

DOCTRINE OF GOD

DIVINE ETERNALITY



Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.
Macbeth, Act 5 Scene 5

One of the most powerful soliloquies ever written. Those words said by Macbeth are whispered as he looks upon the lifeless corps of his wife, the infamous Lady Macbeth, who manipulated her way up to power and status, only to commit suicide. What a lesson to our ears. In these timeless words Shakespeare encapsulate the very essence of human beings' relationship to time. We, Macbeth says, are walking shadows, poor players, brief candles, and life is but a stage. What a powerful reminder of human frailty and impermanence.

When we contrast such a life to God however, we are taken aback and then upwards into the majesty of who He is. God is THE LORD OF TIME and is not creeping or pacing from day to day like we mortals. For Him life is not a walking shadow but infinite light & beauty.

When you begin to contemplate ever deeper into the nature of God your mind is progressively stretched, and your soul lifted higher and higher into the inexpressible glory of His being. This is without question displayed when you stop to reflect up God's relationship to time in particular. Have you ever done this? In fact, have you ever thought about what time itself is? Have you ever perhaps asked the question, "What was God doing before Creation?" perhaps? Well, that question is tied to deeper questions about God and time. In **Saint Augustine's (354-430 A.D.)** day there was a joke that the answer to that question was "God was preparing Hell for people who pry into mysteries."¹

While such an answer is worth a chuckle, we need to go further as Christian believers if we are to be theologically reflective thinkers. We need to really try and grapple with deep questions that stretch our minds and as a result expand and exalt our vision of who God is.

Why discuss God's relationship to time then? Isn't that just some esoteric cerebral exercise that leads to nothing? Not in the slightest. Reflecting on God's relationship to time reveals that there are many interrelated theological ramifications of God's relation to time. For example, consider some of these important questions: Does God know all truth? Does He know what happened, what is happening and what will happen, or does He see all this at once as already occurring or having occurred? Even more so, if God is unchanging then how can He relate to a changing creation? In what way, if God is timeless, can we say the work of the cross is "finished" if it still is existing before Him? You can see that God and His relation to time has serious theological implications! So, to get started, lets look at some biblical data.

¹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 11, Chapter 12

BIBLICAL DATA ON DIVINE ETERNALITY

There are many scriptures that talk about God, time, and eternity. Let us break down the scriptures down into each of the following points:

(1) THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF GOD EXISTING “BEFORE” EVERYTHING ELSE WAS: There are plenty of scriptures that speak of all Creation (space, time, matter, energy) beginning to exist and yet God was, in a difficult way to express, “before” or “beyond” Creation:

- In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
Genesis 1:1 (ESV)

- “I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
and I find knowledge and discretion.

...

²² “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of old.

²³ Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning 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 had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth,

²⁶ before he had made the earth with its fields,
or the first of the dust of the world.

²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there;
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,

²⁸ when he made firm the skies above,
when he established^(d) the fountains of the deep,

²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,

when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master workman,

and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,

³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the children of man.

Proverbs 8:12 and 22-31

- In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

John 1:1-3 (ESV)

- ²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Jude 1:24-25 (ESV)

(2) THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF GOD HAVING NO BEGINNING AND NO END: There are scriptural passages that get across the understanding that God never began to exist, and He cannot cease to exist:

- Lord, you have been our dwelling place
in all generations.
2 Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
Psalm 90:1-2 (ESV)
- “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;
11 they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment,
12 like a robe you will roll them up,
like a garment they will be changed.
But you are the same,
and your years will have no end.”
Hebrews 1:10-12 (ESV)
- “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”
Revelations 1:8 (ESV)

(3) THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF GOD NOT BEING FRUSTRATED BY TEMPORALITY: There are scriptural passages that get across the idea that while we struggle with and are limited by the gnawing evanescent effects of time, God isn't. Time for God does not go too fast and it does not go too slow and He therefore isn't hampered or frustrated by it. These verses show in some very unique capacity, God relates to time categorically different than all creatures. Consider:

- 4 For a thousand years in your sight
are but as yesterday when it is past,
or as a watch in the night.
5 You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning:
6 in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.
Psalm 90:4-5 (ESV)
- 11 My days are like an evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.
12 But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever;
you are remembered throughout all generations.
...
25 Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
26 They will perish, but you will remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.

You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,
27 but you are the same, and your years have no end.
Psalm 102:11-12 & 25-26 (ESV)

- ⁹What gain has the worker from his toil? ¹⁰I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. ¹¹He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. ¹²I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; ¹³also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.
¹⁴I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him. ¹⁵That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away.
Ecclesiastes 3:9-15 (ESV)
- Don't overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, & a thousand years as one day
2 Peter 3:8 (ESV)

So, the Bible gives a sufficient but not exhaustive vision of God and His relationship to time and eternity. It affirms that God categorically relates to time in a very different way comparable to all Creation. It tells us that our lives are marked by the finitudes of seasons, cycles, birth, aging, and death but God's is not. It tells us that God never began to exist and cannot cease to exist. It tells us that this physical space-time world had a beginning and will have an end, but God will endure.

That all said, we must acknowledge that the Bible is not a natural philosophy book. It isn't a metaphysics book. It's not even a systematic theology book. This means that the Bible, to some degree is under-determinative when it comes to describing God, time, and eternity. For example: The Bible does not speak about the nature or essence of time.² It doesn't tell us what eternity is. It doesn't tell us if God is timeless durationless or infinitely enduring throughout all time. It doesn't tell us whether God transcends time, looking down on it with a birds-eye view, or if God is within time "remembering" the past and "seeing" the future perfectly through His omniscience.

So, what we want to do is try and wrestle with these questions. We want to think through the nature of time, eternity, and God's relationship to both. To that let us turn.

² John Frame, *A Theology of Lordship: The Doctrine of God*, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), pg. 554

THINKING THROUGH: THE NATURE OF TIME & ETERNITY³

Is God timelessly eternal OR is He never-endingly existing throughout all time? Is God transcendent to time or is God existent throughout all time? These are important questions that have deep philosophical, theological, and, I dare say, practical implications. To answer these questions, we have start by asking: What even is time? And what is eternity for that matter? Let's try to grasp at these two questions.

(I) WHAT IS TIME?

What is time?⁴ When **Saint Augustine** (354-430 A.D.) reflected on time he said in his *Confessions*,

“For what is time? Who can easily and briefly explain it? Who even in thought can comprehend it, even to the pronouncing of a word concerning it? But what in speaking do we refer to more familiarly and knowingly than time? And certainly we understand when we speak of it; we understand also when we hear it spoken of by another. What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not.”

Essentially, he was saying, “I know what time is practically but when you ask me to really think about it and define it, I don't know!” How true this is in much of life! We take ideas and beliefs and features of reality for granted so often and we never take the time to reflect upon what things actually mean or are. Augustine did go on to say of time,

“Yet I say with confidence, that I know that if nothing passed away, there would not be past time; and if nothing were coming, there would not be future time; and if nothing were, there would not be present time. Those two times, therefore, past and future, how are they, when even the past now is not; and the future is not as yet? But should the present be always present, and should it not pass into time past, time truly it could not be, but eternity. If, then, time present -- if it be time -- only comes into existence because it passes into time past, how do we say that even this is, whose cause of being is that it shall not be -- namely, so that we cannot truly say that time is, unless because it tends not to be?”

