." The wife is a secondary authority, but nevertheless she possesses real authority and equality of dignity while her husband still retains the role of headship; the welfare of the household is thus maintained. St. Paul uses the example of Christ to show that we should not only love, but also govern, "that she might be holy and without blemish." The word "flesh" and the phrase "shall cling to" both refer to love, and making her "holy and without blemish" refers to headship. Do both these things and everything else will follow. Seek the things which please God, and those which please man will follow soon enough. Instruct your wife, and your whole household will be in order and harmony. . . . If we regulate our households in this way, we will also be fit to oversee the Church, for indeed the household is a little Church. Therefore it is possible for us to surpass all others in virtue by becoming good husbands and wives. . . . As with a general whose troops are so well organized on the front that the enemy cannot find a place to penetrate for an attack, so it is with husband and wife: when the concerns of everyone in the house are the same, harmony reigns in the family, but if not, the entire household is easily broken up and destroyed.

How piously to fulfill your role as husband or wife. Let us therefore painstakingly care for our wives and children. By doing so, we are making our obligation of headship an easy task. Thus we will have a good defense before Christ's judgment seat, and will be able to say: "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel." If the husband is admirable and the head sound, then the rest of the body will suffer no harm. St. Paul has precisely described for husband and wife what is fitting behavior for each: she should reverence him as the head, and he should love her as his body. But how is this behavior achieved? That it must be is clear; now I will tell you how. It will be achieved if we are detached from money, if we strive above everything for virtue, if we keep

the fear of God before our eyes. What St. Paul says to servants, applies to us as well, "...knowing that whatsoever good anyone does, he will receive the same again from the Lord." Love your wife not so much for her own sake, but for Christ's sake. That is why he says, "be subject...as to the Lord." Do everything for the Lord's sake, in a spirit of obedience to Him. These words should be enough to convince us to avoid quarrels and disagreements. No husband should believe any accusation he hears from a third party about his wife, and vice versa; nor should a wife unreasonably monitor her husband's comings and goings, provided that he has always shown himself above suspicion. And what if you devote the day to your work and your friends, and the evening to your wife, but she is still not satisfied, but is jealous for more of your time? Don't be annoyed by her complaints; she loves you, she is not behaving absurdly—her complaints come from her fervent affection for you, and from fear. Yes, she is afraid that her marriage bed will be stolen, that someone will deprive her of her greatest blessing, that someone will take from her him who is her head.

Poverty is no evil. A wife should never nag her husband: "You lazy coward, you have no ambition! Look at our relatives and neighbors; they have plenty of money. Their wives have far more than I do." Let no wife say any such thing; she is her husband's body, and it is not for her to dictate to her head, but to submit and obey. "But why should she endure poverty?" some will ask. If she is poor, let her console herself by thinking of those who are much poorer still. If she really loved her husband, she would never speak to him like that, but would value having him close to her more than all the gold in the world. Likewise, if a husband has a wife who behaves this way, he must never exercise his authority by insulting and abusing her. Instead, he should show true nobility of spirit, and patiently remind her that in the wisdom of heaven, poverty is no evil. Then she will stop complaining. But he must not teach her only by words, but by deeds. He should teach her to be detached from high social position. If he is so himself, she will imitate him.

A sober life-style. Beginning on their wedding night, let him be an example of gentleness, temperance, and self-control; and she will be likewise. He should advise her not to decorate herself with golden earrings, necklaces, or other jewelry, or to accumulate expensive clothes. Instead, her appearance should be dignified, and dignity is never served by theatrical excess. Furnish your house neatly and soberly. If the bridegroom shows his wife that he takes no pleasure in worldly excess, and will not stand for it, their marriage will remain free from the evil influences that are so popular these days. Let them shun the immodest music and dancing that are currently so fashionable. I am aware that many people think me ridiculous

for giving such advice; but if you listen to me, you will understand the advantages of a sober life-style more and more as time goes on. You will no longer laugh at me, but will laugh instead at the way people live now like silly children or drunken men. What is our duty, then? Remove from your lives shameful, immodest, and satanic music, and don't associate with people who enjoy such profligate entertainment. When your bride sees your manner of life, she

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will say to herself, wise man my husband passing life as nothing; be a good mother to prudent manager of this sort of life be young bride? Only shortest time, and

soon she will discover how delightful it is to live this way. She will retain her modesty if you retain yours. Don't engage in idle conversations; it never profits anyone to talk too much. Whenever you give your wife advice, always begin by telling her how much you love her. Nothing will persuade her so well to admit the wisdom of your words as her assurance that you are speaking to her with sincere affection. Tell her that you are convinced that money is not important, that only thieves thirst for it constantly, that you love her more than gold; and indeed an intelligent, discreet, and pious young woman is worth more than all the money in the world. Tell her that you love her more than your own life, because this present life is nothing, and that your only hope is that the two of you pass through this life in such a way that in the world to come you will be united in perfect love. Say to her, "Our time here is brief and fleeting, but if we are pleasing to God, we can exchange this life for the Kingdom to come. Then we will be perfectly one, both with Christ and each other, and our pleasure will know no bounds. I value your love above all things, and nothing would be so bitter or painful to me as our being at odds with each other. Even if I lose everything, any affliction is tolerable if you will be true to me." Show her that you value her company and prefer being at home to being out. Esteem her in the presence of your friends and children. Praise and show admiration for her good acts; and if she ever does anything foolish, advise her patiently. Pray together at home, and go to church; when you come back home, let each ask the other the meaning of the readings and the prayers. If you are overtaken by poverty, remember Peter and Paul, who were more honored than kings or rich men, though they spent their lives in hunger and thirst. Remind one another that nothing in life is to be feared, except offending God. If your marriage is like this, your perfection will rival the holiest of monks.

