

The Doctrine of Celibacy

1. All males and females should remain celibate until marriage.
 - a. I Cor. 7:1b: **It is good for a man not to light the fire of a woman.** I realize that your Bible reads that it is good for a man not to touch a woman. The verb is the *haptomai* (ἅπτομαι) [pronounced *HAP-to-mai*], which means *to touch*. The root verb is actually *haptō* (ἅπτω) [pronounced *HAP-tow*], which means *to kindle, to light, to burn*. Strong's #680 Arndt & Gingrich p. 102. The concept is fairly simple—the man is not to light the fire of a woman outside of marriage.
 - b. Heb. 13:4a **Let Marriage [be] honored among all, and [let] the [marriage] bed [be] undefiled.** You will note the many words in brackets. This portion of the verse is very elliptical, indicating great importance and great emphasis
2. Virginity under the Law of Moses was so important that the parents of the daughter were to save the stained bed sheets from the wedding night in case the man brought his wife's virginity into question (Deut. 22:13–19). If the woman was not a virgin, yet pretended to be one, this act was heinous enough to require a public execution of the woman (Deut. 22:20–21).
3. A woman who is engaged to be married who is discovered having a final fling is to be stoned along with the man (Deut. 22:23–24); if it is rape, then only the man would be executed (Deut. 22:25–26).
4. Men and women who have sex prior to marriage are to marry each other; furthermore, they may not be divorced (Deut. 22:28–29). We of course are concerned with these laws, not because there is any fault in them, but that there is fault within us. Because of the Law of Moses, sexual encounters were taken with the greatest amount of seriousness.
5. There is absolutely no precedent whatsoever for celibacy in the Aaronic priesthood. The priesthood of Israel was perpetuated by birth, so obviously they could not be celibate. In fact, the high priest was ordered to take a virgin as a wife so that their offspring would not be profaned in Israel (Lev. 21:10–15).
6. In Scripture, there are two calls for celibacy, both by Paul:
 - a. Firstly, let me mention that I recall as being the Nazarite (**not** the Nazarene) vows—these are the vows which Sampson took. My memory of being taught this some time ago is that they included celibacy; however, in a quick re-read of Num. 6, that does not appear to be the case. Sampson did not appear to be celibate, and the only times this vow is mentioned is in Num. 6 and Judges 13:5, 7 and 16:17.
 - b. Paul only makes the suggestion that a person called to God service as a virgin remain one (I Cor. 7:26). He also suggests that widows remain as he (celibate—I Cor. 7:8). This must be taken in the context of I Cor. 7, where a whole host of situations relating to marriage, divorce and remarriage are addressed. The underlying principle is made in I Cor. 7:32–35: **But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. Furthermore, the woman who is unmarried and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit, but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is seemly, and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin, if she should be of full age, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes—he does not sin; let them marry.** In other words, there is naturally occurring, and sinful, divided loyalties when one is married.
 - c. The next time Paul mentions celibacy is further down in the same letter. Paul states: **Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?** (I Cor. 9:5). You will note that Paul does not beat a dead horse; these are the only two places where he mentions this option of celibacy. The principle is simple: when you are married, you have encountered a whole new set of problems and loyalties which must be dealt with along with your walk in God's service. Without a wife, Paul is able to devote more of his life to the teaching of God's Word, as well as to evangelism.
7. In Scripture, there is one example of celibacy, apart from Paul, and that is the daughter of Jephthah (Judges 11, our passage). The vow that Jephthah made did not have to be made. He could have made any kind of a vow or he could have made no vow at all. God would still have delivered Israel.
8. I want to make one final comment concerning Romanism. Under the dispensation of Israel, we have a specialized priesthood which was perpetuated by birth. In the Church Age, we have a universal priesthood.

The Roman church papacy and priesthood falls into neither of these two categories. The claim to Apostolic succession follows supposedly through Peter, who, as we have seen, is decidedly not celibate. In fact, it appears as though of the Apostles, only Paul was celibate (and possibly Barnabas, if he could be considered an Apostle). There are additional problems with the Roman church, but their emphasis upon celibacy for their priesthood and sex in marriage only for procreation are fabrications which are not taught in Scripture. A distinction between sex in marriage for procreation and sex in marriage for pleasure is never made in the Bible. In fact, Paul writes: **Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise, also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife** (I Cor. 7:3–4). I am hoping that I don't have to get graphic or draw pictures to illustrate how the husband has the authority over his wife's body and how the wife has authority over her husband's body. I hope that you realize that what Paul is speaking of here is sex between man and wife.

9. In conclusion, I want you to notice that this was a rather short doctrine because the ideal of celibacy is taught very little throughout Scripture, and not at all in the way that the Roman church presents it.