

Biblical Context of Celibacy

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Because some religious organizations promote celibacy, it is easy to assume this practice is supported by God's word. However, when examining the context in which Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul discussed this subject, it should become clear that celibacy is not commanded in the Bible.

The idea that religious leaders should not get married predated Christianity. Celibacy was practiced by the priest-devotees of the Great Mother cults, including the religion of Isis which required those who celebrated her "holy mysteries" to be unmarried. In other cults like Manichaeism, Gnosticism and Hermeticism, an inner circle of worshipers was required to observe strict continence. So it should be no surprise that these practices influenced some members of the early church of God during the first century. The Stoic philosopher Epictetus (55-135 CE) held the idea that teachers should be unmarried so they would be free from the cares and responsibilities associated with family life. This explains why Paul described celibacy as one of the "doctrines of demons".

Now the Spirit (of Almighty God) explicitly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and **doctrines of demons**, ²speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³**forbidding to marry**... (1Tim. 4:1-3a; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).

Paul marveled at how quickly some church members were turning away from Christ's teachings and accepting false doctrines, including celibacy.

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace (forgiveness of sin) of Christ, **to a different gospel** (Gal. 1:6; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

It did not take very long for Christ's teachings to be replaced by many false doctrines. The Regional Council of Elvira in Spain (306 CE) decreed that all priests and bishops, married or not, should abstain from sexual relations. The ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 CE) declined to make such a prohibition, but did forbid priests to live with women other than their mothers, sisters, or aunts. The position of the Eastern churches was made clear by the decrees of the Quinisext Council in 692 CE, which included that bishops must be celibate, but ordained priests, deacons, and sub-deacons could continue in existing marriages. By the time of the ecumenical meetings of the Roman Catholic Church during the first and second Lateran Councils (1123 CE and 1139 CE), it was determined that priests were explicitly forbidden to marry. In 1563 CE, the Council of Trent reaffirmed the tradition of celibacy. Needless to say, Christ's teachings have been altered, or removed altogether, by those who claim to be "Christian" today.

Because Paul had a grueling travel schedule, suffered many perils on his trips, and experienced various forms of persecution, it was not wise to take a wife along with him (2Cor. 11:23-27, 32-33). However, Paul noted that some of the other apostles, as well as Christ's brothers, did bring their wives on some of their journeys.

Do we (Paul and Barnabas) have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? (1Cor. 9:5; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Anyone in God's church during the first century had a target on their back, and it was primarily

due to the Jewish religious leaders who wanted to eliminate them all (2Cor. 11:24-25a; Titus 1:10-14, 16). So it was in this context that Paul encouraged single people to think carefully before they got married, especially if they were likely to engage in the kind of work Paul was doing.

But I say this as a concession, **not as a commandment**. ⁷For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that (1Cor. 7:6-7; emphasis added).

I suppose therefore that this is good **because of the present distress** – that it is good for a man to remain as he is: ²⁷Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife (1Cor. 7:26-27; emphasis added).

Indeed, persecutions against early church members were often so severe that Paul believed the return of Jesus Christ was imminent.

But this I say, brethren, **the time is short**, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none (1Cor. 7:29; emphasis added).

Christ predicted that after his death and resurrection, the Jewish religious leaders would persecute faithful representatives of God.

Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you **will** kill and crucify, and some of them you **will** scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city (Mt. 23:34).

Paul was beaten five times with thirty-nine lashes, and three times with rods (2Cor. 11:24-25). According to some Bible commentators, all Christ's apostles were killed with the exception of

John who recorded the book of Revelation. So it is in this context that Paul was addressing the subject of remaining single for those who were not yet married.

Also, it is incongruous that Paul would speak against marriage given the fact he knew the figurative connection between Jesus Christ and the Church of God. Specifically, as a man marries a woman; so Christ (the man) will marry God's church (the woman) in a future resurrection of the dead.

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For **I have betrothed you to one husband**, that I may present you (collective members of God's true church) as **a chaste virgin to Christ** (2Cor. 11:2; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Paul expanded on this "hidden mystery" in the following section of scripture,

For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and he is the Savior of the body. ²⁴Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their husbands in everything. ²⁵Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her, ²⁶that he might set it apart and cleanse it (of sin) with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. ³⁰For we are members of his body (which is the true church of God). ³¹*"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."* ³²This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church (Eph. 5:23-32; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Christ left his Father in heaven, and "spiritual Jerusalem" which is compared to a mother (Gal. 4:26), in order to be married to the collective church of God in a future resurrection.

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him (Almighty God) glory, for the marriage of the Lamb (Christ) has come, and his wife has made herself ready. ⁸And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is (represents) the righteous acts of the saints. ⁹Then he said to me, "Write: '**Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!**'" (Rev. 19:7-9a; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

This is why Christ did not seek a wife when he was a flesh and blood man on earth. Instead, he compared himself to a eunuch because he would not be married until the resurrection, which is described in Revelation 19:7-9.

For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men (Ac. 8:27), and **there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake**. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it (Mt. 19:12; Ed. note in parenthesis).

The context of Matthew 19:12 follows a conversation Christ had with his disciples regarding marriage and divorce. Specifically, that it would be better not to get married if there is a likelihood it will end in divorce.

And I (Christ) say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery. ¹⁰His disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry" (Mt. 19:9-10; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Consequently, there is no connection between Christ's statement in Matthew 19:12 and the teaching/doctrine in the Roman Catholic Church, or any other religious organization, to support celibacy in the priesthood. Instead, commanding that priests remain celibate is a "doctrine of demons" because it originates in the spirit realm of the fallen angels who strive to negatively influence the affairs of mankind.

But he (Christ) turned and said to Peter, "**Get behind me, Satan!** You are a stumbling block to me, for **you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men**" (Mt. 16:23; cf. 2Cor. 4:2-4; Eph. 2:2; 6:12; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Christ pointed out that the Jewish religious leaders were unduly influenced by Satan's value system which pretends to represent God's truth, but instead substitutes the false doctrines/commandments of men (Jn. 8:44),

(Christ said) "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? ⁴For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' ⁵But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me has been dedicated to the temple" - ⁶is released from honoring his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. ⁷Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ⁸These people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. ⁹And **in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men**" (Mt. 15:3-9; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

There is no prohibition in the First Covenant "commanding" that priests remain unmarried and, as God does not change, anyone who

“commands” this today is lying and deceiving those under their influence. Consequently, they will have to answer to the head of God’s church in a future resurrection.

For I am the Lord, I do not change... (Mal. 3:6a; cf. Ps. 102:27; 119:89; Jas. 1:17).

Therefore God (Almighty) also has exalted him (Christ) and given him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Php. 2:9-11; Ed. notes in parentheses).



FOR I AM THE LORD, I DO NOT CHANGE...

Malachi 3:6a; cf. Psalms 102:27; 119:89; James 1:17

For it is written: “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” ¹²So then **each of us shall give account of himself to God** (Rom. 14:11-12; emphasis added).

So the doctrine, that celibacy is required by those who seek to serve God, is a lie. Anyone who is in a position to enforce this falsehood needs to repent and ask God’s forgiveness. Those who wish to remain single are not breaking God’s law, but they must not believe this is a mandatory requirement for those who wish to serve God.

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