Do not look for a rich wife. If you are inclined to entertain and give dinner parties, there should be nothing immodest or excessive about them. And if you should find some poor, saintly man who just by stepping into your house would bring God's blessing upon you, invite him. Now I'll add one more thing: none of you should look for a rich woman to marry, but a poor one instead. You'll get no satisfaction from her money, since if she is rich, she will annoy you with her taunts and demands. She'll be disrespectful and extravagant, and will frustrate you by saying things like, "Don't complain about all my clothes! I haven't spent anything of yours; I'm still wearing my own clothes bought with the inheritance my parents gave me." What are you saying, woman? Still wearing your own clothes? What can be worse than this sort of language? You no longer have a body of your own (since you gave it away in marriage), yet you have money of your own? After marriage, you are no longer two, but one flesh, and are your possessions still divided? Love of money! You have both become one person, one organism, and can you still say, "my own?" This cursed and abominable phrase comes from the devil. . . .

St. Paul says, "The wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does" (I Cor. 7:4). Say also, "If I have no power over my own body, but rather you do, how much more power is yours over my material possessions?" By speaking this way, you will put the devil to shame, and will firmly unite her to yourself. Thus you will teach her, by your own manner of speaking, never to speak in terms of "mine" and "yours."

Seek first the Kingdom of God. Finally, never call her by her name alone, but with terms of endearment, honor and love. If you honor her, she won't need honor from others; she won't desire praise from others if she enjoys the praise that comes from you. Prefer her before all others, both for her beauty and her discernment, and praise her. She will in this way be persuaded to listen to none that are outside, but to disregard all the world except for you. Teach her to fear God, and all other good things will flow from this one lesson as from a fountain, and your house will be filled with ten thousand blessings. If we seek the things that are perfect, the secondary things will follow. The Lord says, "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you (Mt. 6:33). What sort of people do you think the children of such parents will be? What kind of people are all the others who associate with them? Will they not eventually be the recipients of countless blessings as well? For generally the children acquire the character of their parents, are formed in the mold of their parents' temperament, love the same things

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their parents love, talk in the same fashion, and work for the same ends. If we order our lives in this way and diligently study the Scriptures, we will find lessons to guide us in everything we need. In this way we will be able to please God and to pass through the course of this life in virtue and to gain those blessings which He has promised to those who love Him, of which, God willing, may we be counted worthy through the grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom, together with the Holy Spirit, be glory, honor, and power to the Father, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

The following condensed life of Sts. Xenophon and Maria is taken from Married Saints of the Church by Monk Moses. St. Xenophon exemplifies the ideal Christian husband and head of a family.

Sts. Xenophon and Maria

This husband and wife, the parents of Sts. Arcadius and John, were truly worthy of the name Christian. Once, when the Saint's children were young men and away at school, St. Xenophon became extremely ill and was near death. Sending for his children, he gave them the following instruction: "Everyone has loved me, I have never reviled anyone or made anyone ashamed, I have not injured anyone in the least, or embittered anyone. I was never absent from church. I never turned a stranger or a poor man away from my house, but gave to all whatever I had. **I never desired the beauty of any other woman than your mother, who after your birth agreed with me to embrace virginity for Christ's sake.** [Bold is mine.] I have defended Orthodoxy to the point of death. You should help widows and orphans, honor the clergy, and visit the sick. Do not forget the hermits who live in the mountains and caves and holes in the earth, because the Lord has mercy on the world for their sakes. As you know, we always had a monk at our daily table. You should protect the monasteries, never be absent from church, and respect your mother, because she also fulfills the commandments of God. You should keep your servants until their death and feed them. You, who have as much wealth as you could wish for and lack nothing in this transitory world, should also desire to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, and should keep all the commandments of God as you have seen me do. . ."

This admirable father, who held senatorial rank, customarily ate just once a day kept vigil with his wife, and entrusted all their problems to God. Through the fervent prayers of his family, St. Xenophon recovered from his

illness. When he and his wife again sent their children away to study, the ship on which the young men were sailing was wrecked. The two brothers were saved, but neither knew that the other was still alive, since the waves carried them to different shores. Independently, giving thanks to God, they both became monks. Being told of the shipwreck, the God-loving parents cried out from the depths of their souls: "Blessed be the Name of the Lord from now and to the ages of ages; as it was decreed by the Lord, so has it come to pass." They kept all-night vigils, imploring the Lord to reveal to them what had become of their children. And the Lord revealed to them that they were still alive. Taking money with them to give to the poor and the ascetics they met on the way, they walked toward Jerusalem in search of their children, and in a wondrous manner they were reunited with them. After a short time together, they again separated so they could give themselves entirely to God, each member of the family taking the monastic schema in a different place. For their great devotion and self-denial, the Lord gave them abundant gifts. Both the parents and the children were found worthy to work wonders.