

Ask the Pastor: "Thinking Biblically Sessions" (Summer 2018)

During the summer months of July and August, as our regular Sunday "Time for Truth" and Wednesday Bible Study classes go on hiatus, special learning opportunities are offered in their place. This year, in addition to our Christian Education Retreat and our Vacation Bible School, three special classes were held for adults and teens.

Students in the adult classes were asked to write questions that they had, or that they have had asked of them, so that the Pastor could provide responses from Scripture. Nine questions were given to Pastor Norwood, who provided biblical responses, and led a discussion on each, over three sessions.

Question #1: Explain how we eagerly pursue and desire the greater gifts like prophecy and the differing measures of gifts, as in "1 Corinthians 12:31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts..."

Question #2: Is church attendance required?

Question #3: Is there a "mother god?"

Question #4: Should we have to do everything that Jews do?

Question #5: Can you receive salvation without tithing?

Question #6: Are there any biblical teachings on sororities, fraternities, or other secret societies?

Question #7: Does God bless the marriages of people who are not married in the church?

Question #8: What is the difference between our mind and our spirit.

Question #9: How do I enter a home with unbelievers?

The following is a very brief summary of his comments along with the cited relevant verses of Scripture used in the discussion sessions.

Question #1: Explain how we eagerly pursue and desire the greater gifts like prophecy and the differing measures of gifts, as in "1 Corinthians 12:31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts..."

Various spiritual gifts [χάρισμα “charisma” - *a spiritual endowment, faculty, ability*] are given by the Holy Spirit. While they can be refined and “sharpened” by training and maturation, they are not derived from below, but granted from above for the “common good.”

1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV); To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:11 (ESV); All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Some gifts are associated with the ancient offices and functions of the church...

1 Corinthians 12:27-31 (ESV); 27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? 31 But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Ephesians 4:7-14 (ESV); 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. 8 Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” 9 (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

In one sense, *1 Cor 12:31; But earnestly desire the higher gifts...*, is in reference to the whole church's desire to have such gifts present in the congregation for the benefit of the congregation. The "higher gifts" build up / edify the church, which is why prophecy (meaning the proclaiming of the Word of God) is preferred. However, in another sense, praying to personally excel in one's own gifts in order to help build up the church to glorify God is also encouraged.

1 Corinthians 14:1-5 (ESV); 1 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. 3 On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. 4 The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. 5 Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

Numbers 11:27-29 (ESV); 27 And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” 28 And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, “My lord Moses, stop them.” 29 But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”

1 Corinthians 14:12-13 (ESV); 12 So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. 13 Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret.

Joel 2:28-29 (ESV); 28 “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. 29 Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

James 1:5 (ESV); 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

One must bear in mind that the “more excellent way” is Love [**ἀγάπη** “agape”], specifically the self-sacrificing perfecting divine benevolence, which ensures that spiritual gifts are used in a way that is God glorifying...

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (ESV); 1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Romans 12:3-13 (ESV); 3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in

generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. 9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

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Question #2: Is church attendance required?

The thought that church attendance is optional and that one can be Christian and choose not to be part of a congregation is often based upon a misinterpretation of Micah 4 and John 4...

Micah 4:3-5 (ESV); 3 He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; **4 but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. 5 For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.**

John 4:19-24 (ESV); 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." **21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."**

But, interpreting Micah 4 and John 4 in that way is to misinterpret those passages... Hebrews 10 makes this clear. Additionally, Acts 2 4 provide us with the example of the church in Jerusalem while it was still under the direct supervision of the Apostles...

Hebrews 10:23-28 (ESV); 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, **25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. 26 For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.**

Acts 2:42-47 (ESV); 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. **46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,** 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 4:32-33 (ESV); 32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

The Apostle Paul provides commands for all believers, which includes mutual submission within the context of the fellowship of congregational life. We also see that the church is the “bride of Christ,” and a focus of his gracious work of sanctification. If the church is important to Jesus Christ, it must also be important to those who claim to be his disciples...

Ephesians 5:15-21 (ESV); 15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Ephesians 5:25-32 (ESV); 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

The epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Ephesians, Thessalonians, etc... were all written to congregations. The letters to the seven churches in Revelation are to congregations. Furthermore, church order is set up in scripture; we see this with the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, and also in Titus 1 among many other texts... and why Ephesians 4 cites the offices and their ministry as a gifts given by the Lord for the maturing of the saints...

Titus 1:5-16 (ESV); 5 This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— 6 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. 7 For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, 8 but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. 9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. 10 For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. 11 They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. 12 One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” 13 This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, 14 not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. 15 To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. 16 They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

Ephesians 4:11-16 (ESV); 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Here are some video links that may be helpful also...

"I am a Christian - But do I need Church?" <https://youtu.be/hTVgQfndocs>

"Do Christians need to Go to Church?" <https://youtu.be/GQhzWW-dauY>

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Question #3: Is there a “mother god?”

Those who speak of a “father god” along with a “mother god” are not speaking from a biblical Christian perspective. However, there is a sense in which the one true God of the Bible is described with both paternal and maternal characteristics...

