

Did the Early Church Teach That It's Priests Were to Be Celibate?

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In Matthew 19:11-12, Christ made a statement that could be taken out of context and then used to support celibacy. However, Christ was responding to what some of his disciples had just said in Matthew 19:10. His disciples seemed comfortable with the idea that God had made an exception regarding divorce in certain situations (Mt. 19:7-8). In fact, it would be possible to quote scripture to try and justify divorcing a wife (Prov.21:19). Christ pointed out that should they exercise this certificate of divorce, they could not remarry without committing sin (Mat. 19:9). Consequently, it would be better and wiser if they had not been married at all (Mt. 19:12). Christ used similar language in Matthew 5:27-32 to describe the choices we make, and how those choices affect our relationship with God.

Had Christ been speaking in favor of celibacy, he would have contradicted the law of his Father pertaining to the Aaronic priesthood, which depended upon its priests being married and having children (Ex. 28 and 29). This priesthood was still operating when Christ made the statement in Matthew 19:11-12, and would continue to function until 70 CE.

The context of Matthew 19:11-12 had nothing to do with the priesthood, and should not be applied to any priesthood today.

In 1Corinthians 7:25-40, Paul made a number of comments regarding the state of marriage. To correctly understand what Paul was saying, it is important to examine the context of these

writings. Paul provides the historic background in 1Corinthians 7:26. Here he describes the incredible stress that church members were going through due to the persecutions that followed the death of Christ. Paul believed the persecution would have been less painful for those who were unmarried because many who were married could lose spouses and children to martyrdom (Ac. 22:4; 26:11; 1Cor. 15:9) (click here and scroll down to chapter 9).

In Paul's case, his service to God involved many dangers (2Cor. 11:23-27), and it would be extremely stressful for a wife, were he to bring her along, as she could have been treated in similar fashion. On the other hand, if Paul left a wife at home, while he traveled for years at a time, it would also have been very difficult for her, and their relationship could have been under great stress (1Cor. 7:26).

In 1Timothy 4:1-3, it is shown that "forbidding to marry" is associated with departing from the faith. Therefore, any religious institution that teaches such a doctrine should be avoided for the reasons shown in scripture.

Why did the doctrine of celibacy enter the Christian era?

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor. 11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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