

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Eternality of God

Lesson #14

The eternity of God is one of the most fascinating and at the same time mind bending attributes of God. Most who believe in God will readily acknowledge that He exists forever. But what exactly does that mean? We are creatures of time and only know what it means to exist within time. All our vocabulary takes the time that we exist in for granted. But what about God? Did God experience the succession of moments before anything was created? Did God create time on the first day of creation, “in the beginning.” Does God exist outside of time? Does God exist within time? Does time exist within God himself? Does God exist at all times, past, present, and future simultaneously, in the “eternal now?” Believers are give the free gift of eternal life. How does our “eternal life” different from God’s eternity, or the eternity of angels, animals, and plants? These are the kinds of questions that make studying the eternity of God fascinating. So, let’s jump in!

I. DEFINITION OF GOD’S ETERNALITY

A. Louis Berkhof defines God’s eternity as,

“That perfection of God whereby He is elevated above all temporal limits and all succession of moments, and possesses the whole of His existence in one indivisible present.”¹

B. Stephen Charnock describes God’s eternity saying,

“Eternity is a perpetual duration, which hath neither beginning nor end; time hath both. Those things we say are in time that have beginning, grow up by degrees, have succession of parts; eternity is contrary to time, and is therefore a permanent and immutable state; a perfect possession of life without any variation; it comprehends in itself all years, all ages, all periods of ages; it never begins; it endures after every duration of time and never ceases; it doth as much to outrun time, as it went before the beginning of it: time supposes something before it; but there can be nothing before eternity; otherwise it would not be eternity.”²

II. ILLUSTRATIONS OF ETERNITY

A. Thomas Watson stretches out minds to consider God’s eternity saying,

“If you were to take all the earth, all the sky, and all the space of the universe and convert it into sand, and if every year you removed one tenth

¹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pg. 60.

² Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, pg. 279-80.

of a grain of sand away, the years it would take to remove all the sand away would be less than a moment in eternity.”³

B. C. S. Lewis illustrates God’s eternal nature saying,

“Think of a sheet of paper infinitely extended. That would be eternity. Then on the paper draw a short line to represent time. As the line begins and ends on that infinite expanse, so time began in God and will end in Him.”⁴

C. Stephen Charnock illustrates God’s eternality,

“Eternity and time differ as the sea and rivers; the sea never changes place, and is always one water; but the rivers glide along, and are swallowed up in the sea; so is time by eternity.”⁵

III. THOUGHTS TO PONDER ABOUT GOD’S ETERNITY

A. God is always face to face with every year, every month, every day, every second, and every moment that has ever been. He lives in the eternal now and sees all time at once.

B. Because God is eternal He is apart from time. Time is a creation of God and comes from God having a beginning and an end. Anything which exists before and after time is eternal.

C. Because God is eternal everything He says will last forever because He is always there to make it last.

D. Stephen Charnock writes,

“Let us be deeply affected by our sins long since committed. Though they are past with us, they are in regard of God's eternity, present with him; there is no succession in eternity, as there is in time. All things are before God at once; our sins are before him, as if committed this moment, though committed long ago. As he is what he is in regard of duration, so he knows what he knows in regard of knowledge. As he is not more than he was, nor shall not be any more than he is, so he always knew what he knows and shall not cease to know what he now knows. As himself, so his knowledge, is one indivisible point of eternity. He

³ Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, pg. 63.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, quoted by A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, pg. 40.