Hosea 13:8 (ESV); 8 I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs; I will tear open their breast, and there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild beast would rip them open.

Matthew 23:37 (ESV); 37 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

While such passages speak of characteristics that are associated with a maternal nature, they cannot be properly viewed as affirming a “mother god.” In Scripture, God is always directly referred to with masculine pronouns and the First Person of the Trinity is only called "Father" by Christ himself, who also taught his disciples to do the same...

Matthew 6:9 (ESV); 9 Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...”

John 4:20-24 (ESV); 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” 21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

John 20:16-17 (ESV); 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). 17 Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Visions and descriptions of God, when anthropomorphic, depict God in masculine form...

Isaiah 6:1-3 (ESV); 1 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”

Luke 3:38 (ESV); 38 the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

Revelation 5:13 (ESV); 13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

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Question #4: Should we have to do everything that Jews do?

The Jerusalem Council, which was the first recorded deliberation of the leaders of the church on a point of faith, dealt specifically with this issue. Their instruction is summed up by “James the Just” (who was the first bishop of Jerusalem and the half-brother of Jesus Christ) in Acts 15.

Acts 15:19-21 (ESV); 19 Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, 20 but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. 21 For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”

This freedom from the dietary codes that bound Jews under the Law of Moses is based in the declaration of the Lord Jesus Christ...

Mark 7:14-23 (ESV); 14 And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: 15 There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.” [**16 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear*] 17 And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. 18 And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, 19 since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) 20 And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

The Apostle Paul, who also participated in the Jerusalem Council, addresses this issue in how believers should conduct themselves when they differ on matters of conscience. In Romans 14, he uses as an example an issue often associated with what may be perceived by some to be applicable dietary codes from the Law of Moses. In Galatians, Paul reaffirms that Christians are not under the ritual laws of the Old Covenant, but have been set free by the grace of Jesus Christ through faith...

Romans 14:13-23 (ESV); 13 Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. 14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. 15 For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. 16 So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God

and approved by men. 19 So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. 20 Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. 21 It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. 22 The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. 23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Galatians 5:1-6 (ESV); 1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. 4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. 5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

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Question #5: Can you receive salvation without tithing?

There are those who erroneously associate tithing with being “saved.” We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone... not by any work on our part, including tithing...

Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV); 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Romans 10:9-11 (ESV); 9 ... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11 For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”

Romans 6:14-15 (ESV); 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. 15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

However, just because our salvation is not based upon law, but upon grace, it does not mean that we ignore the laws declared by God in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament). Even though the Jewish ritual and civil codes may no longer apply to Christians, such laws still teach holy principles and values. As Christians, we are enabled to obey the law of God, not because we are bound by the Law of Moses, but because we have been freed by grace to obey out of gratitude by the power of the Holy Spirit within us...

Jeremiah 31:31-33 (ESV); 31 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Ezekiel 11:19-21 (ESV); 19 And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. 21 But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, declares the Lord GOD.”

Ezekiel 36:24-28 (ESV); 24 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. 28 You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Hebrews 8:10 (ESV); 10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Many who reject tithing see it as being part of the Mosaic Law that no longer binds Christians... however, while tithing was *included* in the Mosaic Law, it preceded the Law of Moses as a model of faithful giving that acknowledges God as provider...

Genesis 14:17-20 (ESV); 17 After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) 19 And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; 20 and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Hebrews 7:1-2 (ESV); 1 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, 2 and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.

Today, while some reject the standard of giving at least ten percent as a tithe because they are no longer bound under the law to do so, we see a different example set by the believers in the Jerusalem Church. Their practice of giving actually exceeded tithing, and even Levites gave sacrificially to the church...

Acts 2:44-45 (ESV); 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Acts 4:34-37 (ESV); 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. 36 Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Because we see that tithing was an act of obedient faith in God and acknowledgment of the Lord's provision for believers in the Old Testament, how much more should we see it as a minimal beginning example for faithful and cheerful giving as New Testament believers?

Malachi 3:6-10 (ESV); 6 "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. 7 From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?' 8 Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. 10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 (ESV); 6 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

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Question #6: Are there any biblical teachings on sororities, fraternities, or other secret societies?

There were types of fraternal orders and special vows recorded in Scripture, in both the Old and New Testament...

2 Kings 6:1-2 (ESV); 1 Now the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, “See, the place where we dwell under your charge is too small for us. 2 Let us go to the Jordan and each of us get there a log, and let us make a place for us to dwell there.” And he answered, “Go.”

Numbers 6:1-5 (ESV); 1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD, 3 he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. 4 All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins. 5 “All the days of his vow of separation, no razor shall touch his head. Until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the LORD, he shall be holy. He shall let the locks of hair of his head grow long.