What is he saying? He is grasping at the nature of time by reflecting on the element of “passage” or “flow” that we experience in life. The idea of a “present” insists that there be a “past” and a “future.” This past, present, future nature to reality, that flow-like aspect to existence, is, in some way, to Augustine's mind, to grasp at what time is.

The unforgettable Greek philosopher **Aristotle** (384-322 B.C.), lived about a thousand years before Augustine, and wrote in his *Physics* that “time is the measure of change” (chapter 12). He went on to say, “that time is not change [itself]” because a change “may be faster or slower, but not time....” (chapter 10). Take for example how a tree changes seasonal colors versus the change of a mountain to a valley or a child into an adult. Each of these are at different rates, yet, they all are happening ‘within’ time, but they also show the “passage of time.” Yet, though time and change are not identical, Aristotle noted, they are nevertheless insuperably linked for “there is no time apart from change....” (chapter 11).

³ Consider the following resources so you can get a better sense of the issues theologically and philosophically with God, Time, and Eternity: **William Lane Craig** that philosophically and theologically deal with divine eternity: <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/scholarly-writings/divine-eternity/timelessness-and-omnitemporality/> and <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/scholarly-writings/christian-doctrines/time-eternity-and-eschatology/>. Also consider the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on God and Time, which can be found here <https://www.iep.utm.edu/god-time/>. Also consider **John Feinberg**'s excellent and quite thorough chapter on ‘God, Time, and Eternity’ in *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), pg. 376-476. Also consider **Natalja Deng** short little book, *God and Time* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Also consider this PDF file that covers some of the various major issues of God, Time, and Eternity, <http://evangelicalarminians.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Understanding-God-God-and-Time.pdf>. Also consider this blog https://amymantravadi.com/2019/05/05/what-the-church-has-said-about-divine-eternity/#_ftnref6 which gives you a great collection of quotes throughout the history of the Church on divine eternity. Also consider this online PDF journal entry “Is it Time to Change? Open Theism and the Divine Timelessness Debate.” by **Marshall Wicks** from Word of Life Bible Institute on <https://www.tms.edu/m/tmsj18c.pdf>

⁴ Consider these articles on this question: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/time/#H3> and <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/time/> and <http://www.exactlywhatistime.com/philosophy-of-time/ancient-philosophy/>

Aristotle and Augustine and others were on to something about the nature of time. Now, we are not going to get into all the nuances of philosophical and scientific debate over time at this point.⁵ Instead, suffice to say that in its most simplified form, **time is duration**. To give a little more clarity:

- Time has measure to it (able to be sequenced or counted if you will)
- Time has a linear nature to it (it has instances or moments or points that can be linearly ordered by a before and after)
- Time has a kind of direction to it (what can be called the “arrow of time” because it seems to move or point towards the future)⁶

These ideas of measure, linearity, and direction get across another aspect of time: flow. Time **seems** to flow or pass or go towards something we call the future. The present keeps disappearing, the past gets further away, the future gets closer to us. It’s like we are on a boat on a river, watching lily-pads casually pass by us going further and further into the recesses of history while at the same time we look upstream, can only see to the horizon and conjecture what is around the future corner.

This “flow” idea of time is debated in discussions on the philosophy of time. While I am not going to get into the intricacies of this debate, I do need to mention it because it matters when we begin to think of eternity and God’s relationship to time. In the debate over the flow of time there are two major theories about time, which are called the A-THEORY and the B-THEORY.⁷ To simplify consider this diagram rather than reading paragraphs of information about them:

A-THEORY OF TIME	B-THEORY OF TIME
ALSO KNOWN AS THE TENSED OR DYNAMIC VIEW OF TIME	ALSO KNOWN AS THE TENSELESS OR STATIC VIEW OF TIME
<p>Analogy: a slice of bread</p> <p>Only the present is really time. The past and the future do not exist objectively but only as memories or potentials.</p> <p>The sense of “flow” of time is objectively real because we rationally and objectively experience things as really changing. We experience the coming into and go out of existence of things, and new facts (that are tensed) arise as time moves onward.</p>	<p>Analogy: a loaf of bread</p> <p>All of slices in the loaf are equally real. The whole loaf IS TIME, and each slice is only relatively and subjectively past, present, and future in relation to every other slice before and after it.</p> <p>The “flow” of time into past, present, & future is illusory because each slice equally exists as part of the whole. Each slice stands in a relationship of “before” and “after” but no slice is past, present, or future, therefore such words are just useful fictions.</p>

Much more could be said, but I believe this gives us enough of an understanding of what time is and how its measurability and flow is understood in philosophical thought. Now, before we try and understand all of this in relation to God, we also need to understand another concept: ETERNITY. Eternity is somewhat related and yet unrelated to Time. To that let us briefly turn.

⁵ Consider again <https://www.iep.utm.edu/time/#H3> and <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/time/> and <http://www.exactlywhatistime.com/philosophy-of-time/ancient-philosophy/>

⁶ These three points are part of a larger set of points that come from the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <https://www.iep.utm.edu/time/#H3>

⁷ Check out Natalja Deng short little book, *God and Time* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019) on the two views of time (B-Theory and A-Theory) or the articles on time from IEP or Stanford

(II) WHAT IS ETERNITY?

What is eternity?⁸ Is it an infinity of time? Is it durationless? Is it boundless? What is it? Is it the same as time? Is it completely different from time? These are important questions in understand what we mean when we say, “God is eternal” or “God is in eternity.”

Well, I think the most classic and succinct philosophical reflection on the nature of eternity comes from the Roman Christian philosopher **Boëthius (c. 480-524)** who said,

“[Eternity is] the whole, simultaneous and perfect possession of boundless life.”⁹

Nearly 750 years later the great Christian Medieval intellect **Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)** wrote in his magnum opus *Summa Theologiae*,

“So two things characterize eternity. First, anything existing in eternity is unending, that is to say, lacks both beginning and end (for both may be regarded as ends). Secondly, eternity itself exists as an instantaneous whole lacking successiveness.... There are two things to be noted about time, namely, that time itself is successive, and that an instant of time is imperfect.”

So, what are Boëthius and Aquinas getting across about eternity? Eternity is that which “excludes a beginning, an end, and the succession of moments.”¹⁰ In other words eternity is the absence of time. It is the absence of change or duration. This is what could be called an **atemporal or timeless eternal view of eternity**. Eternity on such a view is: pure nowness, boundless, durationless, immeasurable wholeness. It is contrasted to time which is considered to be: finite, measurable, linear, and directional.

