



## Course DC203: Transcendence of God

**“To whom will you liken Me, and make *Me* equal and compare Me, that we should be alike?” Isaiah 46:5**

**Intro:** God is incomprehensible. His greatness transcends human ability to think or imagine. Men are creatures, but He is the Uncreated God. He is what He was, is and always shall be—the eternal I Am, the never-changing God. To dwell upon the transcendence of God long is to soon discover that we are greatly limited by our creature abilities. He who is outside of creation, time, and change must reveal Himself to us—and He has in Christ. Jesus is **“the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person”** (Heb. 1:3). Truly, **“no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*”** (Matt. 11:27). There is great benefit in dwelling upon the incomprehensible God. Faith is deepened, His promises are trusted, and His concern and love for us move us to worship.

### God is Transcendent beyond Compare:

- **I *am* the Lord, and *there is no other*; *There is no God besides Me.* Isaiah 45:5**
- **<sup>3</sup> You shall have no other gods before Me. <sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of *anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth. Exod. 20:3-4**
- **“To whom will you liken Me, and make *Me* equal and compare Me, that we should be alike?” Isaiah 46:5**

### God is Immutable:

- **“For I *am* the Lord, I do not change”** Malachi 3:6
- **<sup>17</sup> Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath, <sup>18</sup> that by two immutable things, in which it *is* impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us*. Hebrews 6:17-18**
- **Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever.** Hebrews 13:8
- **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.** James 1:17

### This lesson has a twofold assignment:

**First:** There is a written section entitled, ***Things True about God***. It was written by Don Minkler, being most of the first chapter from “The Theology of the Cults Exposed and Refuted (Covering the Cults: Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unity),” used with permission. As you read, jot down any notes which may strike you as you dwell upon the incomprehensible God.

**Second:** There is a message/lecture for this course. A. W. Tozer speaks upon the immutability of God. The CD or mp3 downloaded from the internet can be accessed through the resident faculty member/pastor. Write a half-to one-page report concerning how correct theology needs to see God as being truly *transcendent*. Let your instructor read it.

# Things True about God

## (Image Worship Exposed as False)

Isaiah 45:5; Exodus 20:3-5; Isaiah 46:5

In the first of the Ten Commandments the Lord declared Whom we are alone to worship, for He alone is the True God, there is no other but Him. Concerning the Second of the Ten, it may appear to the casual observer that the command to make no “carved image or any likeness” is redundant. However, the Second Commandment is not redundant, but is vital in revealing how we are to worship Him Who alone is God. That is, the First Commandment primarily reveals WHOM we are to worship, and the Second Commandment primarily reveals HOW we are to worship Him – in spirit and in truth, without any image-making of our own.

Certainly, any image of a god or of the True and Infinite Lord God from finite man’s own devising must of necessity be false! Mankind is only able to think, imagine and create in terms of creature-finiteness. To whom or what shall we liken the uncreated transcendent God? Idolatry is not just confined to creating an idol in the manner of the unsophisticated heathen nations, but it is an idolatrous heart that willfully imagines God to be contrary to how He has revealed Himself. A.W. Tozer well said, “. . . idolatry is at the bottom a libel on His character. The idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than He is—in itself a monstrous sin—and substitutes for the true God one made after its own likeness . . . A god begotten in the shadows of a fallen heart will quite naturally be no true likeness of the true God.”<sup>1</sup> This sort of idolatry

is always found in cults, for false religions invent their own image of who God is. However, let *every-one* who would be free from idolatry be diligent himself to not entertain any thoughts that are unworthy of God, for it is easy for us to slip into such.

God is transcendent beyond our highest and best thoughts. Therefore, when one sets His heart to worship the One True God, let him come humbly, ready to adore and worship rather than to explain, supply or invent information, let him be diligent to receive what God is pleased to reveal of His Infinite Nature rather than become one “who darkens counsel by words without knowledge” (Job 38:2). After hearing from God, Job humbly and rightly replied, “Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know” (Job 42:3). Job’s words serve well the one who undertakes the task of theology in its most restricted sense – the study of the Nature of God Himself, reminding us that we are finite creatures capable only of creature thoughts and expressions.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1961), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Theology is often used in a general way to describe one’s doctrinal positions on various thoughts, all of which in some degree reflect his/her understanding of God. However, strictly speaking, theology is the study of God Himself. That very sober reality should cause every one who undertakes such a study to do so humbly, adoringly and worshipfully. Russell Byrum wrote, “Our idea of the nature and operations of God is of fundamental importance. It determines what is the nature of our religion and theology. . . . This study about the Nature of God is the study of theology in the more restricted and exact sense of the term.” Russell R. Byrum, *Christian Theology* (Anderson, IN: Gospel Trumpet Company, 1950), 179.

