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Presentation Transcript

God In Us

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Have you ever driven by a church and seen the word *Reformed* in the name? That word indicates that a power struggle has taken place in the past, followed by a split. Do you wonder why there are so many churches, splits, sects and denominations in Christianity when it all started with Jesus and the unified set of beliefs that he brought? All this in the face of what Paul said: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism. It might be good to notice that our own church has been beset, perhaps even more than some of the larger groups, with this divisive quality.

Is there anyway to know where one should worship, who is led by God, who has the Holy Spirit and who does not? Well, the place to start in that study is with ourselves. How can we tell if *we* have the Holy Spirit, or if someone else does? There are plenty of people, driven by their own biases, who believe they are led by the Spirit to do this or that. But just *thinking* that we have it isn't sufficient.

Years ago now, I gave a whole series of presentations called *True Spirituality*. In it, I detailed some of the qualities of a spiritually-minded person – that is, somebody that has the Spirit. But something more is needed to clarify the issue. And this presentation – and I've called it *God In Us* – is another run at that topic. It's a way to think about how the Holy Spirit's work in us from the angle, what is the reason God has given us His Spirit?

So let's start in Hebrews 2:10.

Hebrews 2:10 – *For it was fitting that He, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.*

So it's the Father's aim and goal to bring *many* sons to glory. And that term *glory* is defined, in relationship to us, in many places. We're going to be God as God is God – the children of God, like Jesus is God. He's our older brother. And God did allow Him to suffer on our behalf. So God is creating a family. It's to be a glorious family. It's immortal. It's a happy family. It's a unified family. And it's a free family.

But what does that look like in terms that we can understand? How is He going to accomplish His objective? In other words, what's His plan? Well, a good place to start – since it's all about us being like God – is, what is God like? Does God have free will? Well, of course, He does. There are a multitude of scriptures showing us that. God has revealed it to us. So we can *know* that He can do whatever He wants and be any way He wants. We know that He *chooses* not to lie. He *chooses* to be an honest God. We know that God loves all beings He has created, because He *chooses* to do so. He has free will. He gets to decide how He's going to be.

In 1 John 4:16, we can read:

1 John 4:16 – *So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love. And listen to this now: Whoever abides in love, abides in God and God abides in him.*

God is holy and He's Spirit. Jesus is holy and He's Spirit. If they're in you, that's what we call the Holy Spirit in somebody. And what's the criteria for that again? "Whoever abides in love, abides in God and God abides in him." Now, we're going to talk more about what love is later – the way God defines it. It doesn't matter what *we* think about what love is. What matters, for this discussion, is what *God* thinks it is. So we're going to go with that. That He's honest and He's loving – those are two characteristics that are a part of His nature, and that nature is sustained by His will. Just like it's impossible for Him to lie, it's also impossible for Him not to love.

Now what is the mechanism that He's using to help us become like Him? Mechanism is probably a poor choice of words, but God isn't going to wave a magic wand over us to make us like Him. He has a *way* of causing us to become like Him. So what is that way? The first element to that is, if we're going to be like God and have free will, then we get to *choose* to be like God. We get to choose be like God chooses to be. Essentially, if we want to live forever as God is God in His family, we have to choose to be like Him, just like He does. Have you ever thought about that? It puts a whole new light on it, doesn't it, when we do that.

Let's go to Deuteronomy 30:19 and 20. God said to ancient Israel:

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 – *I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and cursing. So what did He do? He gave them the law. The law helps us avoid death and live. And He says: Therefore, choose life – He wasn't going to make them do it – that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying His voice, and holding fast to Him, for He is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers – to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob – to give them.*

Now that sounds pretty Old Testament – you know, like going over Jordan into the Promised Land. So we're going to come right now to a fundamental biblical principle. God's plan is *full* of duality. He teaches us that way. He sets examples and gives us examples that we can look at to

help us understand things that are going to happen now and in the future. So usually, the way this works, there's a physical event or object that is a shadow for something spiritual that comes later. For example, take the children of Israel. Let's read what Paul says about them in 1 Corinthians 10:1:

1 Corinthians 10:1 – *For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers – so we don't want to be unaware either, do we? – that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food – manna – and all drank the same spiritual drink – that was the rock that spouted water at Marah. ...and all drank the same spiritual, for they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.*

Going over the Jordan River – wading through it like they did – all whatever – 3 million of them – and passing into God's Promised Land is a shadow of going into the Kingdom of God. Ancient Israel were the people God was working with and they're a shadow of the church today. Moses was a shadow of Christ, who is our leader into salvation through the waters of baptism. Moses led the children of Israel the water of the Red Sea and Paul says that was their baptism.