BUT there have been Christian thinkers who have taken issue with this and argued that eternity MUST involve a sense of succession, direction, and change. **Charles Hodge (1797-1878)** the great Presbyterian theologian and principal of Princeton Theological Seminary affirmed,

If, therefore, God be a person, or a thinking Being, He cannot be timeless; there must be succession; one thought or state must follow another. To deny this, it is said, is to deny the personality of God.... It is certain that God is subject to all the limitations of personality, if there be any. But as such limitations are the conditions of his being a person and not a mere involuntary force, they are the conditions of his infinite perfection. As constant thought and activity are involved in the very nature of a spirit, these must belong to God; and so far as thinking and acting involve succession, succession must belong to God.”¹¹

Or consider a more modern theologian **Richard A. Muller (1948-present)** who has affirmed,

“Eternity...is a duration, coexists with all times without disrupting or confusing the times of individual things.... Eternity is not ‘timelessness’...but a successionless existence immediately related to all moments of time or, more precisely, a successionless duration directly related to temporal succession: after all, it is defined not as an ‘absolute’ but as a ‘relative’ attribute.”¹²

So, what Hodge and Muller get across is a different view of eternity comparable to Boëthius or Aquinas. For thinkers like Hodge and Muller eternity is not a boundless directionless eternally present whole but an INFINITELY or EVERLASTINGLY immeasurable, linear, and directional duration. Eternity is a “form” of time you see, just metaphysically different. This is known as the **everlasting or temporal view of eternity**.

⁸ For a very good online article on this huge topic consider the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry “Eternity in Christian Thought,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/eternity/>

⁹ Anicius Manlius Severinus Boëthius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, in a different translation from the Latin By W. V. Cooper, <https://www.exclassics.com/consol/consol.pdf>

¹⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), pg. 162

¹¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Kindle edition (Louisville, KY: GLH Publishing, 2015), location 7319-52.

¹² Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. III – The Divine Essence and Attributes (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), pg. 348

(III) GOD'S RELATIONSHIP TO TIME: TIMELESS OR EVERLASTING?

So, two views on eternity: TIMELESS NOWNESS or INFINITE DURATION. Do you see it yet? Do you see how these two views are coming to be related to the larger issue of the nature of time itself (A or B Theory)? The question is how theories of time relate to theories of eternity.

So, what do we say to all this? Well, let us try and understand the strengths and weaknesses of these two views of eternity – (A) GOD AS TIMELESS or (B) GOD AS EVERLASTING – and see how they coalesce into the equally complex views of time and God's relationship to both.

(A) GOD AS TIMELESS

The classic understanding of God's relation to time in the history of Christian thought has been that God is **timelessly eternal**. This tradition goes all the way back to the great Greek thinkers such as Plato and Plotinus, eventually finding their Christian expression in the writings of Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and Aquinas down to various present philosophers & theologians.¹³

To say that God is timelessly eternal is to say that **God lacks temporal extension and temporal location**.¹⁴ This means that God has not lived through any amount of time and He has not lived through or in any particular point in time. So, there is no amount of time God has existed and no specific particular time God has existed. God simply "is." As **Saint Augustine (354-430 A.D.)** said,

"It is in eternity, which is supreme over time because it is a never-ending present, that you are at once before all past time and after all future time. . . . Your years are one day, yet Your day does not come daily but is always today, because Your today does not give place to any tomorrow nor does it take the place of any yesterday. Your today is eternity. . . . You made all time; you are before all time; and the 'time,' if such we may call it, when there was no time was no time at all."¹⁵

The marks of the concept of eternity is that "it excludes a beginning, an end, and the succession of moments."¹⁶ This is contrasted to time, which is, arguably, by definition, creaturely. The great theologian **Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)** said of time,

"Time is the duration of creaturely existence. . . . [It] is the measure of motion in a moveable object."

So, it can be argued, that when you say "TIME" you are saying, "motion, change, measurability, computability, limitation, finiteness, creature."¹⁷ Because of this reality, you cannot assign the element of time to God. Why? Because, BY DEFINITION it is a creaturely concept and therefore, BY DEFINITION, implies limitation to God's nature. As the great reformer **John Calvin (1509-1564)** said,

When we attribute prescience to God, we mean that all things always were, and ever continue, under his eye; that to his knowledge there is no past or future, but all things are present, and indeed so present, that it is not merely the idea of them that is before him (as those objects are which we retain in our memory), but that he truly sees and contemplates them as actually under his immediate inspection.¹⁸

So, it must be understood that God is not a process. He is not becoming something. He is not a creature. He didn't come into being. He can't go out of being. He doesn't have a past. He doesn't have a future. He simply is. He is pure actuality.

¹³ For a good historical overview of this idea go to John Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), pp. 379-384. Various 20th-21st Century philosophers and theologians who have revitalized atemporal or divine eternity views of God would be Norman Kretzmann and Elenore Stump, Paul Helm, Nelson Pike, W. Norris Clark, Brian Leftow, and Katherin Rogers

¹⁴ Nelson Pike's definition as discussed in John Feinberg, *ibid*, pg. 376

¹⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book XI 10-13

¹⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), pg. 162

¹⁷ Bavinck, *ibid*, pg. 165

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), pp. 609-610

It is important to realize the difference between eternity and time on this view. The difference is not merely quantitative but intrinsically qualitative. Eternity is not an infinite sequence of moments in either direction, like an infinitely extended number line, but rather just “isness” or “nowness” holistically. There is no past, present, or future. The best example to grasp this eternal “nowness” understanding is to think of the present moment.¹⁹

The present is but an instant, it is “nowness” and it doesn’t have any duration, for if it did, then it would fall into past or present. Eternity is, in a difficult way to express, pure qualitatively unbounded presentness or nowness or isness. This atemporal eternity is an “indivisible...limitless rather than instantaneous...infinitely enduring...beginningless and endless present...[that has] neither successiveness nor plurality of intervals.”²⁰ What this means to say is that God doesn’t have succession and He is without measure.

On this view God stands upon a high mountain looking down at a river.²¹ He sees the mouth of the river, the middle of the flowing waters, and He sees the end of the river, falling off a into a waterfall. All at once God sees the entirety of the river.

Another analogy would be that of person who sits atop a steeple of a church looking down as he watches a parade on the street below.²² The person looking at the parade sees the entirety of the parade at once. He sees the head of the parade going through downtown, he sees the middle of the parade, and he sees the backend of the parade a mile back up the street.

The interlocking implications of this position is that if God is timelessly eternal then He is necessarily:

- **SIMPLE** – This is the understanding that God is a singular unity. Remember when we discussed divine simplicity that it was the understanding that God is not composed of parts. Well, this applies to God in relation to time. For the *divine eternalist* God does not have a succession of moments that are measurable. If God could be measured in a sequence of past, present, and future, then, it is argued, God would be “measurable” and “quantifiable” and this seems to put a limit on God.
- **IMMUTABLE** – This is the understanding that God is changeless. For the *divine eternalist* God can’t be said to gain or lose anything. He doesn’t learn new information that He didn’t previously know and He doesn’t have a shift in His personality or thinking across a sequence of past, present, or future moments. If God were experiencing a succession of moments in Himself, then it is argued, that God would have change within Himself – He would be not be “the same yesterday, today, and forever” and therefore would not be “Lord of All.” He wouldn’t be perfectly Actual! He would have potential within Himself; He would become a fickle and fanciful creature shifting in a sea of change.
- **INFINITE** – This is the understanding that God is boundless – that He is without any creaturely or finite limitation to His character or essence.²³ For the *divine eternalist* there is no limit to God’s nature. There is nothing beyond Him or outside of Him. He is in no way, shape, or form “bound” or restricted to a singular point or successive set of points in time or space. If God were in time, it is argued, then God would be in some way bound to time – He would be one entity among many entities that experiences duration and therefore would only be able to extend “as far as” time extended.

