

# The Implication/Application of the Excellencies of God

## Lesson 2 – Transcendence and Immanence

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### Review

We live in a culture of instant gratification where people want things immediately. Believers can be tempted with this as well in their spiritual growth. Yet, there is no shortcut to the study of God. God designed growth in the knowledge of Him to be a lifetime pursuit culminating with your entrance into glory. This lifelong pursuit is something that we should never be satisfied with in the depth of our learning. Horner notes, “There can be no condensed learning of God; the very thought is an insult to His transcendent majesty.”

Creation itself declares the attributes of God in a general sense.

<sup>1</sup>The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. (Psalm 19:1)

<sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

Yet it is only in God’s specific self-revelation in the Bible that God has stated and exhibited His specific divine attributes or “excellencies”.

God is unable to be fully understood. He is “incomprehensible”. His greatness is too magnificent to fully comprehend. His greatness is beyond the finite mind’s ability to understand. Yet, we can know God truly and in a personal way in salvation as God is “revealed” to His adoptive children through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In salvation, “knowing” God is expressed in a mutual relationship.

We are studying the “attributes” of God. That word implies that we are ascribing a quality to God. We are not ascribing anything to God. We are looking to see what the Scriptures declare are God’s intrinsic qualities. Therefore, the better word to use is “excellencies”.

<sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God’s* own possession, so that you may proclaim the **excellencies** of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1 Peter 2:9)

God’s excellencies are the perfect, full manifestation of the characteristic and are intrinsic to His being. God “is” (name the excellency). God’s excellencies describe His nature. If any one of the excellencies found in Scripture were not found perfectly, fully in God, then God would not be God. Every excellency of God is so to the fullest, to the infinite. Because of the excellency of “infinitude”, we understand that the finite cannot fully grasp the infinite.

Not one of God’s excellencies is present or working at any one time more than any other. The excellencies do not “balance” each other. They are not partitioned. They are all part of His intrinsic, indivisible, simple being. This is why it is dangerous to focus on one excellency at a time because God never acts with only one excellency. They are all working perfectly, fully at the same time. We must think with a balance of all of God’s excellencies. Elevating any one in our thinking leads us to false thinking and therefore false living.

We must cultivate a deep understanding of God’s excellencies. When we see the high and lofty King for who He has revealed Himself to be in His word it drives us to our knees in worship; it moves us to deep love for our creator; it cultivates a heart motive to obey, please, honor, and glorify Him.

We are studying those characteristics or “excellencies” in order to know God better and be impacted by that knowing.

❖ **How did these truths about God’s excellencies impact you this week?**

### **Introduction**

What is the first characteristic that comes into your mind when you hear these words: God, Father, Christ, Spirit?

For many people (believer and non-believer alike), that first word will be the emphasized excellency of God or member of the Godhead. Without a self-awareness of the importance of carefulness related to emphasizing one excellency over another, we can become warped or lopsided in our thinking about God and, therefore, lopsided or warped in our walk with God.

Today we will begin to look at some of the absolute or incommunicable or divine excellencies. These are the qualities that God is NOT working to build in His children through the Spirit’s work of sanctification.

We will start with transcendency and immanency. Two excellencies that significantly impact our thinking. And in the extreme of either make us warped in our thinking.

### **Transcendence**

The excellency of transcendence (beyondness) means that God is distinct, far above, greater than His creation (including people) and independent from it (them). He is so lofty, so different from His creatures, so perfect and enthroned in glory, that there is no possible way we can approach Him in our own merit or strength, no possible way we can fathom His greatness, no possible way we can compare ourselves to Him.

Picture God as a mountain compared to yourself. You are less than seven feet tall (most likely). Then there are mountains. There is Mount Whitney in CA (14,505 ft elevation / 10,080 ft prominence), Mount Denali (formerly Mount McKinley) in Alaska (20,310 ft elevation / 20,146 ft prominence), and Mount Everest in Nepal (29,029 ft elevation / 29,029 ft prominence).



Whitney (~14Kft)



Denali (~20Kft)



Everest (~29Kft)

...And then there is God. We stand before him and we are like atoms before Everest. He is like the universe and we are like the Earth. He is so big we cannot fathom His bigness. He is infinite in elevation and infinite in prominence before us. He is such a majestic mountain that the peak cannot be seen with the naked eye or any human aid. Only through the eyes of Christ can He be seen.