Look in Galatians with me.

Galatians 6:16 – *And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.*

The Israel of God is the church today. He makes that connection when he calls it the Israel of God, because it was the Jews of old and the Israelites of old, and now it's the Church of God. Everyone can be in this Israel of God.

So we see a picture of what cast the shadow, which is the church, which Paul called the Israel of God. And here's the point of it all: it's valid to point to a scripture in the Old Testament – God speaking to Israel and telling them to choose life – because that is even more valid for us today. That was just a picture of what we have to do in this time. So, God wants us to *choose* to be like Him. And He says that, if we do that – if we abide in His Word and abide in Him – He will abide in us. So never look down on the Old Testament. When He told them to choose life, it wasn't just about the Ten Commandments...and that command is amplified and still applicable today. If we want to be like God and be in the Kingdom, we had better choose that way of life now, because this is our time.

Once we realize that God is not going to drag us against our will into His awesome Kingdom, once we realize we must *choose* to be like God, then let's look at the shadow again for some direction – in 1 Chronicles 28:9:

1 Chronicles 28:9 – *And you, Solomon, my son, know the God of your fathers and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought.* He understands His plan and His thoughts and He understands yours and mine. *If you seek Him, He will be found by you – if you choose to go after Him – but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever,* he told Solomon. *Be careful now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary. Be strong and do it.* Israel's job was to build a temple in Jerusalem.

Now there are many chapters following this scripture that detail exactly how God wanted to build His temple. He wanted them to do it, but He wanted them to do it His way. There was no room for creative design or planning on their part. God told them how and what to build. He also told them how financing would come for it. There was nothing there for them to worry about. God said, "I've told you what to do. It's be hard. Be strong and go after it! Do it! Just do what I tell you to do."

And what was this temple once it was built? Well, the temple was the center of their nation – the religious part of their nation – the place from which God speaks to the people through the priesthood. And in this ancient temple, in the innermost part of it, there was an ark. It was a box make out of wood. It was oblong, not square or a cube. It had a lid on it. The lid had two archangels carved on the lid with their wings touching each other – one was on one side and one on the other, apparently. And they formed an arch over the seat called the mercy seat. And it was all overlaid with gold. In the box, were the two tablets given to Moses that had the Ten Commandments written on them by God's own finger. Now this box, called the Ark of the Covenant, was a shadow cast by the throne of God in heaven – not only that, but our relationship with God going forward.

So the spiritual application of the two tablets.... And, if you think about it, God, figuratively, was sitting on them. They were under Him. The spiritual application of the two tablets means that God's relationship to us is always going to rest on the Ten Commandments. Jesus Himself told us, in the Sermon on the Mount – beginning in Matthew 5 – that the Ten Commandments, under the New Covenant, are *not* done away – how many people have you ever heard say that they are, directly contrary to what God said? – but amplified into a more spiritual application.

Now I once read about some people who believed that, since we now have the Holy Spirit, everything we do is holy. So, every day is holy. So every day is the Sabbath. So you don't have to single out the seventh day and rest on it, because that's just a physical thing and blah, blah, blah. That is totally contrary.... It would be laughable if it wasn't so outrageous and so sad. One of the men that was writing about this made the comment that Jesus had freed us from God. You know, God gave the Ten Commandments, and Jesus now, in His amplification of the law, made it unnecessary for us to keep God's harsh rituals. This is just...I'm speechless when I think about it, actually.

