

JOHN
CHRYSOSTOM

Earl M. Blackburn



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Faverdale North,
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e-mail: sales@epbooks.org
web: <http://www.epbooks.org>

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e-mail: usasales@epbooks.org
web: <http://www.epbooks.us>

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PREFACE

I was taught that the preface should be written last. If true, then the last shall be first with regard to some esteemed people, who are owed very special thanks. Jim and Juliana Lipe graciously provided a beautiful and quiet place 'out in the country' where I could write without interruption. Courtney Kreid, my editorial assistant, and Billy Sutton gave helpful suggestions that offset my writing foibles. Two colleagues, whose friendship and fellowship in the gospel ministry has been prized for decades, Danald Lindblad and Tom Lyon, read my manuscript and made valuable suggestions. Several years ago, Pastor Lyon also gave me the thirty-nine volume set of the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, which has proven its weight in gold for research. Arden Hodgins, a dear friend and a gifted servant of the Word, wrote a kind commendation. Dr Tom Nettles, a dear friend (in spite of his 'visceral reactions' against my split infinitives) and a church historian *par excellence*, did the same. Heritage Baptist Church in Shreveport, a delightful and generous church to pastor, lovingly gave me writing

sabbaticals. My darling wife, Debby, the second greatest love of my life, behind Christ and his Word, has given me her unfailing love and service. What can I say to thank you? Words utterly fail me. Finally, to all the faithful servants of the Word around this globe, who consistently and boldly expound the whole counsel of God, your courage stirs me. What would the world be without you? May Christ give his churches a host of these Chrysostom-like preachers.

Earl M. Blackburn
Bossier City, Louisiana

INTRODUCTION

Golden Mouth — what a seemingly ostentatious name to identify one of the Greek Fathers of the early church! He had no part in shaping the historical Trinitarian or Christological controversies of his day. He played no role in the preceding, time-honoured ecumenical Church Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople before his installation as bishop. His forced bishopric of Constantinople lasted just under six years (398–404) and his tenure was fraught with political intrigue, petty envying, and intense strife. He had neither desire for politics nor ambition for ecclesiastical advancement. He preferred to live the simple life of an ascetic and had no cravings for the fame, riches, or luxuries that came with life in the metropolitan cities of his day. Twice he was deposed and banished contrary to canonical law. Betrayed, sick and exhausted, he died in exile, far away from home in present-day Georgia in 407.

Why, then, is he recognized by both the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity as one of the Doctors of the Church, but especially regarded as such by the East,

rivalling only the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus)? What has made him so revered and remembered? Why is it that today he is known in two of the three major branches of Christianity, as 'Saint' Chrysostom of Byzantium? What was it that caused the great Protestant Reformer of Geneva, John Calvin, to esteem him so highly as to publish a book of his particularly selected sermons? Why is it that every book on church history devotes a portion of its study of the early church to John Chrysostom? These are interesting questions indeed.

Golden Mouth was neither the birth name nor the ecclesiastical name given during John's life or ministry. He was simply named John and, no doubt, would have preferred it to remain that way. However, because of his golden eloquence in the pulpit, empowered by a mighty Spirit-anointed unction in his preaching of the Word of God, his renown enthusiastically lived on. Thus, sixth-century churchmen began regularly referring to him as 'Chrysostomos' which is Greek for 'golden mouthed'. (Chrysostom is the anglicized form of the Greek.) This name has been appended to John of Antioch ever since. Throughout history, the names of John and Chrysostom have been used interchangeably to refer to one and the same person, with Chrysostom being the more famous. However, throughout this book, the name of John will ordinarily be used, except when the context suits the use of Chrysostom.

TIMELINE

- 313 The Edict of Milan
- 325 The Council of Nicaea
- 328 Athanasius ordained Bishop of Alexandria
- 336 Athanasius' first of five exiles
- 349 John Chrysostom is born
- 367 Athanasius' Easter letter outlining the canonical books of the NT
- 368 John Chrysostom is converted to Christ and baptized
- 371–378 John Chrysostom's monastic life
- 378 John Chrysostom's return from monastic life
- 380 John Chrysostom ordained a deacon
- 381 The First Council of Constantinople
- 386 John ordained (as a priest/presbyter/preacher) into the gospel ministry
- 387 John Chrysostom's sermons *On the Statues*
- 398 John Chrysostom ordained twelfth bishop of Constantinople

- 402 The Tall Monks Controversy
- 403 The Synod of the Oaks
- 403 John Chrysostom's first exile & recall
- 404 John Chrysostom's second exile & banishment
- 407 John Chrysostom's death
- 431 The Council of Ephesus
- 451 The Council of Chalcedon