⁵ Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, pg. 280.

knows nothing but what he did know from eternity; he shall know no more for the future than he now knows. Our sins being present with him in his eternity, should be present with us in our regard of remembrance of them and sorrow for them.”⁶

IV. SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR THE ETERNITY OF GOD

- A. Exod. 3:14 – “God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ”
- B. Psa. 90:2-4 – “Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. 3 You turn man back into dust And say, “Return, O children of men.” 4 For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a watch in the night.”
- C. Psa. 102:12 – “But You, O Lord, abide forever, And Your name to all generations.”
- D. Prov. 8:22-31 -- “The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. 23 “From everlasting I was established, From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth. 24 “When there were no depths I was brought forth, When there were no springs abounding with water. 25 “Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills I was brought forth; 26 While He had not yet made the earth and the fields, Nor the first dust of the world. 27 “When He established the heavens, I was there, When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, 28 When He made firm the skies above, When the springs of the deep became fixed, 29 When He set for the sea its boundary So that the water would not transgress His command, When He marked out the foundations of the earth; 30 Then I was beside Him, as a master workman; And I was daily His delight, Rejoicing always before Him, 31 Rejoicing in the world, His earth, And having my delight in the sons of men.”
- E. Eph. 3:21 – “. . .to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”
- F. I Tim. 6:16 – “. . .who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.”
- G. II Pet. 3:8 – “But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.”

6 Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, pg. 303.

V. **ERRORS CONCERNING THE ETERNITY OF GOD**

- A. Error -- God is a created being.
- B. Error -- There are many eternal gods.
- C. Error -- God exists from endless *time* past into endless *time* future.⁷
- D. Error -- God's actions, judgements, and ways should be evaluated to see if they are true and correct.

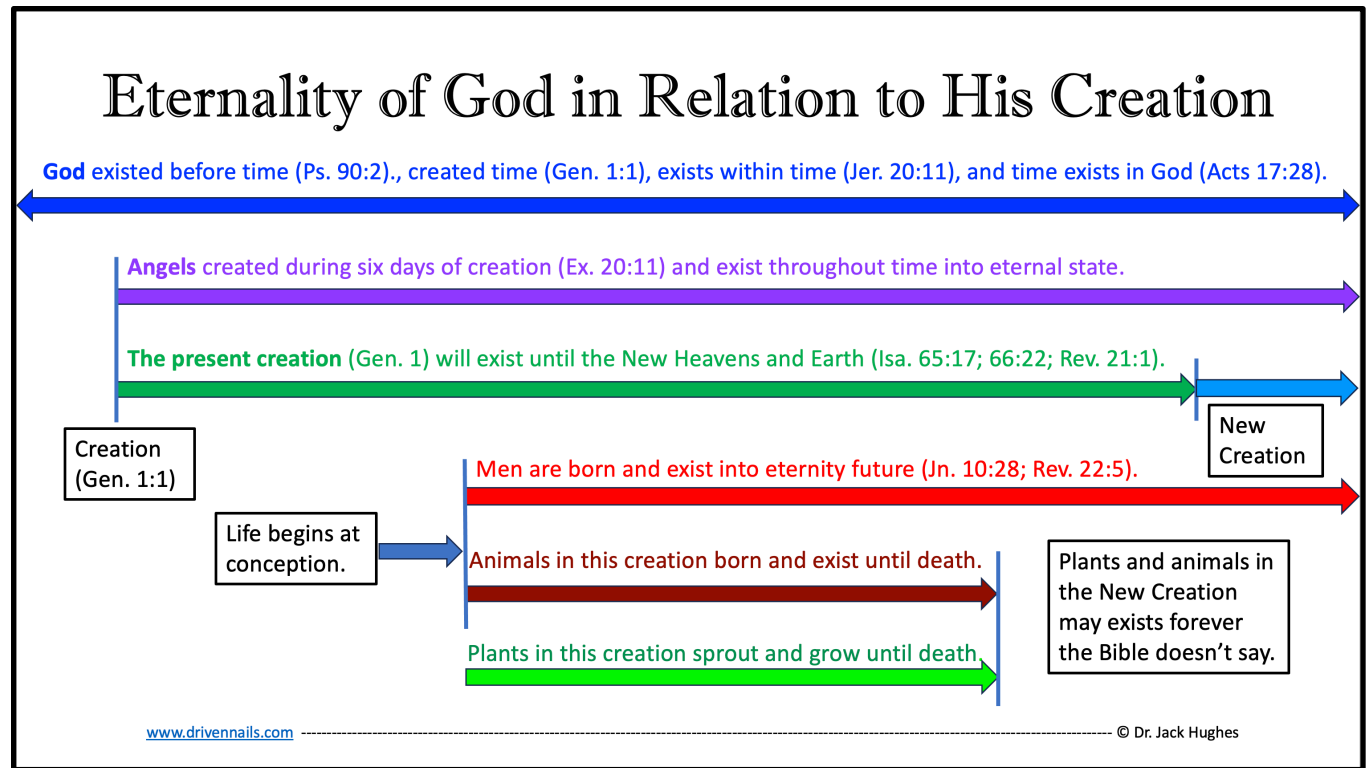
It is important to note that one of the most difficult problems which men have had in studying the eternity of God is how to allow God to be eternal but also exist apart from time. Eternity usually is connected with time but in God's case He is free from time, yet eternal!