A.W. Tozer, with piercing insight wrote, “The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God (*italics mine*).” Tozer, *Knowledge*, 9.

A worthy and exalted view of God begins in the realization that He is higher than our best words, imagination and ability to appreciate. We must possess the unshakable realization that our creature limitations will certainly cause us to fail in our grasping after, speaking for, or in our comprehension of *His exaltedness*.

### **The Need for Awe Before The Transcendent God**

When considering the Lord God Almighty, there is a little three letter word that is all too suspiciously (and shamefully) absent in today's various religious environments (sadly that includes much of the "Christian" world). It's a word, however, which is inseparably associated with the holiest and most useful of God's creatures, whether we speak of men or of flaming seraphim above. It is the word *AWE*. There is nothing which would better cure the troubles affecting a weak Christianity like a fresh dose of awe before the exalted transcendent God.

"God is transcendent!" – says every useful theology book in one manner or another, and rightly so. But what does it mean to say that God is transcendent? Just here we can point the direction the word will take us, but we cannot travel in that direction as far as our pointing indicates. For transcendent means beyond human comprehension and experience – beyond human words, thoughts, imagination, and ability to comprehend and appreciate! God is transcendent beyond creature vocabulary, thoughts and ability to comprehend.

Allow me to multiply a few creature words and thoughts by way of pointing out how miserably we must fail in comprehending the transcendent God. By way of an example, we may hear one say: "We serve a big God" – but by doing so, we speak with unworthy thoughts of God! Perhaps the heart is right in the one who says that, but

technically, the words are all wrong! He is transcendent beyond the unworthy creature word "big" – for big implies a comparison to something small. But God is infinite, being beyond comparison! One may speak by comparison only of created things, such as comparing a grape to a watermelon. Now, creature words and understanding may say that the grape is small and a watermelon is big, because we can do a little math and say that the watermelon is so many hundreds of times bigger than the grape. The "bigness" of the watermelon is grasped by the "smallness" of the grape for our starting point, and thus we may compare. But the word big will never accurately describe God's transcendent exaltedness, for we have no starting point! There is nothing we can compare the uncreated, immutable Lord God to as a point of reference! "To whom will you liken Me, and make Me equal and compare Me, that we should be alike?" (Isa. 46:5). "Big" implies limits, and therefore is not a true transcendent word – but God is transcendent, beyond our mind's ability to imagine! Again, big implies that with enough math we can obtain a size comparison – but God is transcendent! He cannot be measured! Thus, how sinful for us to make an image of God!

Again, a right theology acknowledges that God is infinite. But infinite is a transcendent word itself, indicating what is beyond comprehension. Strictly speaking, it is quite unworthy to say of God that He is infinitely stronger (or greater, or wiser, etc.) than a lion, a man, or an archangel and so forth – for we have no business comparing God with any created thing as a frame of reference. Rather, God is infinite *beyond all comparison*. As Tozer said, "... in the universe there are really only two things, God and not God – that which is God and that which is not God."<sup>3</sup> Amen! There is either God, or that which God has made/created, whether one speaks about things in heaven or things on earth, whether

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<sup>3</sup> A.W. Tozer, *Christ the Eternal Son* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 1982), 14-15. I am unable to trace out and give credit to all the ways in which I have been blessed through A.W. Tozer's works, except to say that I am grateful to God for his writing and preaching, and I largely credit his works with opening up my mind to the transcendence of God. If anything of the fragrance of Tozer is detected, it is because I have spent much time in his garden.

we speak of visible created things or invisible created things, whether we speak about thrones, dominions, power, or anything imaginable – there is God or not God (Col. 1:16). And there is nothing that is “not God” to which He can be worthily compared.

Likewise, the creature word “above” in relation to God is meaningless, unless we couple the word “above” with the meaning of transcendent so that it only points to what we cannot comprehend. For directionally, God is no more “above” us than He is to the “right” of us, or the “left” of us – or to the “front” or “back” of us, and the everlasting arms are no more above us than underneath us — “for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28)!

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Likewise, all additions to the creature words we may use to speak of God, such as the “quality” of God’s greatness, or the “degree” of His majesty — fail again. For these are creature words that speak of measurement, but God is “beyond” measurement (yet I trip over my words again, for “beyond” is a creature word indicating distance, yet

God is everywhere at once). All words, thoughts and attempts to scientifically comprehend and express the Lord God Almighty must fail us! The best we can do is use these words, thoughts and ideas only by blending them with the sense of “transcendent” — which is a word that confesses we cannot comprehend its meaning, since it points us to where we admit no man’s understanding can go.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, how sinful indeed whenever religious innovations of men have “changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image” (Rom. 1:23) – which is the idolatry behind every false religion.

