



More ...

... about *The God Is Love Fellowship*

Purpose

The purpose of *The God Is Love Fellowship* is to encourage people by presenting the teachings of Jesus through the first-century writings of his followers.

History

The God Is Love Fellowship began as *Anchored Encouragement* in the fall of 2012. The purpose was to provide a place to go on Sunday mornings for believers who were not connected with any spiritual or religious group. The focus of AE was to encourage each other while allowing each person to “anchor themselves” with God in whatever way they believed was right for them. A very sweet fellowship developed.

A group of about seven people first met in the Holiday Inn Express in Grass Valley. Though this worked OK, it seemed a bit sterile and isolated, plus the rent for the meeting room was steep. So AE moved to the Flower Garden coffee shop in the Brunswick basin for several months. Though not isolated, it was noisy and there were many distractions. It was also hard to grow past about ten people without becoming an annoying crowd.

AE then moved to Valentina’s Bistro and Café across the parking lot. There the weekly rent was reasonable and we had the place to ourselves (since it was closed to the public on Sundays), but the acoustics were very poor. After about eight months the availability of that place went away.

AE then found a side room at Perko’s Restaurant where the rent was only whatever food and coffee was purchased. This worked well for several months until a move to Summer Thymes coffee shop was

made to accommodate an attendee. Back into a coffee shop setting brought along previous challenges, but it worked pretty well.

Just this last fall a dining room at the Holbrooke Hotel in downtown Grass Valley became available at a very good rate -- including coffee! It is a historically beautiful place, with plenty of room to grow, quiet, yet not isolated. Recently a couple attending the meeting was unable to attend for health reasons. An internet broadcast was started to accommodate them. They told some friends who also started watching. Others have joined on-line since then. Last count there have been over 100 visits to the broadcast site on Ustream.

In order to give the meeting a name (for reference purposes on internet streaming and the Web site), "*The God Is Love Fellowship*" was chosen. This was a name not already taken as a ".com", but also it reflects the orientation of the presentation that is done each week. At the heart of *The God Is Love Fellowship* is the boundless and infinite love of God for all people who were created in his very own likeness. Many of those who started 2½ years ago are still here today, and there has been nothing but encouragement, love, and respect. It is indeed a sweet fellowship.

Three Governing Ideas

There are three ideas that govern *The God Is Love Fellowship* (GILF).

First, the focus is on encouragement. Life is full of good and wonderful things, but it also presents many challenges and discouraging situations. So, we all need some encouragement and support as we each find our way down life's road. We do not gather to argue or debate about anything, and there is no attempt to govern anyone else's thinking or beliefs. That is between each person the God who made them and loves them. Life is too short to not spend our time loving, encouraging, and helping each other discover the very best God has for us as individuals!

Second, a positive, always loving, and always good view of God is the basis of all teaching (presenting) from the first-century writings by

the followers of Jesus (commonly known as the “New Testament”). This is because God *IS* love and everything he does is motivated by his love. Everything!!! Hatred, retaliation, torment, abandonment, and annihilation are nowhere to be found in the God who is what love is.

But, at times, God’s love is severe – very severe – and it results in judgment that that is just and pure. But such judgment is always grounded in his infinite love for all people who were created in his very own likeness – grounded nowhere else but in His infinite love! His loving purpose for all people is for them to find the very best he has for them by drawing them to himself through his irresistible grace and his boundless love. The God who *IS* love can do (and never will do) anything less.

Third, the presentations (teaching) each Sunday of the first-century writings are done as accurately, carefully, and faithfully as possible. Without a doubt, this can never be fully achieved, but it is the heart-felt goal every Sunday. Care it taken to not speculate, or present personal bios -- though this too is never fully achieved. But the goal is to faithfully present what is written and to let each person decide in his or her own heart what it means for them as they do their own searching and thinking and communication with the God who loves them. Each person is autonomous before God and must work out with Him what they believe and how they live. Our role is simply to encourage each other in that quest.

Churches

GILF is not a church*. Churches provide many good and wonderful programs -- and for many people this is the best way for them to worship God and find fellowship with like-minded people. GILF is a very informal fellowship of people who desire to encourage (and be encouraged by) others, by considering the writings of those sent out by Jesus to proclaim the good news about God and his love for the world he created.

