

UNIT 1: The Attributes of God

Section 9: God's Eternality

Assigned Reading:
A. W. Pink – The Attributes of God
No Assigned Reading

Introduction:

Having discussed God's Aseity, Unity, and Immutability in our previous weeks, it is appropriate to move on in our discussion to attributes of God that are typically grouped together under the heading of God's Infinity or Infinitude. These help give fuller description of what we mean when we speak of God being "perfect" in His existence... He is not bound or restricted by anything, for everything is a creation of His. He is unlimited in regards to time, space, power, and knowledge. We'll be looking at each of these specifically in coming weeks: Eternality, Omnipresence, Omnipotence, and Omniscience.

This morning we will be studying God's Eternality. Because God is infinite, He is not limited by time.

It is interesting to note how other "attributes of God" argue for God's Eternality as well...

Immutability: If God does not change, time does not change God. **J. Feinberg** explains, "If God is totally unchangeable, nothing at all about him changes. If God always existed, but did so in successive stages so that what he was or knew differed from one point in his life to the next, he would not be immutable."

Simplicity: Time has no effect on God's being, perfections, purposes, or promises. **J. Feinberg** explains, "To be simple is to have no parts; to be temporal is to have successive stages in one's life, but that is parts. A timeless being has no temporal stages in his existence, so a simple being must be timeless.

Omniscience: We'll also discover how this has impact on God's knowledge. This implies that the passing of time does not add or detract from God's knowledge. He knows all things past, present, and future!

There also exists an argument from **Creation**: If God exists in time, He must have existed an infinitely long time before creating our universe. "But creating this universe was certainly a good thing to do, so why did he wait to create until he did? What was he doing before he created? On a temporal view of eternity, there seems to be no adequate answer to these questions" (Feinberg, 391). What "happened" to suddenly cause God to create?

Q1: What is time?

Q2: What is God's relationship to time?

Q3: What is man's relationship to time?

Outline:

I. Defining God's Eternality

A. Defining Time...

1. To speak of eternity, we must understand what we mean by time...
2. **Augustine** wrote, "What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain to one who asks, I do not know. Nevertheless, I confidently affirm that I know that if nothing passed away, there would not be past time; and if nothing were coming, there would not be a future time; and if nothing were, there would not be present time."
3. **Culver**, "... our minds can settle for "duration." There is a certain arbitrariness about this approach, for the past no longer exists, as such, and the present strictly is only a "line" through which duration passes to become the future, which as yet does not exist."

B. Various Theologians

1. **Grudem**, "God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and he sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time."
2. **Ryrie**, "God exists endlessly. His existence extends endlessly backward and forward (from our viewpoint of time) without any interruption or limitation caused by succession of events."
3. **Berkhof**, "Eternity is 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."
4. **Erickson**, "God is the one who always is."
5. **Theological Charts**, "God is free from succession of time"

II. Discussing God's Eternality (*Grudem*)

A. God is Timeless in His Own Being

1. **The God of Eternity:**
 - a. God is infinite in relation to time
 - b. **Gen 21:33** *Abraham* planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. [*El Olam*]
 - c. **1 Timothy 1:17** Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.
 - d. **Isaiah 40:28** 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.
 - e. **Romans 16:26** "the everlasting God..."
2. **No Beginning or End: Psalm 90:2** Before the mountains were born Or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.
3. **God's years are eternal:**
 - a. **Job 36:26** "Behold, God is exalted, and we do not know *Him*; The number of His years is unsearchable.
 - b. **Deuteronomy 33:27** "The eternal God is a dwelling place, And underneath are the everlasting arms; And He drove out the enemy from before you, And said, 'Destroy!'"
4. **God has always been:**
 - a. **Revelation 1:8** "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." **4:8** And the four living creatures, each

one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY *is* THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."

- b. **Exodus 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.'"
 - c. **John 8:58** Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."
 - d. **Isaiah 57:15** 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.
5. **God created all things:**
- a. **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
 - b. **John 1:3** All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.
 - c. **1 Corinthians 8:6** yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him.
 - d. **Colossians 1:16** For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him.
 - e. **Hebrews 1:2** in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.
 - f. **Grudem**, "The study of physics tells us that matter and time and space must all occur together: if there is no matter, there can be no space or time either. Thus, before God created the universe, there was no "time," at least not in the sense of a succession of moments one after another."
 - g. **When God created the Universe, He also created time.**
 - h. **Boethius**: "Eternity is the complete possession of eternal life all at once."
 - i. **Anselm**: "Thou was not, then, yesterday, nor wilt thou be tomorrow; but yesterday and today and tomorrow thou art; or, rather, neither yesterday, nor today nor tomorrow thou art; but, simply, thou art, outside all time. For yesterday and today and tomorrow have no existence, except in time; but thou, although nothing exists without thee, nevertheless dost not exist in space or time, but all things exist in thee."
 - j. **Tozer**, "Time marks the beginning of created existence, and because God never began to exist it can have no application to Him."
6. From these points, we must say that God's relationship to time is qualitatively different from ours. Many have articulated this difference by saying that God is "ABOVE TIME" and that His existence is always somehow "present" – called "the eternal now"
7. If God is said to have always existed "in time" experiencing an infinite number of moments of succession, the present becomes impossible. For God to have experienced a past infinitely long, we cannot have reached this moment. Philosophically, an actual infinite cannot exist. So, instead, we state God exists "above time." – Augustine of Hippo was one of the 1st to articulate God's "Timelessness."