Jesus Himself told us that the Ten Commandments have *not* been done away, but they are amplified to a more spiritual application. Maybe we could say about the Sabbath, it's not that we just don't work, but that we spend our time worshipping God on that day, and drawing closer to Him. Another example would be, it's not good enough any longer to refrain from killing someone, but now we must not hate them either.

So Jesus' point was that God's foundation – the law of God – is still His foundation in dealing with all of us. Anyone who preaches contrary to that is not living in God's Spirit. But there's no need to condemn them or argue with them about it. If we're looking for a place to worship and somebody is preaching things that aren't really biblical, then it's okay to go somewhere else. Better there be peace.

We said that the temple is a shadow. And what is it a shadow of? Well, let's read Ephesians 2:19:

Ephesians 2:19-22 – *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God – so there's the family thing again, right? And anybody can be in it – not just the Israelites. The Israel of God is the church – built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. There it is! The temple of old was a shadow of a new temple, which is all the people that God has called and who are living by His ways and His plan. He's building us into a temple. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. So it's not finished yet. I'm not finished. Neither are you. God is working on us while we're breathing and He's creating us to be a part of His temple.*

Just as the first temple was habitation for God, the church is the place from where He communicates to Israel. The first temple – the shadow of things to come – was physical. The second temple – the church – is a body of believers. And that belief is maintained...or being a part of that group is a spiritual way of thinking. For the time being, there are physical people in it, but it is being built up to become completely spiritual when we are all born by the resurrection into God's Kingdom as His eternal children.

How does God go about using the spiritual temple – the church – to meet His objective of bringing us all to perfection and eternal life? Well, as we said, the church is a group of people who were invited by God to be a part of it. These people have understood God's work and have *chosen* to commit to be a part of it. And that commitment is what unifies all the members.

I was listening to a sermon, given by a Kenyan man. His name is James Matulu. I don't think he'd mind me mentioning his name. And he asked the question, "Have you ever been with someone that you didn't know and find out that you agreed on everything spiritually?" I had that experience myself. A man from the Church of God Seventh Day invited me to come work with him for three days. He was trying to create a curriculum for a religious school – training center

– and he wanted me to do some presentations for him. I had never met this man until he picked me up at the airport. We worked together for three days. We ate meals together. We talked. We studied the Bible. And we never could find anything that we disagreed about. It was a wonderful awesome experience. That happens when people are living by the Spirit. They think the same way together. And that same way is God’s way.

So the commitment that we make to follow God is what unifies all the members, no matter where they are, because all are following God’s instruction and living their lives the way He showed. When we were baptized, we were asked, “Do you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and your Lord and Master?” And we all said, “Yes, I do.” We learned that we were bought with a price. God redeemed us – bought us back from the devil – to be His children, and He to be our God. And we’re to believe Him, not the devil, any longer. So we become God’s agents, when we make that commitment, to go out into the world, as we live our lives, carrying with us, in our hearts, God’s law, His approach, His love, His mercy, His laws, His message, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that presence draws other people that God is looking for. We’re not trying to call everybody. We’re just trying to call the people that *God* is calling. I mean, we’re just trying to reach the people God is calling – not to call them. We don’t do that.

I, one time, watched a YouTube video by this guy who was a marketing person. And he mentioned that there isn’t really any way to reach everybody, if you’re trying to sell them tennis shoes or cologne or whatever. He said you’re only trying to reach a certain tribe of people, he called it, that would be interested in your product. You can’t reach everybody.

We can’t either. And it’s not necessary. All we have to do is set the right example, let our light shine – don’t put a bushel over it – and people that God is calling will be drawn to it. And when they see us, we have to make sure that they are seeing a shadow of Jesus Christ as their Savior. We have to live our lives to that effect.

I just answered my own question, which was, how is it that God uses us to increase His family and perfect us in the process? We have to *become* the work. We have to foreshadow Christ in our lives. We’re the shadow then. And that is getting us closer to the answer to the question I posed at the beginning of this presentation: How can we tell if others have the Spirit and how can we tell if we do? Well, let’s look at some of the things that the Bible tells us about how we’re to go about our work.