** Actually, GILF is (technically speaking) a sole-proprietorship business, registered with the State of California, doing business in Nevada County as “The God Is Love Fellowship”. Though it is not legally a “non-profit” organization, and has no non-profit tax exemption, GILF considers itself to be non-profit in its endeavor. Income is gained from paid musical performances which are subject to being taxed. However, all income goes to GILF overhead and expenses, and to helping people in various ways as needs arise.*

GILF very much appreciates all the churches in this community, believing that each one is doing what it does (in the way that it does) according to how they believe God want them to do it. A genuine and humble respect between churches and spiritual organizations is honoring to God. Whoever may wrong among us must work it out with God alone. Our job is to love each other unconditionally, just as God loves us, and to leave all judging to him who, alone, is worthy of it.

GILF, additionally, encourages everyone (attending GILF or not) to seek a good local spiritual assembly in accordance with their own sincere beliefs. There are many churches and spiritual gatherings in our community, and GILF appreciates their presence and their good influence on society along with their desire to honor God who they love and worship. GILF, further, is not in any way possessive of those who attend (in person or on the internet broadcast). There is no attempt to build up, or maintain, a large following. All who attend are encouraged to always seek the best spiritual gathering in accordance with their sincere beliefs. Splits are welcomed and even encouraged! If at any time, a group of people involved at GILF desire to start a new group with the same (or different) direction or focus, they are encouraged to do so. GILF would be happy to help them in such an endeavor!

Membership

GILF has no membership. If there is any membership at all it is found in a personal connection with God. This is the only membership that really counts. Such membership is called “the

body of Christ” in the New Testament writings, and it is a membership of all who are followers of Jesus and are “joined together” in a common purpose. That common purpose is to be the way Jesus gets around in this physical world – to be his “body”! Wow! (It is indeed a beautiful thing.) And for those who are “members of the body of Christ”, they are also “members of each other” (just as the NT writings claim). This is what real membership is all about.

Most traditional churches have a local-formal membership that is needed in large organizations to protect the assets and direction of that church. This is done in accordance with “doing things decently and orderly”, and in accordance with “being good stewards” of what has been entrusted to them by God. This is a good thing and is honored by GILF, but it is something not needed by GILF itself.

On “Teaching”

The followers of Jesus believed that there really is no “teacher” but God himself, through the person of His spirit (often called the “Holy Spirit”). And, this makes sense, for who among us can really teach the human heart except God – the One who created it? It is common among people call some “teachers”. But, in reality, such teachers can do little more than present information. Only God can truly teach and change a heart.

And so, GILF prefers to call human teaching “presentation” and leave the real teaching up to God where it belongs. In fact, human teachers (presenters) are warned that they will “incur a stricter judgment”. It is unclear if this judgment is by God or men, but it is probably by both and should serve as a sobering motivation to “teach” (present) with great care and genuine humility.

Titles and Positions

GILF uses no titles (pastor, teacher, bishop, pope, guru, etc.). The first-century followers of Jesus were contented to use their name

alone, without any official title. It seems wise and best to avoid titles as much as possible and remind people that we are all on the same level before God. Jesus, for example, said “call no man father”. He said this so that our focus would be on his father in heaven, who is also ours, and not on any earthly man.

The followers of Jesus never used titles of position, just first names: Paul, Peter, James, John, etc. There was no “Pastor Paul”, “Bishop Barnabas”, or even “Elder Elijah”! There were, however, pastors, teachers, and apostles, but these were “gifted abilities” from God, through which they served people -- not titles to be held. It can even be said that these were “positions” held by some, but such positions were for serving others, not for “lording over” others as mediators between God and people. According to the New Testament writings, there is only one mediator between God and people, and that person is Jesus.

GILF is led by a layman (a regular guy) who is not a professional minister or pastor, and who possesses no authority over people other than to ensure that the Sunday morning gathering is based on encouragement by all who are involved. Local area churches, and their leaders, are honored and very much appreciated by GILF.

Sacraments

GILF does not participate in “sacraments” (rituals). What is commonly known as “Communion” or “the Lord’s Table” is the result of Jesus’s instruction to “eat and drink in remembrance of me”. GILF believes there is no requirement for an “officiator” and leaves this spiritual ritual to be done by each believer in his or her own way. It seems probable that Jesus just wanted people to continually remember what he did for the whole world (his death on the cross) by using something as routine as a meal to trigger such remembrance. However, special “communion” services conducted by churches are honored and appreciated by GILF.

Baptism is another common sacrament-ritual. GILF does not attempt to get people baptized since it is never a requirement by Jesus or his followers. However, if someone reads something in the New Testament writings, or has a strong personal sense that prompts them to be “baptized”, GILF is happy to conduct a brief baptism for them. Since GILF believes that the mode of baptism (immersion, sprinkling, or pouring of water) is not important, sprinkling will be administered since it is the easiest. Water baptism is only symbolic of a greater *spiritual* baptism that happens when a person becomes a believer in Jesus. It is an expression of “identification” with God through Jesus. GILF does not believe that baptism is required by God and is a personal choice of each individual.