B. God Sees All Time with Equal Vividness

1. Due to the above, we can conclude that God sees all of time with equal clarity!
2. **Psalm 90:4** For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a watch in the night.
 - a. **Grudem**, "... the clarity of our memory fades with the passing of time. Even if it were possible for us to live "a thousand years," we would remember very few events from hundreds of years earlier, and the clarity of that memory would be very low. But here Scripture tells us that God views a thousand years as yesterday."
 - b. **God sees all of the past with absolute perfect vision**
3. **2 Peter 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.
 - a. **2nd half already pointed to in Ps 90:4**
 - b. **1st half presents new facet... Grudem**, "In God's perspective, any extremely long period of time is as if it just happened. Any very short period of time (such as one day) seems to God to last forever: it never ceases to be 'present' in his consciousness" (Grudem, 172)."
4. **Combining what we learn:** Any long period of time is as if it just happened, any short period of time is as if it continues to occur forever. All of time is as if it is "eternally present" to God.
5. **God does not experience time in a succession of moments.**
6. **Classic Illustration:** Bird's Eye view of a parade...
 - a. For God, everything that will happen has already happened.
 - b. The beginning and end are perfectly in view to God!
 - c. **Culver**, "It does not seem quite correct to say He lives in an eternal now, as we do occasionally read, for the past and future are present in God's mind as truly as the present. God lives in eternity, not in a line separating past from future."
7. **1st Implication:** See how this has direct impact on God's knowledge...
 - a. **Isaiah 45:21** "Declare and set forth *your case*; Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me.
 - b. **Isaiah 46:9-10** "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me, ¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';
8. **2nd Implication:** This also has impact on God's will...
 - a. There is no "temporal order" to God's decisions. There can be "logical order" though.
 - b. From all eternity God has determined what He is now doing!
 - c. There are no actions that are reactions to unforeseen developments...
 - d. Impact on **Freedom**: If God knows all things, including everything He will do in the future, then there is no way for Him to avoid doing those things. Thus God is not free. But if God is outside of time, then he never knows anything beforehand because there is no before or after in timeless eternity. He can never know any action before He does it. So, God acts timelessly and all at once, and His freedom is not limited.

C. *God Sees Events in Time and Acts in Time*

1. To say that God is “above time” is not to say that He cannot act “in time.”
2. Since He created time, He can use it for His purposes!
3. God sees time as including succession of events, and yet He is in no way bound by that succession!
4. **Gal 4:4-5** But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. – ***fullness of time***
5. **Acts 17:30-31** "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, ³¹ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." – ***past, present, future***
6. Again, it might be stated, that our appreciation of God’s eternity is seen in God’s works being fulfilled through the passing of time...

D. *We Will Always Exist in Time*

1. Quite the contrary to the Hymn “When the Role is called up yonder” – time will continue for us! (“when time shall be no more...”)
2. As long as we are “finite creatures” we will experience events one after another...
3. Examples from Revelation of “actions” occurring – implying a previous state, followed by a different state: **Rev 4:10, 21:24, 21:26, 22:2, 22:5**
4. **Grudem**, “We will experience eternal life not in an exact duplication of God’s attribute of eternity, but rather in a duration of time that will never end... our lives with the Lord will go on forever.”
5. **We find meaning in the present by finding rest in God – the One fixed in Eternity!**
 - a. **Ecclesiastes 3:11** He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.
 - b. **Tozer**, “All within us cries for life and permanence, and everything around us reminds us of mortality and change. Yet that God has made us of the stuff of eternity is both a glory yet to be realized and a prophecy yet to be fulfilled.”
 - c. **This may be another mark of what it means to be created in the “image of God”**
 - d. **Tozer**, “God’s eternality and man’s mortality join to persuade us that faith in Jesus Christ is not optional. For every man it must be Christ or eternal tragedy. Out of eternity our Lord came into time to rescue His human brethren whose moral folly had made them not only fools or the passing world but slaves of sin and death as well.”
 - e. **As believers**, we are “past-oriented” in terms of redemption and “future-oriented” in terms of consummation. This gives our present meaning!