Awe becomes us well at the consideration of God, for even those attributes which Christians commonly think they have down, saying that God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, are in themselves transcendent words – being beyond our comprehension! The usefulness to our creature minds to separate the “omni’s” into these three categories so that we can more readily appreciate and think upon them independently, only reveals our inability to fully comprehend the transcendent prefix word “omni” in relation to the Person of God. That God is omnipresent (everywhere at once) means that He must be omnipotent, else He could not be everywhere at once. And to have all power and be everywhere at once means He must be omniscient as well, for to be everywhere means He knows what is going on everywhere. The omni’s of the Divine Nature are not divided from one another but rather demand that they all work in unity. But for the sake of our human weaknesses, let us focus upon but one aspect of God’s transcendence, His omniscience.

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<sup>4</sup> I am quite aware that the words I have used to describe “transcendence” are able to be picked apart as creature words themselves! Understand that I am aiming at stirring an adoring, worshipful and awe-inspired heart in the reader, rather than seeking to satisfy the scientific mind. Indeed, it is all that we can safely do when we consider theology in its most restrictive sense. But thank God that He allows us to use creature words, for we cannot help it, for creatures we are. Thank God that for our benefit He even condescends to reveal aspects of His incomparable exaltedness to us through the medium of creature words and thoughts. Russell Byrum pointed out, “. . . God is spirit . . . Those Scripture statements which seem to represent Him as having bodily parts, as eyes, ears, hands, are anthropomorphic and are mere adaptations in language to represent knowledge attained or actions executed such as a man accomplishes by the use of such organs. [And, in referring to various ways in which God had manifested Himself to some in the Old Testament (as a Man, the burning bush, the pillar of fire, etc.) Byrum continued] . . . These manifestations which are technically known as theophanies are, however, not indicative of the essential nature of God, but are only forms assumed for the occasions.” –Russell R. Byrum, *Christian Theology* (Anderson, IN: Gospel Trumpet Company, 1950), 184-185.

To say that God has all knowledge means that He knows more than just all *actual* knowledge (whether past, present or future). It means He knows all *possible* knowledge as well. That is, He knows what the world would be like today if Adam had remained holy and Eve alone had sinned. He knows what would have happened if Hitler had gotten saved, or what would have happened if you and I had made different choices. He is ALL KNOWING – and therefore He could say to Chorazin and Bethsaida, “. . . if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (Matt. 10:21).

Furthermore, to consider His omniscience is to acknowledge that He is eternal and outside of time since He knows the future as plainly as He knows the past and present. It reveals as well that He is infinite, there being no limit to what may be known. Thus, if one had the ability to do so, he could no doubt show how everything men divide up concerning “attributes” could be used to reveal any other attribute that belongs to God alone. Tozer powerfully nailed this home, saying, “The harmony of His being is the result not of a perfect balance of parts but of the absence of parts. Between His attributes no contradiction can exist. He need not suspend one to exercise another, for in Him all His attributes are one. All of God does all that God does; He does not divide Himself to perform a work, but works in the total unity of His being.”<sup>5</sup>

To begin to get a glimpse of the Majestic Lord God is to get all the theological stuffing knocked out of us and say with Job, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6).<sup>6</sup> Consider the larger quote, after Job’s inadequate theology had melted

away and he came to behold God in a transcendent manner:

**<sup>2</sup>I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. <sup>3</sup>You asked, “Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?” Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. <sup>4</sup>Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, “I will question you, and you shall answer Me.” <sup>5</sup>I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. <sup>6</sup>Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes. Job 42:2-6**

Isaiah’s encounter with God in the temple and Saul’s encounter on the Damascus road reveal the same. What shall we say but,

**<sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! <sup>34</sup>“For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?” <sup>35</sup>“Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?” <sup>36</sup>For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:32-36**

God is infinite, He is eternal, He is self-sufficient – all things flow from Him and are held together by the Word of His power. He needs nothing from anyone, else He would not be the eternal I AM. Let us worship Him! But let us never make an “image” of Him. That is idolatry indeed – and this is what every cult and false religion has done, they have made an image.

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<sup>5</sup> Tozer, *Knowledge*, 23.

<sup>6</sup> In view of God’s transcendence, I have not written this without fearfully wondering if in some “creature” way I have multiplied “words without knowledge.” However, in spite of creature limitations, I know my heart is at least on the right track, for I have been drawn to adoringly worship Him through doing so. It is hoped that the reader’s spirit has worshiped along with mine in the truth that He is exalted beyond man’s ability to comprehend. To speak about His transcendence is to say with Job, “Indeed these are the mere edges of His ways, and how small a whisper we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power who can understand?” (Job 26:14).

