**Truth, Understanding, Unity, and Fellowship**

*Ephesians 3:1-7*

**Introduction**

1. God’s entire will pertains to our behavior regarding two important relationships – **Matthew 22:37-40** – Vertical, with God; Horizontal, with man.
2. **The doctrine we subscribe to concerning either relationship will affect the other.**
3. It is important that we have an accurate understanding of the foundation of our spiritual relationship with God and men to ensure holiness and righteousness in regard to each.
4. In writing to the Ephesians concerning his role in revelation, Paul mentions four spiritual principles in logical relation to one another which serve as the foundation of right spiritual relation to God and man – **Ephesians 3:1-7**
	1. **Truth** – **(vv. 3, 5)** – truth is made known through revelation – to know God, have fellowship with Him.
	2. **Understanding** – **(v. 4)** – we must understand truth and can do so through reading.
	3. **Unity** – **(v. 4)** – we can understand alike with others, i.e. we are to be unified in truth.
	4. **Fellowship** – **(v. 6)** – in such common understanding of truth and following it we share and participate together in the things of God.
5. Not one of these can be isolated – if there is one that exists without the other it is not genuine but perverted.
6. Truth is the Link Between Heaven and Earth
7. ***“by revelation He made known to me the mystery” (Ephesians 3:3)***
8. Jacob’s Ladder (dream) – **Genesis 28:10-14** (Going to Padam Aram to find a wife from Laban)
	1. Fulfilled in Christ – **John 1:51** (to Nathanael)
	2. **(v. 12)** – angels ascending and descending.
		1. Angels – messengers.
		2. Communication/Revelation – From heaven to man, and man to heaven.
	3. **(v. 14)** – universal blessing associated with the dream.
	4. Jesus – identifies Himself (Son of Man) in place of the ladder.
		1. The revelation of God from heaven to man on earth is through Jesus.
9. Jesus – **John 14:6** – Way (to the Father) – Truth (concerning the Father) – Life (of the Father, offered by the Father).
	1. Eternal life is to know God – **John 17:3**
	2. We know God through Jesus who is the Word – **John 1:1, 14, 18** – grace and truth, God declared.
10. The truth must be known and abided in for us to have fellowship with God – **John 8:30-32**
11. **The nature of truth tells us about the defined parameters of any man’s relation to God:**
	1. Truth is objective.
	2. Man can only stand right with God through objective truth – **1 Timothy 2:4**
	3. While a man’s relation to God is a personal matter (between Him and God), it is conditioned on objective and universal principles.
		1. We all will be judged individually – **Romans 14:11-12**
		2. But we will all be judged by the same revealed standard – **John 12:48; Acts 10:34-35**
	4. Therefore, we have no right to dictate what our own relationship with God looks like. I.e. whether we are accepted or not based on our own subjective standard – **2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; 1 John 1:6**
12. Understanding is the Mechanism of Accessing Truth
13. ***“when you read, you may understand” (Ephesians 3:4)***
14. Since it is only through the truth that we can come to God (**cf. John 14:6**), then we MUST understand it – **Ephesians 5:17**
15. The gospel saves those who believe, but if the gospel is not known (through it being proclaimed) it cannot save – **Romans 1:16; 10:14-15; 1 Corinthians 1:21**
16. The simple hearing of the message of truth does not save, but the UNDERSTANDING of that truth is necessary:
	1. Do you understand? – **Acts 8:30-31**
	2. Can be misunderstood – **Romans 3:1-2, 9-11** (have law, but do not understand); **2 Peter 3:16** (twisted to own destruction)
		1. EX: Jews knew the law, but not understanding its purpose were not benefitted by it – **John 5:39-40; Romans 10:2-4**
	3. TRUTH SAVES, BUT THE ACCESS TO THE SALVATION IT OFFERS IS UNDERSTANDING.
17. When one does not understand, it is not that understanding is beyond reach, but:
	1. They are dishonest – ***“But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.” (Luke 8:15, NASB)***
	2. Led by the blind – **Matthew 15:14**
	3. Desire for the world – **2 Corinthians 4:3-4**
	4. Biased reading of the text – **Matthew 22:23, 29, 31-32**
	5. Seeking to justify settled beliefs and practices – **Luke 10:29**
18. The gospel is designed and revealed perfectly by God in a way that is specifically tailored to man whom He created. Therefore, the failure to understand the truth does not reflect poorly on God, but on the man – **Hebrews 4:12**
19. Unity is the Result of Understood Truth
20. ***“when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ” (Ephesians 3:4)***