It does not stop there. God is not just “bigger” than us. He is majestic and we are dust. He is the creator and we are the creature. This only begins to help us understand God’s transcendence. He is infinitely beyond us.

### ❖ How big is your view of God?

<sup>8</sup>“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup>“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

<sup>4</sup>The Lord is high above all nations; His glory is above the heavens. <sup>5</sup>Who is like the Lord our God, Who is enthroned on high, <sup>6</sup>Who humbles Himself to behold *The things that are* in heaven and in the earth? (Psalm 113:4-6)

<sup>7</sup>“Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?

<sup>8</sup>“*They are high as the heavens, what can you do?* Deeper than Sheol, what can you know? <sup>9</sup>“Its measure is longer than the earth And broader than the sea. <sup>10</sup>“If He passes by or shuts up, Or calls an assembly, who can restrain Him? (Job 11:7-10)

<sup>23</sup>And He was saying to them, “**You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.** (John 8:23)

<sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! <sup>34</sup>For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? <sup>35</sup>Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? <sup>36</sup>For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

### ❖ Do you place limitations on God?

#### Errors from Overemphasis on Transcendence

An overemphasis on God’s transcendence over other excellencies that describe His nearness (i.e., immanence) is associated with a variety of doctrinal errors, cults, and major world religions.

- Islam where there is no personal relationship with Allah.
- Gnosticism where god is beyond and never touching the inferior material realm since it was believed to be intrinsically evil.
- Deism where God is viewed as the clock winder of the universe, but is no longer personally involved in the universe’s activities.
- Satan’s lie that some of the redeemed believe that says that God is not intimately involved with their moment-by-moment life issues.

### ❖ Do you over-focus on God’s transcendence?

## Implications of Transcendence

Here are some implications/applications of understanding the transcendence of God.

- All people have intrinsic value because the transcendent God of glory has created each in His own image. Therefore, within the body of Christ, there is no place for making distinctions between people based on physical appearance, cultural background, financial background, religions background, gender, etc. (Colossians 3:11; Galatians 3:26-28)
- Because God is transcendent, we cannot adequately capture His transcendent majesty with limited human mental capacity. We cannot put God in a box. This does not mean that we stop trying to know God better, but that we understand there are some truths and ways of God that we will not be able to fully comprehend.
- Because God is transcendent, there is no possible way that sinful people can approach Him on their own terms. This should lead you to brokenness for sin.
- Because God is transcendent, so infinitely holy, salvation from sin for us lowly creatures cannot be our own achievement. It is impossible for man to find his way to God. God must first approach us, He must descend to provide salvation.
- Because God is transcendent, true knowledge of God only comes from His self-revelation in His written word and the living Word.
- Because God is transcendent, reverential awe is your appropriate response to Him. While there is new, abundant, joyful life for the redeemed, there must still be reverential awe for He is the almighty, sovereign, transcendent One.
- Because God is transcendent, we know that He works beyond nature. He works supernaturally. Natural humanism has no part in our thinking. We will not limit the working of God by mere human reason.
- Others?
- ❖ **Are you living out implications of transcendence?**

## Immanence

The excellency of immanence (nearness or intense closeness) means that God exists and remains in His creation. He is very much involved in creation. Creation is continually dependent on him for its existence and functioning. He is intimately involved in the affairs of people, particularly His redeemed since He intervened to make you His adopted child.

Wherever you are, there is God. No point in the universe or person who exists is nearer to God than any other. As the great expanses in the universe remind us of God's transcendence, the indescribable closeness in atoms in a molecule or molecules in a visible amount of matter, points us to the immanence of God.

