**Lesson 9: The Transcendence and Immanence of God**

Exodus 15:11

11 Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

The idea of God’s transcendence is that the Lord is high above us or that He is seated in the heavens. It underscores the concept that the Lord is separate from the rest of creation and that to a certain extent none can attain to Him. Wayne Grudem writes, “Very simply, this means that God is far ‘above’ the creation in the sense that he is greater than the creation and he is independent of it.”[[1]](#footnote-1) In this sense, the transcendence of God is related to some of His other attributes like aseity and holiness.

The transcendence of God is coupled with the idea of His immanence. This refers to the teaching that even though God is transcendent in His being, at the same time He condescends to creation and is with us and among us. Though His place is on His throne in heaven, even still He is with us wherever we go. Related to God’s immanence, the Bible clearly teaches that God is the one who sustains creation. Hebrews 1:3 states, “He upholds the universe by the word of His power.”

God’s transcendence and immanence distinguishes Him from the gods of the nations. Their gods are detached and removed from creation, but our God is with us. The Apostle Paul highlighted this fact when he told the Athenians, “He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:25). So the teaching of transcendence and immanence can be summed up that God is infinitely distinct from creation and yet intimately and always involved in it.

John Frame: When philosophers and theologians speak of divine transcendence, they often interpret it to mean that God is so far from us that he can have little to do with our thought or experience. On this view, we cannot know God. Indeed, God cannot reveal himself to us in clear ideas, words, and sentences. Although this view can appear to be a pious recognition of God’s mystery, it actually fits best with claims to human autonomy. If God is so far from us that he cannot interact with us, cannot reveal himself, cannot speak to us, then practically speaking there is no God. We must then learn to live our lives without consulting God, that is, by our own autonomous thought.[[2]](#footnote-2)

*Questions for Discussion*

1. Read the following passages. Indicate whether each passage supports the idea of God’s transcendence, immanence, or both. Then write down a short summary of how each passage supports these doctrines.

a. Psalm 113:5-6.

b. Genesis 14:22.

c. Psalm 92:8.

d. Isaiah 6:1.

e. Isaiah 6:3.

f. Job 22:12.

g. Psalm 71:19.

h. Psalm 23:4.

2. How does the transcendence of God help establish His authority and sovereignty over all creation (cf. Ps. 123:1; Isa. 66:1)?

3. Deism teaches that God is like a divine clockmaker who created the world to be self-sufficient. Once the world started functioning according to His divine order, He allowed it to continue independent of Him. In deism, God is not involved in the affairs of the world and does not remain with us. How does the biblical doctrine of immanence contradict the teaching of deism? What are some passages from Scripture that stand against the teaching of deism?

4. In what ways does Jesus perfectly demonstrate God’s transcendence (cf. John 17:5; Heb. 12:2; Phil. 2:9-11; Eph. 1:20-21)?

5. In what ways does Jesus perfectly demonstrate God’s immanence (cf. Isa. 7:14; Matt. 28:20; 1 Tim. 2:5-6)?

**Glorify Thy Name/Jesus, Name Above All Names**

Father, we love You, we worship and adore You,

Glorify Thy name in all the earth.

Glorify Thy name, Glorify Thy name,

Glorify Thy name in all the earth.

Jesus, we love You, we worship and adore You,

Glorify Thy name in all the earth.

Glorify Thy name, Glorify Thy name,

Glorify Thy name in all the earth.

Spirit, we love You, we worship and adore You,

Glorify Thy name in all the earth.

Glorify Thy name, Glorify Thy name,

Glorify Thy name in all the earth.

Jesus, name above all names,

Beautiful Savior, glorious Lord.

Emmanuel, God is with us,

Blessed Redeemer, Living Word.

*Thoughts for Application*

1. Restate God’s transcendence and immanence in your own words.

2. How is the transcendence of God related to our worship of Him? If He was not transcendent, would He be deserving of all our praise?

3. How is the immanence of God related to our worship of Him? If He was not immanent, would He be deserving of all our praise?

4. How does the teaching of God’s transcendence and immanence help you in your understanding of the gospel?

5. How do some Christians today live as “practical deists” perhaps affirming God’s transcendence but living as though He was not immanent?

1. Grudem, 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Frame, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)