

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

12.1 What Is God Like?

Part I

The Eternal God

Scripture: Psalm 102:25-27

"Of old Thou didst found the earth; And the heavens are the work of Thy hands. Even they will perish, but Thou dost endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing Thou wilt change them, and they will be changed. But Thou art the same, And Thy years will not come to an end."

INTRODUCTION

All things about us are marked by increase and decrease, growth and deterioration, waxing and waning, life and death, but not so with God. He is everlasting and incorruptible. Thus, one way to answer the above question is to say that God is eternal and that is the attribute of which I would like to speak today.

God's favorite self-designation is Jehovah, which, as He revealed it to Moses, signified that **He is what He is:** or, **that He will be what He will be.** Our Lord associated Himself with this appellation when He declared, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."* (John 8:58) Those who heard Him knew exactly what He meant. The fact that He consciously identified Himself with Jehovah caused them to pick up stones in their attempt to silence Him. (See also Exodus 3:13-15)

Now, at the outset this may appear to be a very dry and irrelevant truth upon which to collect our thoughts. Perhaps there will be an invalid who will read these words, one who is unable to come to church or visit friends, and you cannot imagine how the fact that God is without beginning, ending or succession, can be helpful to one in your circumstances. There may be one who has not yet come to belief in Christ as Savior and Lord. You are looking for more than you have and upon reading the announced theme, have already despaired of gaining anything from it. Whatever your situation may be, however complex your needs, let me assure you that there is much inherent in this truth to assist you. Though the

eternity of God is one of the most difficult of all the attributes of God for the human mind to grasp, I am able to promise you direct, personal applications which are suitable to your needs. Our God is an eternal God. This is a most important concept for us to grasp. Consider the following truths and statement of the doctrine:

I. GOD IS WITHOUT BEGINNING: “Of Old Hast Thou Laid The Foundation...”

It is necessarily true that, if God be God, He is without a point of beginning. He is the great uncaused cause, and He sees all time as present. Our minds boggle and spin at the thought of One who sees and experiences everything at once. Notice,

1. God Is Not Self-Caused:

Bertrand Russell in his book, **Why I Am Not A Christian**, raises the question, “Who made God?” The reasoning here is that if someone made God, He is not God. Further, if someone has to make everything, someone had to make God. Therefore, there is no God. If the world had to have a cause, God had to have a cause.

This reasoning seems very plausible, but it is pseudo objection because it is based upon a misunderstanding. The Christian teaching is not that all things have to have a cause. Every finite, changing, limited thing has to have a cause. If you believe that everything has to have a cause it is reasonable to assume the position of Mr. Russell that there is no God. Christians believe that inasmuch as God is infinite and unchanging He does not need a cause. Every effect has a cause, every creature has a creator, every composition has a writer, every design a designer. Everything that needs a cause has a cause. Christianity claims there is an uncaused cause. He does not need anything to explain His existence.

2. God Is the Creator of What Is:

Many Scriptures indicate this truth. *“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”* (Genesis 1:1) Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made by things which do appear. (Hebrews 11:3) God is creator of all things and therefore existed prior to them. Unless God is eternal, He must be a creature. For if there may be said to have been a time when God was not, then He must have been formed by something other and older than Himself. He is the uncaused cause by virtue of His timelessness or eternity. You and I

are not without beginning. There was a time when we were not. Indeed, there was a time when our mothers and our fathers were not. There has never been a time when God was not.

3. God Is Spirit:

That is, God's spirituality argues for His eternity. There are created spirits, demonic and angelic beings. Man himself is composed of body, soul and spirit. Man essentially is a spirit-being. One of these aspects of man's existence will be corrupted one day, the others will live on for eternity. Of course, in the general resurrection the body also will take on its eternal form. But God, who is an uncreated spirit, is absolutely simple in the manner of His existence. He has no flesh to be decayed. He has no arms or legs or hands. These are all characteristics of created beings. He is rather pure spirit, pure in His beginninglessness. This results with God being impervious to all effects of time, not victim to its destructive and corroding influences. God is without beginning.

II. GOD IS WITHOUT ENDING: "Thy Years Will Not Come To An End." (Psalm 102:27)

This very week we were informed of the death of two people who were much loved by members of the Hope Church family. This happening in addition to the presence of aged persons among us serves to put us in mind of physical disintegration. We as they shall become old. Daring the coming again of the Lord, we as they will surely die. We are all helpless creatures in this regard. A baby is born into the world a helpless creature, intended to grow through the nourishment provided, until reaching a mature adulthood. Then comes a time of the general lessening of faculties, a bodily deterioration, and, at length, physical death. Man, since Adam's fall in Eden, is born to die.

1. God Fills All Time:

God knows nothing of gradual deterioration. He knows a freedom from the threat of death. Is it not written in our text, *"They (the earth and heavens) shall perish, but thou shalt endure."* Paul speaks of God as the incorruptible one. (Romans 1:23) By this He means that God cannot be diminished in His existence because of time's passing. Another statement of this truth is found in Deuteronomy 33:27, *"The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms."* Another meaningful verse is found in 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.”

2. God Survives Time:

One of the great and important questions of all world views and philosophy is the question of where and how things began and how they will end.

Christianity answers this question in the truth of the eternity of God. The Scriptures teach that a day is coming when *“the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved.”* (II Peter 3:12) *“For God will send his holy angel to set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot upon the earth, to cry with a loud voice, as when the lion roareth. And when he shall have cried, seven thunders must utter their voices. And then the angel, standing upon the land and the sea shall lift up his hand to heaven, and swear by things that therein are and the seas and the things that are therein, that there shall be no more time.”* (Revelation 10:2-6)

God, at that dreadful time will cast the sun from its place, and forever darken the face of the moon. When his sentence is issued against the created order, all that is shall perish or be purged. God alone, transcending that order, will abide unchanged as the eternal spirit who has no end, as with those who have been created in His image.