¹⁹ Eleonore Stump make this point when she says, “If anything exists eternally, it exists. But the existing of an eternal entity is a duration without succession; and because eternity excludes succession no eternal entity has existed or will exist. It only exists. It is in this sense that an eternal entity is said to have present existence. But since that present is not flanked by past and future, it is obviously not the temporal present. Furthermore, the eternal, pastless, futureless present is not instantaneous but extended, because eternity, as Aquinas understands it, includes duration. The temporal present is a durationless instant, a present that cannot be extended without falling apart entirely into past and future intervals. The eternal present, on the other hand, is by definition an infinitely extended, pastless, futureless duration.” From Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), pg. 137

²⁰ Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Atemporal Duration,” in *J Phil* 84 (1987), pg. 218-219

²¹ The river analogy comes from Thomas Oden, *Classical Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York, NY: Harper One, 1992), pg. 44

²² The parade analogy comes from Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Backer Academic, 1998), pg. 301

²³ Bavinnck, *ibid*, pg. 160

There are some that argue that DIVINE TIMELESSNESS entails philosophical and theological problems.²⁴ I will not get into all the nuances of the arguments, because it can get quite mind numbing, BUT I will mention just two of the most notable ones:

(1) ARGUMENT: DIVINE TIMELESSNESS DOESN'T MAKE SENSE OF PERSONHOOD – It is said by detractors of divine timelessness (if you remember back to Charles Hodge for example) that if God is timeless then it is impossible for Him to have certain qualities that are essential to personhood. Such qualities would include remembering, anticipating, deciding, intending, reflecting, and so forth. These are qualities said to be essential to a rational agent, but they all involve sequence, duration, and therefore time. This even extends to “before creation.” Why? If God was timelessly existing and dialoguing, loving, communicating, thinking, within Himself, among the persons of the Trinity, this requires time. Therefore, because of these kinds of points, it is argued, a divine TIMELESS PERSON is logically impossible. What could a divine timeless thinker say to this? Several things:²⁵

- a. **REBUTTAL: HAVING SUCH CAPACITIES ARE CONTINGENCIES OF PERSONHOOD NOT ESSENTIALS** – The capacity to anticipate or reflect is not something a baby has the capacity to do. Is a baby therefore not a person? I think not. The capacity to reflect, decide, anticipate are not capacities of a comatose individual. Are they therefore not a person? I don't think so. The capacity to remember is not something an individual with Alzheimer's has. Are they therefore not a person? I don't think so. The point is the properties listed as essential are not essential to personhood. Persons do have them, but they are not the necessary features of what it means to be a person.
- b. **REBUTTAL: GOD IS OMNISCIANT SO HE DOESN'T NEED TO DO SUCH PROCESSES** – The simple fact is that God is the Greatest Conceivable Being, and this means He is all-knowing. And all knowing being does need to learn, grow, deliberate, reflect, or anticipate because to KNOW ALL is just that, to KNOW ALL. If you know everything to the maximally perfect degree then, you don't need to worry, hope, learn, or expect. Such words are creaturely contingent and relative words that make no sense in relation to a Maximally Perfect Infinite Being.
- c. **REBUTTAL: THINKING & WILLING DO NOT REQUIRE SEQUENCE OR EXTENSION** – It has been demonstrated that to think or to will something does not require time. In fact to think is to act, and to will is to think, which is to act. While we as temporal and finite creature can COME TO (notice the use of time language) learn things and to know this or that, the fact is, the act of knowing itself, knowing A THING, is not a timely action. Think about it. There is no time lapse between you knowing something and not knowing something. If you know it, it is known instantaneously. Now, to clarify, to know is not the same as understanding something. I may KNOW about physics, but I don't UNDERSTAND it, which requires effort and work, and therefore time. But such a concept as UNDERSTAND doesn't apply to an infinite Maximally Perfect Being. God doesn't have to understand things. God knows all truth because He is Truth. There is nothing He doesn't know and there is nothing outside or beyond His mind or perception. Therefore His knowing just His who and what He is, and His action is just what He wills.

(2) ARGUMENT: DIVINE TIMELESSNESS DOESN'T MAKE SENSE OF GOD ACTING IN THE WORLD – There are plenty of Biblical, historical, and personal examples of God acting and doing in the world. God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt, He sent fire down to consume the worshipers of Baal at the petition of Elijah, He raised Jesus from the dead, He listens to and answers our prayers, He sustains us by His Spirit as we go through difficult times and so forth. Well, if all of this is the case, then God is temporally locating Himself when He acts in this world and therefore cannot be timeless. And you can't say, “Well, He goes in and out of time,” for that itself (in and out) implies time, a state of duration. Acting in the world, it is argued, takes time to do actions, it takes time to do specific actions at specific times instead of other times, and to do specific actions at specific times requires that God knows what

²⁴ For a very good general overview of the various arguments against divine timelessness look at John Feinberg, *ibid*, pg. 395-427

²⁵ For a very thorough rebuttal to this argument look at: William Lane Craig's online article, “Divine Timelessness and Personhood,” which can be found at <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/scholarly-writings/divine-eternity/divine-timelessness-and-personhood/>

time He is doing those specific actions. Therefore, because of all of this, God cannot be timeless but temporal. What could a divine timeless thinker say to this? Several things:²⁶

- a. **REBUTTAL: GOD IS INFINITE & OMNIPOTENT SO HE DOESN'T NEED TO DO THINGS SUCCESSIVELY** – Because God is all-powerful and boundless He doesn't therefore need to do things in an order or sequence. As creatures who are finite, we do things one after the other because we can't do all things at once. But this doesn't apply to God. God is the infinite boundless multi-tasker who can do all things without having to go through a process or duration to do it. Process and duration and succession of things are creaturely features that don't apply to a Maximally Create Being.
- b. **REBUTTAL: WHEN GOD ACTS IT IS AN EVERLASTING BOUNDLESS SINGULAR ACTION** – This is kind of complicated to understand, but the argument is that because God is not in a sequence, because He exists in the boundless eternal "nowness" then when He acts or decrees eternally, those acts or decrees are not happening in a sequence or order – they just are "now." What does this mean? It means that when God acts in the physical-space-time world, in history, He simply does all acts with one eternal boundless timeless act that is expressed in our temporal realm as successive actions and responses.

