



What To Expect

(at *The God Is Love Fellowship*)

Introduction

This is a brief presentation of what to expect at *The God Is Love Fellowship*. 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. Belief is individual and personal responsibility before God, not to be breached by others unless invited.

Seven topics are presented below. These ideas are not presented as absolute truth or some kind of special revelation from God. GILF lets God take care of that with each individual, when and how he chooses to do so. Instead, the beliefs that follow are one man’s conclusions, based on thirty years of seeking God and studying the first-century writings of those sent out by Jesus to proclaim the “good news” of God’s love for his creation.

It is hoped that what is written will be of some encouragement to you!

God

God is love, and because he is, everything he does is motivated by love – even his “judgment”. Love always acts in the very best interest of those who are loved, because that’s what love does and is. God loves all people, not only because he **IS** love, but because he created the human race in his very own image and likeness. This means that we are all very much like God and share his very nature and attributes (though in a very limited way, and sometimes in a fallen and distorted manner). God loves everyone the same and cannot love them anymore than he does because it is a complete, infinite, and boundless love.

God is good and only good -- all the time. Everything he does has a good purpose. Even judgment has a good purpose – and that is to eventually bring all people to himself, to be fully and finally reconciled to him, and completely at peace with him. This means that there is good in every person, no matter how bad their behavior, and God will never abandon or forsake the good he created in us. In fact his goal always has been to redeem and fully restore us because he loves us and created us to know him.

Some do not believe in God or in anything spiritual. They believe only in the material world that they can perceive with their senses. I respect this and even understand it. Our senses are convincingly real while “spiritual things” can seem very unreal. But, at the same time, it is what we so convincingly sense in the world around us that begs (perhaps even demands) that there must be more. For many people, where there is “creation” there must be a “Creator”. This is especially true for them when the creation that is observed is so terribly beautiful, complex, intricate in detail, and reeks the markings of “purpose”. The anatomy of the human body (especially the human eye, according to Darwin), the vastness and gigantic sizes of stellar systems is an example. Another is the amazing, enormous, encyclopedic detail of the human DNA. There are an overwhelming number of examples everywhere we look in our world. For me ... it would take much more “faith” to believe there is “nothing” beyond what I can see, than to simply conclude from the evidence that there must be “something” beyond (regardless of who, what, or in what manner). But that’s just me, and others disagree.

Humans

The human race is the special and highest creation of God. We seem to be the hottest commodity in the universe, outside of God himself. We have enormous value to him. Unlike other acts of creation, humans bear the very image of God, meaning that they share his nature and attributes. We love because God created us like himself, able to love in a self-sacrificing way. We think, feel, and make decisions because we share God’s very nature and received such abilities from him. We also are given freedom of will, just as God has, but unfortunately we are not perfect and use our freedom sometimes foolishly and to destructive ends.

But God knew all of this about us before he ever created us. But he created us anyway, having a plan to rescue us from our self-destruction and take us through a process that would cause us to obtain his perfection so that we can live eternally in an unbelievably wonderful love relationship with him. He loved us before he created us (all of us), he loves us now, and he will love us forever. His love never changes because he never changes.

His plan was to create us, allow us to fall into self-ruin (in varying degrees), then enter into creation himself and become one of us, and die with us and for us by taking away all our fault and wrong-doing. In his plan, he then raised up out of death and raised us up with him. From there his plan was to work in our lives (everyone's life) to eventually bring all people to himself. And this planned work he does in us, we did not earn in any way whatsoever. This planned act of God for mankind is commonly known as "grace" because grace means unearned favor from him.

Jesus

It is hard to explain Jesus in any other way than how he explained himself. He claimed to be "the light of the world", that when followed will lead away from darkness. He also claimed (unapologetically, yet humbly) that he was "the resurrection" and that eternal life is found in himself (not just in his teachings). Additionally, he claimed to be "*the way, the truth, and the life*", and that to see him and believe in him is the same as seeing and believing God! Wow, extraordinarily bold claims!

The problem with Jesus is that he did not just claim to be a good man or a good teacher (though he clearly was both). His claims went far beyond, into a realm where only one of two kinds of people go: the insane and the genuine. Jesus was either a nut case, the likes of which you would be well advised to get as *far away* from him as possible – OR – he was the genuine article, requiring him to claim the thing he did because they were true. In this case, Jesus becomes someone you want to get as *close* to him as possible because (as his followers said) "you alone have the words of eternal life".