Prayer

Since GILF is a very simple operation of presenting some portion of the first-century writings (along with some discussion), there is not any singing, offerings, or prayers. GILF recognizes that these are completely legitimate religious activities conducted in most churches. But to keep things simple (in accordance with trying to accommodate those who do not attend any church), such activities are not included. GILF will, at times pray with, or for, someone if the occasion arises, but it is not a weekly ritual or practice. GILF encourages people to have a personal life of prayer in whatever way, and in whatever frequency that is right for them, in accordance with Jesus’s instruction to pray privately and avoid public spectacle and meaningless repetition. It is acknowledged that God hears our prayers and loves to hear from everyone anytime. GILF also recognizes that public pray is honoring to God and is a legitimate practice by churches.

Giving

GILF does not require or ask for any financial giving, even though the New Testament writers encouraged cheerful giving and make it clear that “the one who labors in ministry is worthy of his wage”. It is believed that God will always provide what little funding is needed for GILF (currently about \$300/month), and that if He ever does not provide needed funding then it is time to “close the doors and go home”. Currently, GILF is completely funded by Carl’s paid musical engagements at local area bars, wine tasting rooms, and assisted living facilities. People who want to give to God should do so according to their own heart and select good organizations and ministries that they feel are worthy of their God-given resources.

Doctrinal Statement

GILF does not have a “doctrinal Statement”. This does not mean that there is no truth or that truth does not matter. But GILF does not attempt to present or maintain a statement that everyone is required to believe. There is no “We Believe...” document at GILF. However, it is a fact that everyone believes something, and whatever it is, it is between them and God. Such belief can be shared openly without reprisal or condemnation at GILF. The only restriction is that all sharing of beliefs are done in love and with the goal of encouraging others. Arguing, debating, or trying to convince others is discouraged. GILF confidently recommends that people consider the New Testament writings as a basis for their beliefs.

The closest thing GILF has to a doctrinal statement is a document called “What To Expect” on the Resources page of the GILF Website. Since GILF has no formal membership and strives to respect every person’s beliefs, this document *only* serves as a way for people to discover what to expect during the Sunday morning broadcast. It is more of a “teaching position” than a “doctrinal statement”. There is also a collection of booklets on the same Resources page that might be helpful.

Historically, though, the Apostle's Creed, the earliest of all creeds of the Christian church, is certainly worthy of your consideration. It was originally written in the 2nd century by the first generation of believers after the time of Jesus and his followers. Though not actually written by the "apostles" (sent-out ones) of Jesus, it embodies the essence of what they taught in those years after the resurrection of Jesus, in accordance with what he taught them.

This creed is brief and to the point. It presents the most fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith, wastes no words, and avoids less important speculation often found in later creeds. It is positive, incredibly hopeful, and presents God as one who will succeed in accomplishing his goal of saving this fallen world that he created. Here it is, in its most primitive and pure form, before it was appended by later generations who lived in a different time, culture, and language from those who lived in the days of Jesus and his apostles:

I believe in God the Father almighty;

*And in Christ Jesus His only Son, our Lord,
Who was born from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,
Who under Pontius Pilate was crucified and buried,
On the third day rose again from the dead,
Ascended into heaven,
Sits at the right hand of the Father,
From whom he will come to judge the living and the dead;*

*And in the Holy Spirit,
The holy Church,
The forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body.*

Final Thoughts (Life Style)

It is best to think of *The God Is Love Fellowship* as more of a “gas station” than a “hotel”. It is a place to come in, get filled up with encouragement, then go and take on life as it comes your way. GILF believes life is to be centered around God and what he has uniquely for you in life – not around an organization or a Sunday meeting, no matter how good it may be. Life is to be lived, fully and abundantly – as much so as your circumstances will allow. Go after things in life! Use your God-given talents to your enjoyment, and to honor the God who created you and loves you. Make life count by helping and encouraging others who you encounter in your daily living. Believe that those who come into your life are there for a reason – to make you (and them) better people in some special way.

Do all this by loving others unconditionally, just as God has loved all of us. Tell them the truly “good news” that God loves them and wants the very best for them, and that all the good things that God has done for them have been accomplished and secured when He, himself, came to this world as a humble carpenter – a man just like all of us – and demonstrated His love for us by giving himself to be the “savior of the world”. Such grace resulted in taking away the sin of the world, performed as a free gift by his loving favor toward all people, completely un-earned by any of us humans who he so dearly loves.