Think of it this way: When God acts in the world of history and time it is not as if He must lay out a plan, have a calendar, in His head before He acts – saying, "I'll do this at this time, and that at that time, and another thing another time." He is all-knowing and all-powerful and Pure Being! Therefore, His will is His action is His desire is His knowing and so forth. Thus, this means God doesn't have to act successively to accomplish His will, He simply ACTS in the infinite now eternally everlastingly and says, "It is," and thus it is. But that "it is" works its way into our creaturely physical-space-time through temporal succession – past (it has been), present (it is), and future (it will be).

- (3) **ARGUMENT: DIVINE TIMELESSNESS MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD TO KNOW TENSED FACTS** – It is said by detractors of divine timelessness that if God is timeless then it is impossible for Him to know tensed facts about the world. It is argued that if God is to truly know all things, then He must know not just raw facts about the world, but the tensed relations of facts that are themselves truths. So, for God to act in the world, it doesn't just take time to do specific actions at specific times, it also requires that He knows what time He is doing those specific actions.

Even stronger is when we think about omniscience. To know all would mean God must know tensed facts (i.e. "Christopher Columbus **will** sail in 1492" vs "Christopher Columbus **is sailing** in 1492" vs "Christopher Columbus **sailed** in 1492") and if He doesn't know tensed facts, then He isn't omniscient and thus not God. God, on such an argument, necessarily is not timeless but temporal. Now I want to affirm that this is perhaps the strongest argument given against divine timelessness. What could a divine timeless thinker say to this? Several arguments have been given.²⁷ Here is one:

- a. **REBUTTAL: KNOWING WHAT TIME IT IS, IS A RELATIVE AND CREATURELY CONSTRUCT POINTLESSLY APPLIED TO GOD** – It is argued many times that if God is timeless then He cannot know what time it is. For if He knows what time it is, then He as temporally located Himself. But this argument is foolish when thought out. What time must God know? Eastern Standard Time? Pacific Time? Atomic time? Galactic Time? What time frame is God in? As has been said, "**Time is the duration of creaturely existence.**"²⁸ Time is referential and therefore relative to observes. And observers are spatially and materially finite and locatable. Therefore, time doesn't make sense if there is no space or matter. God however is spaceless, immaterial, boundless, and infinite. There is no place God is not. This means God doesn't have to "be at" or

²⁶ For responses to this, check out Feinberg, *ibid*, pg. 400-403

²⁷ A fine and rather detailed discussion of this can be found in Feinberg, *ibid*, pg 417-427

²⁸ Bavinck, *ibid*, pg. 165

“within” a certain frame of reference in order to know, act, or will eternally. God sees all as all because He is in and through all. He is unbounded.

With such logic you would have to apply relative terminology of “here” and “there” to God and say he doesn’t know what it is like to be “here” vs. “there” because He is spacelessly transcendent! But that is pure foolishness because no one denies divine omnipresence. Therefore, just like space is relative, so is time, and because they are relative God as a necessarily transcendent Being transcends such relative notions.

There is so much more that could be said, but for the sake of brevity, which has been pushed, I will stop here. The point is for you to understand the various theological and philosophical questions that arise when you begin to contemplate and think about God as timelessly eternal. Now, let us move to the second major view about God and time.

(B) GOD AS EVERLASTING

The understanding that God is everlasting is the notion that God exists eternally in time, across all time, without beginning or end. This tradition of “*divine temporality*” finds its nest in various Christian thinkers such as the 19th Century theologian Charles Hodge as well as 20th Century theologians as James Oliver Buswell and Oscar Cullmann all the way down to present time.²⁹

This idea says, “God’s existence is temporally infinite in duration, unbounded in the past and future. On this conception, there is in the life of God a past, present, and future, as in the lives of his creatures. But unlike any of his creatures, God is everlasting, and necessarily so.”³⁰ Another way of putting this is to say that God extends infinitely into the past and the present, without beginning or end, and He experiences the succession of moments just as we do.

Understand, this view does not deny eternity, rather it affirms that eternity is not defined as a durationless unbounded nowness, but is an infinitely beginningless state of duration. Another way to simplify would be to say (in a flawed analogy as all analogies are) that *timeless eternity* is a singular point or circle, while *temporal eternity* is an unending number line, stretching infinitely into the past and future.

The interlocking implications of this position is that if God is eternally temporal then He is necessarily:

- **COMPOSITE** – This idea essentially undermines *divine simplicity* (God is not composed of parts) and affirms that God experiences real composition, sequence, and extensions. If God is in time, then God actually does have a past, He is in the present, and He will exist in the future. God therefore is divisible into different temporal parts which follow from one another successively.
- **DYNAMIC** – This idea essentially undermines *divine immutability* (God doesn’t change) in its strongest sense. Because God is in time He does change because He experiences before and after, He shifts in His relations with His creatures, and He possesses memory, knowing, and prophesy, all of which involve temporality.
- **INFINITE** – On this point both sides of the aisle agree. For the divine eternalist there is no limit to God’s nature or being and this is the case too for the divine temporalist. God is boundless –without any creaturely or finite limitation to His character or essence. Even on this view God is not made of space or matter. There is still nothing outside of God, nothing beyond Him, nothing unknown to Him. He is still infinite, but simply infinite in a different way comparable to the divine eternalist. God is infinite in that He cannot be quantifiable, just like you cannot reach infinity through counting, you cannot reach the limit of God’s being. That said, God is infinite not in the sense of durationless nowness or isness, but infinite in the sense of “unable to reach the limit.”

That all said, just like with the divine timelessness view, some philosophers and theologians have argued that God as divinely temporal brings up some problems that need to be addressed. Again, I will not get into all the nuances of the arguments, but I do want to mention just two of the most notable:³¹

- (1) **DIVINE TEMPORALITY MEANS GOD IS FLEETINGLY IMPERFECT** – It is said by detractors of divine temporality that if God is in time then God is ever changing, He has potentiality, He is bound, and therefore necessarily is imperfect. Life is a succession of moments that is ultimately characterized by loss, desire, and hope. Things go in and out of existence. We don’t have all our life at once and therefore are incomplete. If God is in time, then the past is inaccessible to Him and the future is only potentially accessible to Him,

²⁹ For a very short historical overview of “*divine temporalist*” thinking consider John Frame, *ibid*, pg. 574-575. Some of the most prominent philosophers and theologians that push for the divine temporality view today are as follows: Nicholas Wolterstorff, Richard Swinburne, Garret DeWesse, William Lane Craig, William Hasker, and Alan Padgett. It is important to note that they are a large group and some are less orthodox than others, but a common thread is they all reject classical Thomistic *divine atemporality*.