"The counsels of a boundless being are not to be scanned by the brain of a silly worm, that hath breathed but a few minutes in the world. Since eternity cannot be comprehended in time, it is not to be judged by a creature of time."
Stephen Charnock

VI. **VISUAL GRAPHIC ATEMPTING TO ILLUSTRAT GOD'S ETERNAL NATURE**

- A. Below is a graphic which attempts to illustrate that God's eternity is different than the eternity of angels or believers having eternal life, or unbelievers suffering eternal torment in the lake of fire.

⁷ A.W. Tozer said, "*God dwells in eternity but time dwells in God.*" Ibid. pg. 39. God exists within time, but also outside of time.



B. Heb. 1:10-12 – “And, “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the works of Your hands; 11 They will perish, but You remain; And they all will become old like a garment, 12 And like a mantle You will roll them up; Like a garment they will also be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end.”

VII. APPLICATION OF THE ETERNITY OF GOD

- A. Because God is eternal, hell and its torments are eternal.
- B. Hell can be seen eternally in three ways:
1. Without intermission: (see Isa. 30:33⁸)
 2. Without mixture: (see Rev. 14:10)
 3. Without cessation: (see Rev. 14:11)

“Eternity is a sea without bottom and banks. After millions of years, there is not one minute in eternity wasted; and the damned must be ever burning, but never consuming, always dying but never dead.”
Thomas Watson

8 According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* the word "Stream" (KJV) or "Torrent" (NASB) "Usually refers to a dry riverbed or a ravine which in the rainy season becomes a raging torrent.

- C. If God is eternal then heaven and its treasures are eternal. Knowing this, how should we then live?
1. Rom. 2:7 – “. . .to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life.”
 2. II Cor. 4:17-18 – “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”
 3. I Thess. 4:17-18 – “Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.”
 4. I Pet. 5:4 – “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”
- D. Knowing hell is eternal should motivate us to share the gospel (II Cor. 5:11).
- E. Knowing that eternal suffering in the lake of fire is a consequence of sin, we should be motivated to live holy lives (Heb. 12:14).
- F. Knowing life is short, but heaven and hell are eternal, we should be motivated to redeem the time (Eph. 5:16).

“That the Judge and punisher lives forever, is the greatest grievance to a soul in misery, and adds an inconceivable weight to it, above what the infiniteness of God's executive power could do without that duration. His eternity makes the punishment more dreadful than his power; his power makes it sharp, but his eternity renders it perpetual; ever to endure is the sting at the end of every lash. And how sad is it to think that God lays his eternity to pawn for the punishment of obstinate sinners.”
Stephen Charnock

*Brief life is here our portion,
Brief sorrow, short lived care;
The life that knows no ending,*

The tearless life is there.

*There God, our King and Portion,
In fullness of His grace,
We then shall see forever,
And worship face to face.*
Bernard of Cluny