In 2 Corinthians 5:15, Paul says:

2 Corinthians 5:15 – *and He* – that’s Christ – *died for all* – not just for the Israelites, but everybody – *that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him, who for their sake, died and was raised*. Once we accept Christ’s sacrifice, what we’re doing is, we’re agreeing to live the way He lived, and not to live for ourselves, but for *Him* – to do what *He* wants. That’s our agreement with God.

So part of our job is that – ransomed by God from the devil – we surrender our whole lives to God and make everybody part of our lives available to Him. And that would mean that we speak our efforts to represent God, not out of our own plans, ideas, imaginings, but only God's. It's not that God doesn't want us to use our imagination and creativity. He just doesn't want our ideas to supersede His when it comes to doing His work. Remember what God told Solomon in the temple. He gave him very specific directions about what He wanted him to do and how to build it. It's wasn't Solomon's choice. It was God's!

Read with me something Jesus said in John 7:16.

John 7:16-17 – *So Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.”* So even Jesus, God's Son, was careful about this. It was on His mind that He was *not* going to speak His own things, but God's. And He said: *“If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory, but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.”* God does not lie.

So, if you look at the New Testament history in the book of Acts and the Epistles, we see a story – not long after the church started – of division and false teachings and false teachers. And in every case, the reason for these divisions was called by the apostles self-centered ambition. People who are converted, who are surrendered to God, do *not* think about climbing a ladder of control, but about letting God speak the words He has already spoken in the Bible through them. They are just the messenger. Right? It's not so important who's speaking it. What matters is, is it according to God's word?

John 14:23 – Here's what Jesus told His disciples:

John 14:23 – *“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.”* So He told them again, “I'm just telling you what I've been told by God.”

“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word.” It's easier to say, “I love God,” but the way we demonstrate that is by *living* by His word. And if we *do* that, God is going to love us, and He and Jesus will come make their home with us.” That's the Holy Spirit in us.

So there will always be people who will imagine themselves to have God's Spirit, and who keep their own will, and do not keep God's word. And there will always be people who understand how to do that in some things and not others. We're not perfected yet. But this is one way that we can know who has the Holy Spirit – including ourselves – who does not – and whether we have it or not. Remember, God told Solomon, “Here is how I want you to build the temple. Be strong,

and go and do it” – and I’ll put in parentheses – “the way I told you to.” So the same instruction applies today, as we have read.

The new temple God is building is composed not of physical stone, but *living* stones, we’re told in the scripture – people who believe and follow God, and who speak God’s plans rather than their own. In the days of old, it took a lot of financial power – money – to build the first temple, because it was physical. It doesn’t take any money to build the new one. It’s a spiritual activity – a mindset. It only takes each of God’s living stones to go into the world and live their new lives in Christ. And God, then, takes care of the rest. Now I know there are needs for money, but the thing is, God is going to take care of that for us.

In our church we argue about how to keep the Sabbath. Should we go out to eat at restaurants? What about the guy that’s running the power plant, and our lights are on at our house on the Sabbath? We argue about all that stuff. All that identifies who has the Spirit and who does not. And I’m not talking about one side of the argument or the other, but about the arguing itself. Assemble with the people who believe like you believe. And make sure that the way you believe is right. And when Jesus comes back, whether you’re right or the other side is right, He’s going to straighten all that out for us – in a heartbeat. So what do we think about the people on the other side of the argument in the meantime? Well, if they’re not trying to cause division, if they’re trying to do their best to follow God, wish them well and follow what you believe is the right thing. God looks on the heart. But beware. In Psalms 127:1:

Psalms 127:1 – *Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.*

We have seen so often people guided by their own desires, work to build something, and imagine it’s for God, only to see it fail to produce people dedicated to God. I was a part of a church once that, despite everybody’s best efforts, I believe, was not founded on God’s form of government. And no matter how much everyone worked in it, it shattered and lost its power. The only way to succeed in the new temple is to focus on what God wants us to do – clearly expounded in scripture. And if we do that, then God will provide what we need, just as He did with the shadow – the temple of old.

We don’t need to fret and worry about money, or facilities, or numbers. We see people who do fret about such things. And if we see them, we need to realize what that is. If we plan and fret about physical things, we need to realize what that is as well. The Holy Spirit does not create anxiety in us about physical things. That’s a lesson I had to learn.