	1. NOT – you will understand it in your own way.
	2. BUT – you will understand it exactly the way Paul does.
	3. **If we understand anything, we understand it alike.**
21. The basis for unity is God’s nature – **John 17:20-21**
	1. NOT a unity in diversity of mind, will, and judgment.
	2. A unity between distinct persons that all share the same mind, will, and judgment.
22. **“Is it a fellowship (salvation) issue?”** – **James 4:11-12; John 7:21-24** – our judgment and dealing with one another must always be within the realm of divinely revealed truth.
	1. If it is a matter where God has left it to human judgment or conscience it is not a “fellowship issue.” (**cf. Romans 14:1-4** – eat, or not eat)
	2. If it is a matter of revealed truth where God establishes pattern and procedure, then it is a “fellowship issue.”
	3. **“In matters of faith, unity. In matters of opinion, liberty. In all things, love.”**
	4. Consider: what was included in Paul’s charge? – **1 Corinthians 1:10-13**
		1. What does the ***“same mind and…same judgment”*** include?
		2. As long as they believed the same about Christ, could they be divided regarding what Paul addressed in the letter?
			1. Chapter 5 – sexual immorality, church discipline.
			2. Chapter 6 – civil litigation among brethren, sexual immorality.
			3. Chapter 7 – principles of the sexual relationship and marriage.
			4. Chapters 8-10 – use of liberties, and corresponding treatment of brethren.
			5. Chapter 11 – proper observance of the LS.
			6. Chapters 12-14 – evaluation and use of spiritual gifts.
			7. Chapter 15 – universal resurrection.
	5. **1 Corinthians 16:13** (faith – objective standard); **2 Corinthians 13:5** (in the faith?)
23. Fellowship is the Privilege of Unity
24. ***“the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6)***
	1. Jew and Gentile had nothing to do with each other, but in the church they would be participating together in the things of God, and enjoying the same hope in relationship with God.
	2. This was effected through the truth of the gospel – **Ephesians 2:17-18; 3:3-6**
25. A blessing enjoyed by those who are united in Christ is their ongoing fellowship with each other.
	1. Fellowship – *koinonia* (κοινωνία, 2842), “a having in common (koinos), partnership, fellowship”, denotes (a) the share which one has in anything, a participation, fellowship recognized and enjoyed. (VINE)
	2. When the church was established, those who were added continued together – **Acts 2:42** – fellowship.
		1. Apostles’ doctrine – studied, learned, and applied together.
		2. Fellowship – general common participation and partnership in spiritual matters. Includes things we participate in together in Christ.
			1. Worship (**Hebrews 10:24-25**):
				1. Lord’s Supper – **Acts 2:42; 20:7** – remember Christ’s death together.
				2. Singing – **Ephesians 5:19** – speaking Christ’s word to one another.
				3. Praying – **Acts 2:42**
				4. Preaching – **Acts 20:7** – listening to God’s word proclaimed together.
			2. Benevolence – **Acts 2:44-45** – giving to each as anyone has need.
				1. **1 Corinthians 16:1; Romans 15:26** – collection for needy saints.
			3. Furthering the gospel **(Philippians 1:3-5):**
				1. Edification – **Ephesians 4:15-16**
				2. Evangelism – **Acts 8:4**
				3. Support of preacher – **Philippians 4:14-18**
			4. Etc. – sharing, and enjoying together matters such as hope, comfort, sufferings of Christ, etc.
26. Such privilege of fellowship is not enjoyed through a unity in diversity, but a mutual fellowship with God, thus, unity among each other:
	1. Fellowship is NOT based on:
		1. Good intentions – they mean well, although they’re wrong?
		2. Arbitrary “clear” passages – only have to agree upon clear passages? Unclear passages should not be a test of fellowship? (**cf. 2 Peter 3:16-18** – even ***“hard”*** passages must not be misused)
		3. Unity in the core principles – core gospel?
	2. Basis of fellowship between men – **1 John 1:3, 7** – fellowship with Jesus/God through word, walking in light. (Doctrine and practice)
27. When there is not unity in the understanding of revealed truth – **2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1** – God’s people must be holy!

**Conclusion**

1. The conditions and parameters of our relationship with God have been clearly revealed and defined by Him.
2. We cannot expect to be right with God by rejecting His standard of that relationship.
3. We cannot expect to be right with God by rejecting His standard and conditions of right spiritual relationships with one another.
4. We must understand, accept, and submit to the immutable relationship between truth, understanding, unity, and fellowship.