III. GOD IS WITHOUT SUCCESSION: *“One Day Is With The Lord. A Thousand Years.”*

1. Time Has No Meaning for God:

The verse quoted above is from II Peter 3:8'. What is being taught is that God does not experience the events of one day at a time as we do. This morning, for instance, we gather to attend morning worship and Bible study. Then, we sit down to dinner with members of our family. In the evening we gather again to worship or otherwise engage ourselves. Tomorrow we go to work at office or factory or wherever to make our living. Others remain at home. During the evenings of the coming week may have friends in for fellowship and conversation. And so one day succeeds another as we face one event or experience after another. In short, our lives are lived as a succession of days and events. This is the way we measure the passing of time. In the life of God there is no such succession.

2. God Inhabits All Places and Times at Once:

The above progression or parade of events does not effect the God who described himself to Moses as the *"I Am."* The thought is that God is not the "I Was" or the "I Will Be," but the "I Am," with all time being present to Him. Consider also the truth contained in Isaiah 46:6-10, *"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."* Acts 15:18 reads, *"Known unto God are all things from the beginning of the world."* In Isaiah 43:13 we read, *"Yea, before the day was I am He; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work and who can let it?"*

3. Everything Abides God's Attention:

Someone has very aptly illustrated this quality of God by comparing our attention or knowledge of things to that of a man watching a parade from the curbstone. Surrounded by people he manages a viewing of the various companies of soldiers, interspersed with military bands; the occasional float, each one at a time. These all come into his purview individually. And, it is not until the entire parade has passed by that he is aware of its extending to such a degree: at no time was he able to see or enjoy it in its entirety. God, on the other hand, is like the man who has stationed himself in a very high church tower, far above the masses of people. In this exalted position, as he looks down at what transpires below, he discerns the whole spectacle at once before him. One part does not succeed another. Nothing escapes his attention or is it forgotten, neither is it unforeseen. (W.G.T. Shedd; **Dogmatic Theology** - Vol. I, p.344)

Earlier I promised some direct and personal applications suitable to our needs. To allow this teaching as only a complex theological doctrine is to do it a tragic disservice. From the truth of God's eternity we learn:

1. The Eternal God Has Set Eternity in Our Hearts:

"He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set eternity in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." (Ecclesiastes 3:11) God, who is without ending and succession has made us like himself. We are as he is in many ways. This is not to say sin has not left us undamaged. It is to say that, despite sin, we have

been lifted above the level of the brute beasts. Man is not a dumb animal. We can be sometimes unusually rude and dull, but as man we have the aspirations of God within us. Non human life can be enjoyed and dear, but a sharp line of distinction is drawn between humankind and the animal world, Man has more than a simple proclivity to live.

2. The Eternal God Authors Eternal Truth:

If God is eternal, his truth is also. There are many who alter twist or deny what God has said about Himself. There are many tricks to this old game and not a few have managed to do what they have been pleased to do with holy things. Professors, ministers, students, men and women everywhere have a dream that by a mere act of their will, by a sharply uttered word, by a cleverly written book, they can put down what God has said. It cannot be done. God exclaims in the face of their best efforts, *"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever."* (Isaiah 40:8) God's immensity speaks also of His fidelity.

3. The Eternal God's Covenant Is Eternal:

There are important verses to enjoy here. Please read Genesis 17:1-2; Acts 2:38-39; Romans 8:29-31. Do you have reason to suppose yourself a child of God today? This is your every right by the reception of Jesus as your Savior. (John 1:12) Then rest in that blessed confidence. You may experience seasons in which you feel deserted, forsaken. Pain may perplex you. Sorrow may vex you. But God will not let you go. It is the everlasting Father with whom you have to do. Forgiven, pardoned, renewed, it is from eternity that He has purposed to love you and bring you to Himself. He will never fail His own, because of what He is: the everlasting, incorruptible one. His attributes are in perfect balance. The eternal God is our refuge, *"underneath are the everlasting arms."* (Deuteronomy 33:27) We may be certain His love is as eternal as He is. The eternity of God should be a wonderful stabilizing influence in the Christian's life.

4. The Eternal God Establishes Lasting Values for Our Lives:

A consideration of God's attributes causes us to be mindful of our own weaknesses and inabilities. God is very wise, we are mindful of our dullness. God is holy, we are sinful. When we think of God's eternity we are immediately aware of the brevity of our lives. How is it possible for us to do anything of lasting value? Psalm 90:10-12 speaks of this problem and offers

the solution. The truth is that the things we give ourselves to in this life will end with the grave unless we allow the eternal God to guide us in the establishment of lasting values.

5. The Eternal God Makes Sin All the More Terrible:

While the eternity of God is a very comforting doctrine, it has its attendant warning. It is a serious thing to offend a friend or neighbor. But its seriousness disappears when it is set along side sin against God. Human offense lasts only as long as memory lasts. Of what duration is that? Perhaps forty or fifty years. Sin against God takes on endless ramifications because of His endless remembrance. Death cannot halt them, for God does not die. Rather, He eternally remembers. He is not as man with man's reactions and capacities. Let me say that no amount of wishful thinking by brilliant and trained minds can change this gospel truth. It is this eternal God who invites you to come to Him and by personal trust in His Son Jesus receive the gift of eternal life. It is He who sent His Son as a sin offering to the cross at Calvary. Oh, how practical and meaningful is the truth of God's eternity. Faith in Christ is not an option. It means eternal life or eternal death. What is it for you?

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