However, even when a member of a cult or false religion will not bow their pride before the inspired Word of God, this does not mean we cannot reason with them in a manner that exposes the folly of their images of God. For man already innately knows or can innately recognize that God is transcendent. Their images of God fail when compared to the transcendent God who has made manifest “His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.” Their own honest judgment (if they would vocalize it) admits that our Rock is greater than their images, even as Deuteronomy 32:31 declares, “For their rock is not like our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.” Notice, *even our enemies themselves being judges* (“as even our enemies concede” N.I.V.)! To reveal what God has manifested of Himself is to expose the cults and false religions, have a bridge of reasoning with them, and open the door for sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **Christ, The Express Image of The Invisible God or What Kind of God is The Transcendent God?**

Since the Divine Nature is transcendent (Isa. 46:5), since in Him we live and move and have our being – there being no place we can flee from His presence (Acts 17:28, Ps. 139:7-12), since all things are naked and open before Him to whom we must give an account (Heb. 4:13) — it is natural that men should inquire, “Is He a good God or an evil God?” All depends upon who He is, since He is omnipotent/omniscient/omnipresent.

Thank God that we can have perfect peace in knowing that He is indeed good! For though God has revealed through creation some things about Himself which all men can innately recognize to be true about God (i.e., “His invisible attributes . . . eternal Power and Godhead”), creation *does not reveal the complete revelation of Himself to the creature, but primarily reveals only His righteousness, wisdom and transcendence before men.* But

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His wonderful love, kindness, gentleness, desire for fellowship, grace and truth and the like, such revelation to men could not come through the things made, but could only be hinted at through creation.

However, when it came time for Him to make known His full and complete revelation of Himself to His creation in language that the creature could understand, “The Word [Who was with God and was God] became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory” (John 1:14). God’s full and express revelation of Who He is *without any compromise at all*, and yet, being expressed in creature language/understanding/words – was accomplished in the *WORD* becoming flesh, and dwelling among us! Thus, “. . . great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). Worship Him!<sup>7</sup>

Man needed not only the first of the Ten Commandments (not to have any other gods before Him), man needed the Second Commandment as well (not to make any graven image or any likeness of God at all), for the image of God we would create would only be corrupted, would only be wrong, false, and a conception full of errors – idolatry! Man could never conceive the express image of God. But when the time was right, when it became time to reveal His express image of Himself to mankind (rather than another Old Testament partial and inadequate revelation of who He is) – GOD HIMSELF GAVE THE EXPRESS IMAGE OF HIMSELF IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST! Praise God! For God, Who alone

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<sup>7</sup> Hannah Whitall Smith wrote, “Christ revealed God by what He was, by what He did, and by what He said. From the cradle to the grave, every moment of His life was a revelation of God. We must go to Him then for our knowledge of God, and we must refuse to believe anything concerning God that is not revealed to us in Christ. All other revelations are partial, and therefore not wholly true. Only in Christ do we see God as He is; for Christ is declared to be the “express image” of God.” *Ibid.*, 22.

could give the image of Himself to man, has done so – He has given the express image of Himself in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Seeing Him, we see God. Hear the Scripture at this point and let every worshipping heart humbly bow before Him who alone is worthy!

<sup>1</sup>God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; <sup>3</sup>*who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high* (Heb. 1:1-3 [italics mine]).

<sup>15</sup>He is the *image of the invisible God*, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup>For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup>And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. <sup>18</sup>And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence (Col. 1:15-18 [italics mine]).

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, *He has declared Him* (John 1:18 [italics mine]).

"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; *and from now on you know Him and have seen Him*" (John 14:7 [italics mine]).

*He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, "Show us the Father?"* (John 14:9 [italics mine]).

*I and My Father are one* (John 10:30 [italics mine]).

<sup>27</sup>All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and *no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.* <sup>28</sup>Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matt. 11:27-30 [italics mine]).

<sup>4</sup>. . . *Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.* <sup>5</sup>For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup>For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts *to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (2 Cor. 4:4-6 [italics mine]).

Notice that last line – God has given us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ! Therefore, in answer to any question about how we shall have any rest of soul before the omnipresent/omniscient/omnipotent/transcendent God, we may respond with absolute confidence and joy — *because He is exactly as Jesus is.* Seeing Jesus, we see God. The Transcendent God is as lovely as Jesus. He cares about sinful men the way Jesus does. The way Jesus felt and dealt with sinful people (such as the woman caught in adultery) is how God feels and deals with sinful people. The way that Jesus cared about tax collectors, sinners, the broken and grieving, about children – as well as about hypocrites – is exactly how the Transcendent God feels, for Jesus is the express image of His Person. Anything we desire to know about the invisible God is revealed in Jesus, for He is *"the image of the invisible God."* Therefore, why can the believer set his heart at rest before the Transcendent God? Because He is exactly what Jesus is — Jesus is this transcendent God manifested in human flesh! Concerning who is God, Tozer so beautifully said:

