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

**Introduction**

1. All of God’s will pertains to our two relationships we possess as His creation – the relationship with Him (vertical) and with all other men (horizontal – both the world, and brethren, concerned with brethren here). (**cf. Matthew 22:37-40** – greatest command, and second like it)
2. The doctrine we subscribe to for either relationship will affect the other.
	1. What we teach and believe about our relationship with God will affect that concerning our relationship with brethren.
	2. The way we love our brethren is by keeping the commandments of God – **1 John 5:2; 2 John 5-6** – if our approach to the commandments of God is flawed then so will be our relationship with brethren.
3. This emphasizes the point of Jesus concerning the need for a proper and stable foundation – **Matthew 7:24-27**
	1. If our belief, teaching, and practices concerning our relationship with God are amiss, then so it will be with our brethren.
4. The church has faced many issues pertaining to unity and fellowship that have spun out of control due to error on the fundamental principles of our relationship with God.
	1. Unity in diversity; Extended boundaries of fellowship – participation with those you believe to be in sin and/or error; etc.
	2. Then the logical reduction of caution regarding your personal convictions and actions due to the tolerant leanings of such teachings. (the spreading of leaven – **1 Corinthians 5:6**)
5. In turn, the unlawful dynamics of such relationships have led to further misunderstanding about God’s direct relationship with individuals – the result is a looser approach to doctrine and morality.
	1. Sin begets sin – **Romans 6:19** – ***“lawlessness leading to more lawlessness”***
6. We must understand the logical growth from our relationship with God – its beginning, and how it is sustained – to the principles which govern our relationship with each other in the church.
7. Truth is the Link Between Heaven and Earth
8. Jacob’s Ladder (dream) – **Genesis 28:12-14**
	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. The future glory in Zion – **Isaiah 35:8-10** – highway, ransomed will return to the Lord in Zion.
	1. Jesus identifies Himself as ***“the way”*** – **John 14:1-6** – thus the link between heaven and earth, the Father and us.
	2. Way (to the Father) – Truth (concerning the Father) – Life (of the Father, offered by the Father).
		1. He is the way in connection with Him also being the truth.
		2. THE WAY TO WHERE GOD IS (heaven) AND THUS ETERNAL LIFE IS JESUS, THE TRUTH.
10. Eternal life is to know God – **John 17:3**
	1. We know God through Jesus – **John 1:14, 18** – grace and truth, God declared.
11. What separates from God (thus, heaven) is sin – **Isaiah 59:1-2**
	1. It is the word/truth which frees from sin – **John 8:31-32**
	2. It is the Son which frees from sin – **John 8:34-36**
	3. The truth = the Son
12. Everyone understands and appreciates that Jesus is the only way to the Father, to salvation, BUT IT CANNOT BE OVEREMPHASIZED THAT JESUS IS THE TRUTH/WORD **– John 1:1, 14; 18:37**
	1. PREACH THE MAN, NOT THE PLAN? – idea that emphasis on doctrine and pattern neglects the preaching of Jesus.
		1. Consider Philip’s preaching – **Acts 8:4-5, 12** – preached the word, Christ, kingdom, Jesus Christ, baptism. (Did he preach the Man or the plan?)
		2. Consider Paul’s preaching – **1 Corinthians 2:2** – Christ and Him crucified – was Paul breaking that mold with the letter? Or do the contents of the letter fall under the same umbrella?
	2. Phrase may not continue to be used as frequently, but the idea is still there, viz. WE NEED MORE PREACHING/TEACHING WHICH LOOKS TO JESUS, AND LESS TECHNICAL MATTERS PERTAINING TO DOCTRINE AND MORALITY.
		1. Perhaps – MORE ABOUT GRACE, AND LESS DOCTRINE – **Titus 2:11-12** – grace of God teaches…
			1. APPLICATION – you can differ on doctrine, but the grace of God covers you both.
		2. Perhaps – MORE ABOUT THE GOSPEL, AND LESS TECHNICAL DOCTRINE – **1 Timothy 1:10-11** (doctrine/gospel)
			1. APPLICATION – you can differ on doctrine as long as you agree on the “core” gospel.
		3. APPLICATION FOR BOTH – differences, even if they are polar opposites, exact contradictions, aren’t consequential either to our relationship with God, or each other, so long as we both believe in Jesus.
13. Nature of truth – specific, objective, thus, non-contradictory, and exclusive.
	1. Personal relationship with Jesus – Relationship of which I am responsible for attaining and sustaining? (YES) Relationship which conditions and elements are different than someone else who has a relationship with Jesus? (NO)
	2. Two people cannot have relationships with Jesus that differ? – if so, He has shown partiality (**cf. Romans 2:11** – no partiality).
	3. Thus, we MUST know the truth – **John 8:31-32** – implication: if you don’t know/abide in THE TRUTH (only one) then you don’t have salvation.
		1. **John 8:30** – they believed but implied by Jesus’ statements is the fact that they were not abiding in the truth.
		2. WERE THEY FREE FROM SIN THEN? NO
		3. Thus, the lost are described as:
			1. Those who ***“did not receive the love of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:10).***
			2. Those who ***“do not practice the truth” (1 John 1:6).***
			3. Those who are children of ***“the devil…[who] does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him” (John 8:44).***
14. Understanding is the Mechanism of Accessing Truth
15. If truth is the only way to knowing God, and receiving salvation, then it is implied that it can and must be understood:
	1. **Ephesians 3:3-4** – when we read, we can understand.
	2. **Ephesians 5:17** – we must understand.
16. While truth is the link between heaven and earth, and thus possesses great power, it is impotent in the lives of those who do not know it and understand it.
	1. Truth cannot, and will not save the one who does not know it – **John 8:32** (KNOWING is necessary); **2 Thessalonians 1:8** (NOT KNOWING is deadly)
	2. 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**
17. The simple hearing of the message of truth does not save, but the UNDERSTANDING of that truth is necessary:
	1. Can be misunderstood – **Romans 3:1-2, 9-11** (have law, but do not understand); **2 Peter 3:16** (twisted to own destruction)
	2. 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.
18. Due to obvious differences in conviction concerning certain topics, some in the church have suggested that we cannot fully understand truth, at least not alike:
	1. Can two understand the same thing differently, and really understand it?
		1. If there is truly mutual understanding, then it is alike.
	2. SUCH IS OFFERED AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO RELATIVE TRUTH – one has said, “While we know truth is objective and absolute, we must realize that our understanding of it is not.”
		1. This does not avoid difficulty – Even if the blame is put on ourselves for not being able to understand, the blame still falls on God – INSUFFICIENT CREATION OF MAN TO BE CAPABLE OF KNOWING.
	3. SUCH IS OFFERED AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO UNITY IN ITS TRUEST SENSE – we can be united in the truth even though we understand it differently.
		1. Is there unity if two different convictions/conclusions are reached?
	4. Consequence – WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND JESUS ALIKE (**cf. John 14:6** – the truth) – although this is the only thing they suggest we can absolutely agree on.
		1. Is there unity in Christ if Christ is understood differently?
		2. EX: Gnosticism – **1 John 4:1-3** – understood Christ, just differently? No, did not understand Christ.
19. There are not “differences in understanding,” there is understanding and not understanding.
20. Why can some not understand?
	1. Led by the blind – **Matthew 15:14**
	2. Desire for the world – **2 Corinthians 4:3-4**
	3. Biased reading of the text – **Matthew 22:29, 31-32** (to Sadducees)
	4. Ultimately, DISHONESTY – **Matthew 13:14-15** (dull hearts); **Luke 8:15** (good soil – ***“noble and good heart”; “honest and good heart,” ESV***)
		1. Not something we like to hear or say – they have a dishonest heart.
		2. HOWEVER, THE FLAWLESS TRUTH REVEALS – **John 12:47-48; Hebrews 4:12**
21. The notion that truth cannot be understood alike will not be accepted if the Biblical principle of the necessity of knowing truth for salvation is believed.
22. However, subscribing to the idea that we cannot understand the truth alike DEVALUES THE TRUTH, AND PROMOTES A FALSE UNITY, WHICH LEADS TO A FELLOWSHIP WITH SIN, AND IMPURITY AMONG GOD’S PEOPLE.
23. Unity is the Result of Truth Understood
24. It is God’s will that Christians be in unity:
	1. Unity of Jesus and God – **John 17:4** (glorified God – **John 7:16-18** – through teaching God’s will – unity); **John 17:21** (ONE)
	2. Unity of Jesus and Apostles – **John 17:6-8, 11, 17** (know the unity between Father and Son, one as Father Son through truth)
	3. Unity of Believers – **John 17:20-23** (They are to be one even as the Father and the Son – ***“through their [apostles’] word”***)
	4. NOTE: The unity in each group is accomplished and manifested through the word/truth.
25. PROBLEM SUGGESTED (from before) – how can there be unity when the truth cannot be understood alike?
	1. United in Christ, not doctrine – **1 Corinthians 15:1-4** (Christ death, burial, resurrection) (“core” gospel?)
		1. Application – as long as two believe in death, burial, and resurrection they can differ on – MDR, institutionalism, Lord’s Supper (outside assembly?); etc.
	2. Such is unity in diversity – agree (unity) on fundamentals (Christ), but disagree (diversity) on various doctrines.
	3. 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.
		3. On the contrary – **1 Corinthians 16:13** (faith – objective standard); **2 Corinthians 13:5** (in the faith?)
26. Do we have to be united in all things the Bible teaches?
27. Is “unity in diversity” the type of unity God desires/requires?
	1. Is this the unity that God and Christ shared – **John 17:20-21**
	2. Can do nothing independently – **John 5:19, 30**
28. TRUE UNITY CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED IF THERE IS AN OBJECTIVE STANDARD OF TRUTH WHICH DOES NOT BEND TO THE DIFFERENCES AMONG MEN, AND CAN BE UNDERSTOOD (therefore, understood the same by many).
	1. There is an objective standard of truth – **John 8:32**
		1. It does not change – **Hebrews 13:8; 2 Corinthians 1:19-20**
		2. It is eternal, thus, eternally relevant – **1 Peter 1:23-25**
		3. Thus, is not fluid, changing with each person – **1 Corinthians 14:36-38** ***(“if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized,” NASB***)
	2. The truth can be understood – **Ephesians 5:17**
	3. CONCLUSION – UNDERSTANDING THE TRUTH RESULTS IN UNITY AMONG THOSE WHO UNDERSTAND.
29. The unity God requires, and provides – **Ephesians 4:1-16**
	1. **(v. 3)** – takes effort – endeavor.
		1. ***“of the Spirit”*** – revelation of HS – objective perfect standard.
	2. **(vv. 4-6)** – foundation of unity.
		1. Body – church.
		2. Spirit – revelation.
		3. Hope – goal and reward.
		4. Lord – authority.
		5. Faith – standard.
		6. Baptism – entrance.
		7. God and Father – origin, family.
	3. **(vv. 7-11**) – gifts left to us by Christ – pertaining to teaching of God’s word.
		1. Apostles, prophets – inspired.
		2. Evangelists, pastors, teachers – studied in word, explain. (cf. **Nehemiah 8:8** – give sense, help understand)
	4. **(vv. 12-16)** – the reason for these gifts left.
		1. **(v. 12)** – edification – built up spiritually in word.
		2. **(v. 13)** – unity in the standard – Christ.
		3. **(v. 14)** – avoiding trickery through growth – fortified against false teaching.
		4. **(vv. 15-16)** – church working, growing together – knit together (united).
30. God reveals Himself, and thus opens the way to salvation through the TRUTH.
31. He has created us with the ability to UNDERSTAND THE TRUTH in order to be reconciled to Him.
32. This understanding of the truth UNITES ALL WHO REACH IT.
33. These who are united in the standard of truth, who have endeavored and are endeavoring to KEEP that unity, have the privilege of participating and sharing together, or having FELLOWSHIP with each other in these spiritual matters as they have mutual fellowship with God (manifested in the unity of the Spirit).
	1. Yet, if this fellowship is not founded on the unity discussed above, it is unlawful and perverted.
	2. Such participation among Christians who differ in matters of the Spirit does not bring glory to God.
34. Fellowship is the Privilege of Unity
35. 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 and learned together.
		2. Fellowship – general common participation and partnership in spiritual matters. Includes all 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; 1 Corinthians 14:15-16** – lifting up petitions to God together.
				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; 3 John 5-8**
			4. Etc. – sharing, and enjoying together matters such as hope, comfort, sufferings of Christ, etc.
		3. Breaking of bread – participated in the observance of the LS together.
		4. Prayers – prayed to God together.
36. 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?
		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)
37. When one is no longer in fellowship with Christ, thus, no longer united in doctrine and practice with others who are in fellowship with Christ, fellowship (joint participation) with that one is unlawful:
	1. **2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1** – what do they have to do with each other? SEPARATE!
	2. **2 John 9-11** – do not receive him, or else be united with him, and share with him in evil.
	3. ***“Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” (Amos 3:3)*** – absolutely not.
38. Fellowship among brethren is a gift of God for the mutual spiritual benefit of those involved – **1 Corinthians 14:26** – all things for edification.
39. However, when God’s boundaries of fellowship are ignored, and fellowship is extended to those who aren’t united in the Spirit, and aren’t in fellowship with God, THE ADVERSE EFFECT IS PRODUCED:
	1. **2 John 11** – share in evil.
		1. **Ephesians 5:11** – are not supposed to have fellowship with darkness.
	2. Discipline in the form of withdrawing fellowship is commanded to save the soul, and preserve the purity of the church – **1 Corinthians 5:4-8**
		1. Implications:
			1. To persist in fellowship with those in sin and error is to defile the church, thus, separate from God.
			2. To persist in fellowship with those in sin and error is to give them the impression that they are not lost.
				1. SUCH WILL PERSIST IN SIN, NOT REPENT OF IT.
		2. God’s conditions of continuing with us – **2 Corinthians 6:17-18** – come out from among them.
		3. ***“Therefore ‘put away from yourselves the evil person’” (1 Corinthians 5:13)***.
	3. Practicing fellowship in the absence of unity in the Spirit, and mutual fellowship with God is deleterious to the individual’s spiritual standing, and that of the church.

**Conclusion**

1. Through a defilement of the very concept of truth, and our ability to understand it has come perverted ideas of unity and fellowship.
	1. In many cases, the desire for unity and fellowship where there is knowledge that such is unscriptural has led to these false concepts of truth, and the understanding of truth.
2. Our entire focus should be to love God, and please Him.
3. This cannot be accomplished separate from His standard of truth, and our adherence to it.
4. We must unite in truth and participate together in truth if God is to be pleased.
5. Any attempt to alter the scriptural standards of unity and fellowship with a modern approach to truth and understanding is vain and will ultimately show its failure in the end.