It does not seem absurd (especially in light of the wonders of the created world we see around us) that God would love his world and want to

communicate his love for it. What options does God have to communicate? He could select a human to speak for him -- and he seemed to have done this in the Old Testament Jewish Prophets who accurately foretold the future and spoke of God's love, grace and judgment. Or, he could have his message written down -- and he seemed to do this also in the Old and New Testament period writings that have stood the test of time. Or, he could speak to each person individually -- and this is claimed to be true by billions of people in the world today. Or He could come *himself*, in human form, as an actual human being, live among us in history, and tell us clearly and directly who he (the creator) is, and what his message of love is for us.

It is hard to find anyone other than the historic Jesus that can seriously be considered as The One who is the creator visiting his world. He alone (with credibility) made such claims. His life, his teachings, his permanent influence on the world have made a strong argument that "this was indeed the Son of God" (as claimed by the men who crucified him).

Salvation

Salvation is the loving work of God on the behalf of all humans, that were created by him, and created in his own image. God saved the human race simply because he loved it, and he loves us because he *is* love. That's what love does – it saves, it does not abandon, annihilate, or torment those who are loved. But love does act severely -- sometimes very severely -- but only because love does not sit back and do nothing. Love acts, love rescues, and does whatever it takes to save and redeem.

When God saved the human race by coming to earth himself in the person of Jesus (a humble carpenter of Nazareth), he saved everyone, completely and totally. (See my booklet "*What Jesus did ... And For Whom*" at <http://godislovefellowship.com/resources.html>.) It did not depend on anything within the humans he saved because it was a free gift of salvation in which he, alone, took away all the wrong-doing and failure (sin) of everyone in this world. That is what love does. We not only had nothing to do with it, we were unable to have anything to do with it. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself". And we are indeed reconciled because he did it for us without even asking our approval. (In our stubbornness and pride, we

probably would have said “no” anyway). But love acts in the best interest of the ones loved, even if they are unaware or unwilling.

We are right in God’s eyes because of what he did for us. Nothing can change that because we did not contribute anything to it. When we believe in what God did for us, we become aware of what he already did and realize it, but such belief adds nothing to “earning our salvation” because it is the work of God alone for all of us. When we believe, God’s disposition toward us does not change because that was settled in what he did for us through dying as Jesus on the cross of Calvary. He loved us and forgave us at the cross, long before any of us believed – and, he loved us and forgave us the same after we believe. Our belief changes nothing in God’s favor toward us.

Belief does not make God’s salvation true, it just accepts and receive it as being already true. Our heart and mind changes when we believe, but God’s heart and mind stays the same, as it always is toward us long before he created any of us. He always loved us and always knew he would save us because that’s what love does. But he also helps us to believe so that we can know and benefit experientially (and fully) all that comes from saving us. This helping us to believe is another aspect of salvation. It is not the “God-to-human” direction of salvation – that was taken care of by God for us on the cross of Jesus. Instead, his helping us (drawing all people to himself by his grace) is a salvation in the “human-to-God” direction, because this aspect of salvation still needs to be worked out in our lives. This takes time. God knows this and is very patient with us.

But at some point in time (and this is based on God’s infinite wisdom), God will act in severity to bring us to himself and complete the “human response” of salvation. Bringing this about is his act of loving judgment. He will act at the right time and in the right way, but make no mistake ... he will act! He is faithful to us and will never forsake us or abandon us. His severe loving action (judgment) will always be the right amount at the right time. He is in no hurry to do the job right. And he will prevail. His love will win and all men, from all time, everywhere, will be finally and completely reconciled to himself (saved). As the New Testament proclaims, “He will reconcile all things to himself – everything in heaven and everything on earth”. It also makes clear that “every knee will bow and every tongue will confess” that indeed Jesus is their lord and loving savior.

Faith

Our faith does not earn us anything with God. This is because God has done everything needed for us to be “right” in his eyes. (And his eyes are always loving eyes toward us – all of us.) His disposition toward us never changes. It is always love and forgiveness. But our faith *does* change our disposition toward God. When we believe, we acknowledge and realize what he has already done for us in the person of Jesus. Our thinking, our will, and even our feelings change when we believe. It is very dramatic and is what Jesus called being “born again”. This is because life for us is new when we finally believe -- just like life is new when we were physically born and entered a new world. Our act of believing does not change God’s attitude toward us – which something that has *already* been established in the work of Jesus for us. Our act of belief only changes us, and our attitude toward him. Nothing is earned, but much is gained!