<sup>7</sup>For what great nation is there that has a god **so near to it as is the LORD our God** whenever we call on Him? (Deuteronomy 4:7)

<sup>7</sup>Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? <sup>8</sup>If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. <sup>9</sup>If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, <sup>10</sup>Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. (Psalm 139:7-10)

<sup>23</sup>“Am I a God who is near,” declares the LORD, “And not a God far off? <sup>24</sup>“Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?” declares the LORD. “Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?” declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:23-24)

<sup>29</sup>Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And *yet* not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup>But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup>So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:29-31)

<sup>27</sup>that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, **though He is not far from each one of us**; <sup>28</sup>**for in Him we live and move and exist**, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’ (Acts 17:27-28)

<sup>3</sup>And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, **and upholds all things by the word of His power**. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup>having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. (Hebrews 1:3-4)

#### ❖ **Do you view God as less than He is because you view Him as natural only?**

##### Errors from Overemphasis on Immanence

An overemphasis on God’s immanence over other excellencies that describe His transcendence (beyondness) is associated with a variety of doctrinal errors, cults, and major world religions.

- Pantheism where God is all and all is God, hence the universe (nature) is God. God is without personality. These are New Age, eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism. These are the “spark” of divinity within people ideas. Christian Science also falls into this category.
- Classic Liberalism seeks to describe God in only natural terms rather than supernatural.

#### ❖ **Do you over-focus on God’s immanence?**

##### Implications of Immanence

Here are some implications/applications of understanding the immanence of God.

- Because God is immanent to everyone but not intimate with everyone (not everyone is a worshipper of the immanent One), we should be motivated in disciple making.
- Because God is immanent, He works intimately in the affairs of the universe, including the details of your life. Therefore, emotions like worry, anxiety, sadness, loneliness, etc. can be rejected because we have an immanent, intimate Lord.
- Because God is immanent, He is not limited in the way in which He works in your life. For example, in His infinite wisdom, goodness, and love, He may heal an ill person directly, by providing a skilled doctor, or not at all to accomplish His perfect purpose. Therefore, you should not be disappointed at the way the immanent, intimate One chooses to work individually in your life.

- Because God is immanent, He may use persons, organizations, or nations to accomplish His perfect purpose.
- Others?
- ❖ **Are you living out implications of immanence?**

### **Biblical Examples of Balanced Views of Transcendence and Immanence**

A biblical worldview sees God as both existing beyond and in the world, both transcendent and immanent. God is always majestic and beyond and yet near and involved. We see this co-existing throughout the Scriptures.

<sup>1</sup>Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. <sup>2</sup>Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. (Psalm 90:1-2)

When Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was about to attack Jerusalem... <sup>14</sup>Then Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of the Lord and spread it out before the Lord. <sup>15</sup>Hezekiah prayed before the Lord and said, “O Lord, the God of Israel, who are enthroned *above* the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. <sup>16</sup>Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see; and listen to the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. (2 Kings 19:15-16)

<sup>1</sup>In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. <sup>2</sup>Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup>And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.” <sup>4</sup>And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. <sup>5</sup>Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” <sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. <sup>7</sup>He touched my mouth *with it* and said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.” (Isaiah 6:1-6)

<sup>21</sup>Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? <sup>22</sup>It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. <sup>23</sup>He *it is* who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless. <sup>24</sup>Scarcely have they been planted, Scarcely have they been sown, Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth, But He merely blows on them, and they wither, And the storm carries them away like stubble. ... <sup>28</sup>Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. <sup>29</sup>He gives strength to the weary, And to *him who* lacks might He increases power. <sup>30</sup>Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, <sup>31</sup>Yet those who wait for the Lord Will gain new strength; They will mount up *with wings* like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary. (Isaiah 40:21-31)

<sup>15</sup>For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, “I dwell *on* a high and holy place, And *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite. (Isaiah 57:15)

<sup>23</sup>“Am I a God who is near,” declares the Lord, “And not a God far off? <sup>24</sup>“Can a man hide himself in hiding places So I do not see him?” declares the Lord. “Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?” declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 23:23-24)

<sup>4</sup>*There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

### **Conclusion**

A biblical understanding of transcendence and immanence sees God as both existing beyond and in the world. God is always majestic and beyond and also near and involved. He is lofty and beyond His creation and yet intimately involved with His creation. Both (as well as all others) working in perfect harmony.

### **Additional Study**

- Each day this week, reread the passages that we looked at today.
- After reading the passages, spend time in prayer only adoring God. Leave supplications for another time.
- Memorize Isaiah 57:15 which speaks to both transcendence and immanence.

<sup>15</sup>For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, “I dwell *on* a high and holy place, And *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite. (Isaiah 57:15)