³⁰ Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Vancouver, Canada: Regent Publishing, 1991), pg. 120

³¹ If you want a more in-depth look at the major philosophical and theological arguments for and against divine temporality consider: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/eternity/#ArguDiviOmniTensFact>

but neither is accessible in a real “nowness” sense. Such a view is, arguably, completely incompatible to a Maximally Perfect Being. What could a divine temporalist thinker say to this? Consider the following:³²

- a. **GOD’S INFINITE OMNISCIENCE MEANS HE PERFECTLY EXPERIENCES ALL TIMES WITHOUT LACK** – The divine temporalist would argue that because God knows all things perfectly (omniscience) then the fleeting nature of time has no barrier on His life or experiences. We are creatures that are mentally, physically, and spiritually finite. Because of this our experience of time is categorically different than God’s. We are susceptible to forgetting the past and only being able to anticipate and speculate about the future. God isn’t like this. God, through being all-knowing, knows all truth to the infinitely minute details. This means He can recall the past in perfect remembrance, and He foreknows the future in perfect providential terms. Thus, the fleeting imperfection of temporal life doesn’t have a bearing on such a God.
- b. **CHANGE DOES NOT INHERENTLY MEAN IMPERFECTION NOR NECESSITATE INTRINSIC CHANGE** – The simple fact is that the divine timeless thinker has to assert that change is inherently somehow inferior to impermanence. That is a far stretch. The divine temporalist would argue that it does not follow that because God changes, God is somehow imperfect or less godlike. When things change, they can change in relation to other things but that does not mean there is a change for the worse. I can, for example, become a father. That change is not a change for the worse but for the better. Likewise, God going from the relationship of “I will create” to being “I have created” is not in any form or fashion a negative change.

On another note, change is never an all-or-nothing reality. Things and people can change and yet at the same time remain objectively the same object or person as before. While I may age, I am in fact the same person I was 20 years ago. I have grown and learned a lot, for sure! But I am still “me,” there is a lasting “I” that stays. For God, such change would be different – because He doesn’t age (because He is incorporeal and infinite), grow more knowledgeable (because He has perfect foreknowledge), or have the capacity to cease to be (because He is necessary). Creatures on the other hand age, learn and forget, and come into and out of existence. Therefore the only change God would have is *extrinsic changes* (Like: “I will send my Son” to “I have sent My Son”) and that doesn’t make Him somehow less than what He was before or will be in the future – God doesn’t change IN HIMSELF or HIS ESSENCE (intrinsic change), but only in His RELATIONS to other entities (extrinsic change). Such change is neither a perfection nor imperfection.

³² For a very thorough rebuttal to this argument look at: William Lane Craig’s online article, “*On the Argument for Divine Timelessness from the Incompleteness of Temporal Life*,” which can be found at <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/scholarly-writings/divine-eternity/on-the-argument-for-divine-timelessness-from-the-incompleteness-of-temporal/> and John Feinberg, *ibid*, pg. 392-394

(2) DIVINE TEMPORALITY IS LOGICALLY IMPOSSIBLE BECAUSE AN INFINITY OF TIME IS IMPOSSIBLE – It has been argued quite forcefully that if God is in time and God is infinite, then time would necessarily have to be ACTUALLY infinite (not additive infinity [counting towards it], but an actual infinity [the whole collection of moments]). But there is now a conundrum, because this would mean that an actual infinity of moments would have to have occurred before the creation of the space-matter Universe, which would mean the Universe would never have been created because before it could have been created an infinity of moments would have had to have happened before hand. But we know that the Universe does exist and today has taken place, so an infinity of moments hasn't taken place! Therefore, God cannot be "in" time. What can the divine temporalist say to such an argument? Well, this is perhaps the most difficult and most compelling argument laid at the feet of the divine temporalist. There have, however, been a few ways that divine temporalists have responded, but they differ considerably.³³ I am only mentioning two:

- a. **TIME IS METAPHYSICALLY TIED TO GOD SO AS TIME PROGRESSES GOD PROGRESSES** – This is the argument made by PROCESS THEOLOGY.³⁴ Time is change, it is infinite duration, and it didn't come into exists or go out of existence, and neither had God. While the physical space time has come into existence, God traverses this physical space time into a higher or metaphysical time that is pure change and creation – God is part of this realm indivisibly so. That said, most process theologians affirm that God and the space-time-matter Universe are linked inextricably so to the extent that the way in which God experiences and progresses is through the Universe. The Universe, in a way, becomes the Body of God, and God (in the metaphysical sense) is the Spirit of the Universe.
- b. **GOD IS TIMELESS WITHOUT CREATION & TEMPORAL WITH CREATION** – The strength of the argument for not being able to traverse an infinite amount of time is so strong that it is philosophically untenable. Because of this some temporalist's argue that God was in fact timelessly eternal, in a state of pure "nowness" or "isness" and timelessly decreed the creation of the space-time-matter Universe, which in effect "brought God into time."³⁵ This position blunts the objection by acknowledging that there was no actually infinite state of time but only a potential infinity subsequent to the creation of the Universe (space, time, matter, energy). As it has been succinctly stated: "God was timeless without creation, and temporal with creation."

³³ William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001); John Feinberg, *ibid*, pg. 389-391. Also consider the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article "*Eternity in Christian Thought*" found at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/eternity/#TimeWithTempCrea> – specifically section 4.2 Divine Temporality

³⁴ If you want to understand process philosophy and theology then I direct your attention to the following online sources: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/processp/>; <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/process-theism/>; https://oliasheville.com/sites/default/files/instructor_Handouts/SnellFarley/PROCESS%20THEOLOGY.pdf. Also consider Feinberg's section on this, *ibid*, pg. 433-436

³⁵ The most prolific philosopher and theologian on this point is William Lane Craig, so go to the following article to understand his position: <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/scholarly-writings/divine-eternity/timelessness-and-omnitemporality/>

(IV) GOD, TIME, & ETERNITY: BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

We have covered a lot of ground in our study of God, time, and eternity. It may seem to be overwhelmingly complex, but that is one of the joys of theological reflection. It makes us think deeply on the nature of who God is. We can never hope to probe the depths of who God is or what God is, but that doesn't mean we cannot know anything at all! Otherwise biblical knowledge and theological study would be an impossible task. No, we cannot know God exhaustively, but we can know Him sufficiently and even intimately.

So, what do we say at this point? Is time to be understood as an A-Theory of Time or a B-Theory of Time? And what of eternity? Is eternity timeless nowness or everlasting duration? And where does God fit into all of this? Frankly, these are not easy questions and nor are the answers. It is important to remember that good arguments have been given for both sides. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that godly men and women who are orthodox Christ-centered believers differ on this topic. Lastly, we must in the end have humility and charity in such a subject so vast and so rich and so complex.

That all said, I will not presume to have the final answer on this subject but will try to give some semblance of reflective thought, that, in the end, may help to piece together some form of a coherent view. Even in this however I am willing to learn more and change, but at the present time I think some of the following considerations need to be looked at:

- **IN THE DEBATE OVER TIME, IT SEEMS THE A-THEORY OF TIME, TENTATIVELY, MAKES THE MOST SENSE:** The average rational and reflective person truly sees a difference between past, present, and future. Our own experience of "temporal becoming" is that things do really come into existence and do go out of existence and this isn't illusory. I mean, we not only experience temporal becoming in the world around us, but even in the interior world of consciousness, we experience the becoming of mental events. We experience a stream of consciousness of one thought occurring after another – a stream of consciousness that is wholly independent of the external world.