Jeremiah 35:1-11; 18-19 (ESV); 1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: 2 “Go to the house of the Rechabites and speak with them and bring them to the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers; then offer them wine to drink.” 3 So I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, son of Habazziniah and his brothers and all his sons and the whole house of the Rechabites. 4 I brought them to the house of the LORD into the chamber of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, the man of God, which was near the chamber of the officials, above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, keeper of the threshold. 5 Then I set before the Rechabites pitchers full of wine, and cups, and I said to them, “Drink wine.” 6 But they answered, “We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, ‘You shall not drink wine, neither you nor your sons forever. 7 You shall not build a house; you shall not sow seed; you shall not plant or have a vineyard; but you shall live in tents all your days, that you may live many days in the land where you sojourn.’ 8 We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he commanded us, to drink no wine all our days, ourselves, our wives, our sons, or our daughters, 9 and not to build houses to dwell in. We have no vineyard or field or seed, 10 but we have lived in tents and have obeyed and done all that Jonadab our father commanded us. 11 But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against the land, we said, ‘Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans and the army of the Syrians.’ So we are living in Jerusalem.” ... 18 But to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your father and kept all his precepts and done all that he commanded you, 19 therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall never lack a man to stand before me.”

Acts 18:18 (ESV); 18 After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.

Acts 21:18-26 (ESV); 18 On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. 19 After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. 20 And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, 21 and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. 22 What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. 23 Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; 24 take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. 25 But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.” 26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

We also see the use of secret passwords in Scripture, as used by Jephthah's forces...

Judges 12:5-6 (ESV); 5 And the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. And when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, “Let me go over,” the men of Gilead said to him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” When he said, “No,” 6 they said to him, “Then say Shibboleth,” and he said, “Sibboleth,” for he could not pronounce it right. Then they seized him and slaughtered him at the fords of the Jordan. At that time 42,000 of the Ephraimites fell.

So the issue is not whether a believer is part of a fraternity, sorority, or an organizations with special ceremonies, symbols, secrets, or passwords... the issue is if the organization teaches or practices what is contrary to Scripture or if the person shows greater loyalty to their fraternal order than to the Kingdom of God.

Colossians 2:8 (ESV); See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

1 John 4:1 (ESV); Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV); “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

1 Corinthians 2:1-13 (ESV); 1 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. 6 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. 7 But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— 10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

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Question #7: Does God bless the marriages of people who are not married in the church?

Being married “in the church” is not necessarily about location, but about the faith of both man and woman being married and the manner in which the marriage is conducted. We see that scripture makes it clear that Christians are only to marry Christians, and that such marriages are between a man and a woman...

Genesis 2:21-24 (ESV); 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Ephesians 5:31-33 (ESV); 31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

1 Corinthians 7:39 (ESV); 39 A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (ESV); 14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, 18 and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”

Scripture commands us to even honor marriages in which one spouse has become a convert to the faith while the other has not...

1 Corinthians 7:12-16 (ESV); 12 To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. 13 If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. 15 But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. 16 For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

There is no direct command regarding the place of marriage, but there certainly is regarding the approach to marriage and an understanding that it is to be considered holy... There is a distinct difference between those who see marriage as a civil contract and those who acknowledge Holy Matrimony...

Matthew 19:3-6 (ESV); 3 And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” 4 He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

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Question #8: What is the difference between our mind and our spirit.

The human spirit and soul (or “mind”) are closely related. so much so that the English terms are often used as synonyms; but, there is a theological distinction. We see this distinction in the

writings of the Apostle Paul. In the following passages: “spirit” is translated from the Greek word “pneuma,” meaning “breath” or “life;” “soul” is translated from the Greek word “psyche,” meaning mind (*mind is also sometimes used to translate the Greek word "nous" in reference to knowledge*)...

1 Thessalonians 5:23 (ESV); 23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 4:12 (ESV); 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Humans are spirit, soul, and body (from the Greek “soma”). This "trinity" in each human is a reflection of the Trinity of God...

Genesis 1:26-27 (ESV); 26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 2:7 (ESV); 7 then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature [*Hebrew - nepesh (neh'fesh) = soul, mind*]

2 Corinthians 13:14 (ESV); 14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Matthew 28:19 (ESV); 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

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Question #9: How do I enter a home with unbelievers?

Christians are *in* the world but not *of* the world, which means that a disciple’s values and lifestyles must be marked by gratitude and love for the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and expressed through devotion and obedience to the Word of God. When believers are with unbelievers, believers must remember that they represent the Lord...

Matthew 10:11-15 (ESV); 11 And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. 12 As you enter the house, greet it. 13 And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace

return to you. 14 And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. 15 Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

Luke 10:5-12 (ESV); 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ 6 And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. 7 And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. 8 Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. 9 Heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ 10 But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, 11 ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ 12 I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

Christians need not shrink from being in the presence of those who do not believe. In fact, it would be difficult to tell people the Good News of Jesus Christ or demonstrate godliness and charity if Christians never were around unbelievers. However, Christians have to be discerning in regarding to being in intimate fellowship with those who do not believe or influenced by their views and values...

Psalms 1:1 (ESV); 1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (ESV); 9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

Christians should be discerning about their associations and relationships, but also must remember that to be “salt and light” in this world means being a living witness for the Lord in this world...

Luke 19:1-10 (ESV); 1 He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” 6 So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. 7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.”

8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

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