Okay. Now, God does *not* expect us to be perfect before He and Jesus come to live in us. He knows we’re weak. It’s about intent. And that’s why the shadow of God’s Kingdom is a group of physical people who are in training. We’re *learning* how to surrender to God – first in one area of life, and then later, in others. God looks on our hearts.

So we start out wanting to follow God completely. And if we do that, then He'll go with it. And then He'll show us other areas of life where we need to let go of our own stuff and follow Him. I gave a presentation recently about Moses. It was called *Moses Bites the Bullet*. It's now a part of the series, *Bible Stories for Adults*, if you want to go look it up on the Website. As His last bit of perfecting work on Moses, God did *not* let him go into the Promised Land. He led God's people for forty years, and it was a real struggle – real trial for him. He had failed to represent God the way God wanted. It was a time when his faith grew weak and he didn't believe. So, since God wasn't allowing them to go into Jordan because of unbelief, he had to hold up the same standard to Moses. And because he failed to represent God the way God wanted, Moses got to *see* across the Jordan, but he did *not* get to go in. Just a reminder from the shadow, our surrender must be as complete as was Jesus surrender to save our lives.

When Elaine and I started LifeResource Ministries, God provided everything we needed and continues to do so over these years. But I had grown up in a family that was always on the edge financially. I never lacked for the basics, but my parents really struggled with that. And there was anxiety in our family about financial things. When I started working in the ministry, I received a paycheck every two weeks, just like clockwork. Sometimes I wished there were more of it, but I really didn't need more. We got by. But I got used to counting on that. And when we left the church that paid our salary to start our new ministry, we probably had more than we had before to live on, but it didn't come in regularly, like it did before. And I was anxious about that for quite a while. I finally had to give up that kind of thinking. It was a habit I had from my youth. God had *always* taken care of us, so what's to worry about? So this is a personal example of how God sometimes works slowly with us, gently strengthening us so we can more accurately reflect the mind of Christ in our lives and recognize it in the lives of others.

When we look ourselves, and find that we're not living just like Christ lived, we don't need to be afraid and run from it. We just need to acknowledge our weakness and ask God to help us. And He and Jesus, living in us, will bring us where we need to be. So there's something else that needs to be brought out here. It's in 1 Corinthians 15:1.

1 Corinthians 15:1-2 – *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

There were a lot of other people at that time competing for the attention of the brethren. Competing with the apostle Paul – can you imagine such a thing? Imagining that they were as good as he was spiritually, and called by God like he was, and given a special commission like he was. None of that was true, however. So he's telling, "Stick to what you've learned and what you believe – the truth – and hold fast to it."

So, imperfect though we are, if we follow the biblical gospel, the Father and Jesus *will* live in us.

So we need to be careful and be on the alert to hold fast to the accurate picture of God's way of life – not to stray away from it over time.

Now, I don't mean to say that just because you were brought up to believe something that it's true. It's only true if you can find it in the Bible. And we should not stray from that. In one of the churches I left, a lot of the people thought they were supposed to follow the church. I told several of them, "We're supposed to follow what God says in the Bible." And when the church stops doing that, that gotta go." We have to hold fast to the picture of God's way of life presented in scripture and not to stray away from it over time. We're to be a shining example of the lived Christian life. And if we *do* that, it's all going to turn out all right in the end.

It's easy to *talk* about following God. It's easy to tell others our plans are God's plans and to believe it ourselves. But talking is not what demonstrates that God the Father and Jesus are living in us. Action and intent prove that. Do our actions and intent align with God's word? Do you want to know if you have the Holy Spirit or if others have it? Well ask, "What are the intentions and what are their actions?" Do they line up with the Bible? The words, when we're trying to discern God in us or in someone else, probably not nearly as important. Talk is cheap. So it's the words, when we're trying to discern, that's not so important, but what really nails it down is what we do and what we intend.

Don't forget to check out our Website, liferesource.org. Lots of good stuff there for you. We're very appreciative of those who have been donating so faithfully to us over the years.

Until next time, this is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.