THAT SAID, I am not sure the B-Theory doesn't have strong counters. I think there are strong philosophical and even scientific indicators that show there is a deep relationship between matter, space, and time. General Relativity proves to us that time is in many ways like space, and therefore it is relative to those experiencing it (the Newtonian "Absolute Time" doesn't seem to apply *although there is debate*). Also, philosophically, it seems intuitive that time and space and matter are intricately tied (remember Aristotle "time is the measure of change"). How can there be time if there is no measure or duration? But what is measure or duration in the absence of referential objects or places?

The question then to be posed is, "Do these relativistic and materialistic aspects of time apply to God?" I can't see how they would philosophically or theologically. If God need not be bound within the relative relations of space, then why think it applies to God in relative relations to time? Especially if space, time, and matter are connected! This seems untenable theologically.

- **IN THE DEBATE OVER ETERNITY, IT SEEMS THE ATEMPORAL VIEW IS MOST SOUND:** When we think of eternity it does not seem to me that it is comparable to duration or sequence. IF it is, then there is no way to escape the power of the argument against an actual infinity. As has been said, "What was God doing before creation if there was an infinity of time and why not create sooner?" and further "How could Creation start if an infinity of moments had to be traversed first?" Eternity seems to be just a state of boundless "isness" or "nowness."

I also think that this understanding of eternity should not be abandoned so quickly due to the historical theological tradition that has been behind it. While I would agree we should not believe something simply because it is old, and we should not hold to something merely out of tradition, we should give pause in jettisoning a theological idea that have existed across a myriad of ages, thinkers, and conventions – from the Patristic Fathers, to the Medieval scholars, to the Reformers, to the present. Even included myriads of Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant philosophers and theologians.

I further think that we should give great pause to the implications that come with divine temporality. Theological and philosophical concepts such as DIVINE ASECITY, DIVINE SIMPLICITY, and DIVINE IMMUTABILITY, are all jettisoned or reinterpreted into meaninglessness if you take a strong divine temporalist view of eternity. I am not sure the loss of these doctrines is worth it.

➤ **IN UNDERSTANDING GOD'S RELATIONSHIP TO TIME & ETERNITY, IT SEEMS THERE ARE A FEW OPTIONS TO CONSIDER:** Because I am affirming an A-Theory of Time and a Timeless Theory of Eternity, I realize this is complicated and hard to make sense of it all. Therefore, I would affirm that there are several ways of understanding all of this complexity:

- **ACCEPT THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY** – One response is simply to accept that we cannot exhaust the depths of the complexities of God's relation to time and eternity. This isn't a philosophical answer and it will not please those who want to have all their theological ducks in a row, but I believe it may just be the case we have exceeded our finite ability to understand God's nature in relation to time and eternity. While we can grasp a lot from this study, and it is a worthy study for a believer to delve into, it simply cannot be fully or maximally comprehended. We simply must hold in tension the facts that God is timelessly atemporal AND we live in temporal tensed existences and yet God relates to us.
- **GOD IS TIMELESS WITHOUT CREATION & TEMPORAL WITH CREATION** – This view is mainly from a temporalist perspective, yet it tries to have a balance between atemporalism and temporalism. In short, without Creation God stands in a changeless timeless existence in which there are no moments of time, just the fullness of Him, His being and His thoughts. In this state there is no succession of thoughts, rather God has the entirety of His thoughts at once – the fullness of all truths. With Creation God actually stands in a new relation of being Creator and Sustainer of that Creation. He interacts with that Creation and in affect interacts in time.

This view is appealing, yet I do not fully indorse all its components because I tend to want to hold to divine timelessness as part of God ontologically. It affirms that without Creation God is timelessly eternal, knowing all truth, existing in unbounded nowness. Yet, when God brings forth Creation it is His free will decision to condescend and enter into time so as to have relationship with His Creation. This condescension is in exact accord with God's nature, it is argued, which is self-giving love, and it follows in according with God's condescension to come into space and time, in the person of Jesus Christ, some 2,000 years ago to redeem Mankind.

- **TIME IS PART OF WHO GOD IS AND THEREFORE ONTOLOGICALLY NECESSARY** – This view can be held by an atemporalist or a temporalist. This view is appealing, yet I do not fully indorse all its components while at the same time seeing it as a promising perspective. It is the idea that God's very essence is temporal.³⁶ It affirms that God is infinite both qualitatively and quantitatively in the sense that God has an infinite duration of existence, thoughts, and actions. God's consciousness and actions pass through an endless succession of moments within Himself and in His relationships with His creatures. God's thoughts and actions are everlastingly directed (arrow of time) towards a teleos or an end goal.
- **GOD IS TIMELESSLY ETERNAL & YET RELATES TO TIME WITHOUT BEING BOUND BY IT** – This view is trying to affirm a divine atemporal view of God, by affirming that God relating to time in no way makes Him be "sucked into time." Some temporalist thinkers argue that for God to know "tensed facts" He MUST be in time. However, again, I do not see that this is necessarily so. If God is omniscient then He already knows ALL TRUTH. Tensed facts, seem to be relative relations of creaturely existence and therefore have no barring upon God. God is the LORD OF TIME. As John Frame has said,

³⁶ <http://evangelicalarminians.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Understanding-God-God-and-Time.pdf>

“God is the Lord in time as well as the Lord above time. So God is temporal after all, but not merely temporal. He really exists in time, but he also transcends time in such a way as to exist outside it. He is both inside and outside of the temporal box—a box that can neither confine him nor keep him out.”³⁷

I simply have trouble with the idea that for God to know tensed facts this somehow ties Him to time. It doesn't seem necessarily so. As one author has rightly affirmed,

“The incarnation of God in the flesh bestows decisive significance upon all time. God the Son inhabits human flesh without ceasing to be eternal. As in creation God is manifested in time, so in the incarnation God is manifested bodily in the flesh. Just as the Son does not stop being God while becoming human—feeling, experiencing, and acting as a human being—so does the Father not cease to be God while engaging in active relationship with unfolding time, acting as God in and through the conditions of time.”³⁸

It seems God can relate to time differently than we can because He is God. He transcends time yet is immanent within it. These are not mutually exclusive paradigms of the nature of God.

Furthermore, it does not seem to me that God's timelessness makes Him somehow STATIC or IMMOBILE like the temporalist detractors want to claim. A wrong way of conceiving this timeless eternal state of God is thinking He is in a static frozen state of inactivity or idleness. Such a state of existence is not exalting but enslaving and static.

Rather the better analogy would be to think of **cheerful activity**.³⁹ Have you ever been doing something you enjoy so much that you lose track of time? In fact, you are so “in the zone” so “one with it” that it seems as if no time has passed at all? Well, THAT feeling and experience is analogous to God in His infinite eternal state. The beautiful interrelationship of His tri-personal Being of boundless beauty, completeness, peace, and wholeness means that time is nothing to Him. It is not a state of static “nowness” or of plodding infinite succession. Rather He simply is. He simply has all of Himself, all the joy, all the peace, all fulfillment, in Himself because He is Joy, Peace, and Fulfillment.