Faith is the realization that there is nothing that can earn us anything with God – not even our act of believing. It is the realization that we were totally helpless and in need of a savior, and that the savior has already come and acted on our behalf, and that all we can do is say “thanks” and humbly receive (realize) God’s free gift of salvation of us. Karl Barth does a marvelous job of express this aspect of faith in his monumental fourteen volume work, Church Dogmatics.

Judgment

Judgment is assessing a situation accurately and then taking action to make things right (or just). Justice is the goal of judgment, and ultimate justice is to make things “right”. Unfortunately, many people view God’s judgment as negative. And there is a small amount of truth in this because when God judges (acts to correct things and make them right) it can be a very difficult experience for those who are being judged. However, as it is with all things concerning God, his judgment is good because everything God does is good and has a good purpose. His judgment is also an act of love because God is love and everything he does is motivated by love, not by hate or purposeless retaliation. As much as we may hate the process, God’s judgment will always bring about ultimate justice – the making of things right

– in everyone’s life. And, that ultimate making of things right will eventually bring about full and complete reconciliation between God and all of his creation.

Because God’s judgment is good and has a good purpose, and is grounded in his love which is always his motive for all that he does, He will never abandon, annihilate, or torment anyone. These kinds of actions are only carried out by those who are *void* of God and void of his love (ruthless dictators, terrorists, and evil self-serving fallen and corrupt beings, of which the God, who is love, takes no part or delight in). This also means that any sense of “hell” is a state brought on by rejecting God and his love. God does not desire, nor does he have any reason to torment anyone – and certainly not for eternity without end. He is magnanimous far beyond such puniness, and his moral excellence could never allow him to do such evil to those he loves.

Reconciliation

Knowing that God is love and everything he does is motivated by that love, and that God is good and everything he does has a good purpose, and knowing that God himself came to this world he created, became a human just like us, died with us and for us to save us from our own flaws by raising from the dead, it is unthinkable that this God would do anything less than eventually reconcile all humanity to himself for eternity. The very worst among us are loved by God and loved just as much as any of us. The very worst, whoever they are, had their sin taken away (along with the rest of the world) when God came in the person of Jesus and died on a cross at the hands of the very people he came to save. This is indeed love – not that we loved God but that he first loved us and proved it by taking action in our favor which we in no way earned.

Although there are people who reject and even hate God, he loves them, always has, and always will. God created in all people (even in the most vile offender) his own image and of infinite value to him. He will never give up on anyone, but will faithfully chase every person down to the ends of the earth, and beyond into eternity, to bring about a change in their heart and soul and see the loving God for who he really is. This is why some have called God “the hound of heaven”. He finds us even when we are not

looking for him, or are on the run from him. This is the relentless nature of love.

God's plan was to save the world. He had this plan from all eternity past. We were always in his heart and mind. And this was the mission of Jesus: to save the world. This is why he is called "Savior of the world" – because he saved the world. New Testament writings say: "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Jesus came into the world to save sinners". This was his mission and he did not fail (not even partially) because he could not fail. "Love does not seek what best for itself and love never fails" -- so says the *Love Chapter* (13th) in Paul's letter to a church in ancient Corinth. It is unthinkable that Jesus failed to do what he set out to do as his sole purpose in this world.

God will not be satisfied, or finished with his purpose that he planned before the world was founded, until every corner of the universe (and beyond in the spiritual world) is made right, free from sin, evil, corruption, rebellion, pain, agony, and cruelty. If even one puny being continues to shake his tiny fist at God and says, "I refuse your love and choose to continue as the fallen and miserable creature that I am", then God has lost, and the puny being has won. God could torment and punish him forever, but it would never render God victorious. Only when "every enemy of God is in willing and grateful submission before him", and when "every knee willingly and thankfully bends with a confessing voice that says Jesus is indeed their lord and savior – only then will God have won – only when his love wins over the hearts and souls of all creation. This is why God states so unmistakably clear that he "will reconcile everything to himself – everything in heaven and on earth". There is nothing that will not be won over by the love of God. How could it be any other way with a God so great and wonderful as our Creator?

All of this, and more, you can expect at *The God Is Love Fellowship!*