All that said, in closing I will quote the words of Herman Bavinck for I believe they encapsulate the view of God's relation to time,

“God's eternity should not for that reason be conceived as an eternally static, immobile moment of time. On the contrary: it is identical with God's being and hence with his fullness of being. Not only is God eternal; he is his own eternity.... God's eternity does not stand, abstract and transcendent, above time, but is present and immanent in every moment of time. There is indeed an essential difference between eternity and time, but there is also an analogy and kinship between them so that the former can indwell and work in the latter. Time is a concomitant of created existence. It is not self-originated. Eternal time, a time without beginning, is not conceivable. God, the eternal One, is the only absolute cause of time. In and by itself time cannot exist or endure: it is a continuous becoming and must rest in immutable being. It is God who by his eternal power sustains time, both in its entirety and in each separate moment of it. God pervades time and every moment of time with his eternity. In every second throbs the heartbeat of eternity. Hence, God maintains a definite relation to time, entering into it with his eternity. Also, for him time is objective. In his eternal consciousness he knows time as a whole as well as the succession of all its moments. But this fact does not make him temporal, that is, subject to time, measure, or number. He remains eternal and inhabits eternity, but uses time with a view to manifesting his eternal thoughts and perfections. He makes time subservient to eternity and thus proves himself to be the King of the ages (1 Tim. 1:17).”⁴⁰

³⁷ John Frame, *ibid*, pg. 559

³⁸ Thomas Oden, *Classical Christianity*, pg. 44

³⁹ The cheerful laborer analogy originates with Bavinck, pg. 163

⁴⁰ Herman Bavinck, *ibid*, 163-164

APPLICATION

Before we close this let us consider some of the reasons why this attribute of God matters. Consider the following:

- **THE ETERNITY OF GOD & OUR FLEETING EXISTENCE MEANS WE HAD BETTER USE TIME WISELY** — Time is short. It has this incessant ability to gnaw away at existence. That is one of the sobering realities of studying history. You get this pervasive sense of the utter brevity of life. Whole civilizations, nations, peoples have been swept away into the annals of the past. You also get this sense when you have lost loved ones in your life and you start looking through old phot-albums. Your heart fills with the sentimentality of yesteryears and a desire to rekindle lost loves that will never be this side of eternity. The sense of the utter frailty of life becomes palpable. You come to understand that you are not the exception to the rule and that one day you will be gone from this world and nothing but a memory, a photo, a recording. Sounds depressing, but it is a reality of our creaturely temporal existence.

It is such a reality that we need to come to grips with it. We need to realize that life is ephemeral, and no one can claim the right to live for any number of years or days. What does James say?

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.
James 4:13-17 (ESV)

What does this mean then? It means we need to work diligently (**John 9:4**). We need to take seriously the time we are given and not squander it day in and day out on foolish self-centered exploits that lead to nowhere. As Paul said,

12 The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.
Romans 13:12-14 (ESV)

- **THE ETERNITY OF GOD MEANS HE HAS A BETTER PERSPECTIVE & PLAN THAN WE COULD EVER HAVE** — God is not forced to hurry. He is not pressed for time. God's timetable is right on schedule (**2 Peter 3:8**). He is never early and He is never late. Because He knows all things and all the possible paths of contingencies, when He works out what He is working out, it is exactly as it should be. What does this mean for us? It means we need to put trust in God. It means we need to come to a point in our life when we realize that **GOD HAS THIS!** He is in control and He is working even when we cannot see in the finite temporal moment of space around us. What did Jesus say to this?

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. **Matthew 6:25-34 (ESV)**

- **GOD’S ETERNITY MEANS HE IS OUR ETERNAL HOPE OF EVERLASTING JOY**— Everything we enjoy in this world only gives us a limited amount of joy and satisfaction. Why? Because **(a)** all things are fleeting, they are but vapors, here today and gone tomorrow (**2 Corinthians 4:16-18**) and **(b)** everything is intrinsically finite — this means to say nothing has the capability of giving you Ultimate satisfaction in this life (**Psalms 107:9**).

Nothing that is finite, nothing that is fleeting, can ever hope to give you ultimate or maximal fulfillment, joy, or beauty. This is why we always get bored. Boredom is a feature of finitude. It is the boundary of limited finite fulfillments. Nothing is maximally joyful, nothing is maximally beautiful, nothing is maximally grand, **SAVE FOR GOD**. As Bavinck once wrote, “**God, and God alone, is man’s highest good.**”

God is the greatest conceivable being (Anselm) and therefore the maximally great entity. He is not bound or restricted, He is not going to fade or fail or shrivel or die. He is infinite perfection. He is beauty. He is joy. And this means that when we stand before Him one day, when we go to that Eternal City, He will be our light (**Isaiah 60:9; Revelation 21-22**) and we will never be bored. It will **BE IMPOSSIBLE** for us to become bored of eternal bliss in God’s presence. The great Puritan theologian Stephen Charnock said,

While God is eternal, and always the same, it is not possible that those that partake of his spiritual life, should not also partake of his eternal. . . . After they are retired from this world, they shall live forever with God, without any change by the multitude of those imaginable years and ages that shall run forever. It is that God that hath neither beginning nor end, that is our God; who hath not only immortality in himself, but immortality to give out to others. . . . Mortality shall be swallowed up of immortality; “rivers of pleasure” shall be “for evermore.” Death is a word never spoken there by any; never heard by any in that possession of eternity; it is forever put out as one of Christ’s conquered enemies. The happiness depends upon the presence of God, with whom believers shall be forever present. Happiness cannot perish as long as God lives; he is the first and the last; the first of all delights, nothing before him; the last of all pleasures, nothing beyond him; a paradise of delights in every point, without a flaming sword.

The enjoyment of God will be as fresh and glorious after many ages, as it was at first. God is eternal, and eternity knows no change; there will then be the fullest possession without any decay in the object enjoyed. . . . As God is, so will the eternity of him be, without succession, without division; the fulness of joy will be always present; without past to be thought of with regret for being gone; without future to be expected with tormenting desires. When we enjoy God, we enjoy him in his eternity without any flux; an entire possession of all together, without the passing away of pleasures that may be wished to return, or expectation of future joys which might be desired to hasten. Time is fluid, but eternity is stable; and after many ages, the joys will be as savory and satisfying as if they had been but that moment first tasted by our hungry appetites. When the glory of the Lord shall rise upon you, it shall be so far from ever setting, that after millions of years are expired, as numerous as the sands on the seashore, the sun, in the light of whose countenance you shall live, shall be as bright as at the first appearance; he will be so far from ceasing to flow, that he will flow as strong, as full, as at the first communication of himself in glory to the creature.⁴¹

What a vision of eternity that awaits us!

The eternity of God is a rebuke to our narrow focus so many times. It reminds us of what really should matter. It reminds us of just how frail and fleeting the things of this life are. But it should also enlighten and empower us to the reality that God, and God alone, is the everlasting one that never fails. It is in Him we find rest.

⁴¹ Stephen Charnock, *On the Eternity of God*, <https://www.apuritansmind.com/the-attributes-of-god-by-c-matthew-mcmahon/on-the-eternity-of-god-by-stephen-charnock/>