THE ETERNAL GOD OF A VANISHING CREATION:
RECOVERING THE
DOCTRINE OF DIVINE TIMELESSNESS

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The doctrine of the timelessness of God has long baffled laymen and theologians alike. This article will address the current debate over the timelessness of God, providing a definition of time and uncovering the Scriptural foundations for this doctrine in the process. This article will also trace the development of this critical doctrine throughout church history. God’s timelessness is of no small consequence, because to tamper with this single doctrine is to send an eroding ripple effect through all the other attributes of God. The church must remember, regain, and rejoice over this forgotten doctrine in order to preserve the integrity of Christian theology.

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Introduction

The eternality of God, according to Charles Hodge, is the reality that “with [God] there is no distinction between the present, past, and future, but all things are equally and always present to Him. With Him duration is an eternal now.”1 Stephen Charnock believed that eternity is “contrary to time, and therefore a permanent and immutable state … a perfect possession of life without any variation. … It doth as much outrun

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time, as it went before the beginning of it: time supposeth something before it; but there can be nothing before eternity.\textsuperscript{2}

These definitions capture the notion that God has neither beginning nor end, which is to say that He has illimitable life. Hodge and Charnock also explain that there is no temporal succession in God, which is referred to as the timelessness of God.\textsuperscript{3} The implication of illimitable life is that God has complete possession of life, all in a single moment. This removes the possibility of His succession through time. Human life, on the other hand, is bound by the succession of time. Mark Jones writes,

To illustrate the idea of the eternal present, think of watching a baseball game. We watch a live game in a succession of moments. We do not infallibly know each detail of the game before it happens. We wait for the game to unfold before our eyes. In other words, the ninth inning comes after the first eight innings. But God does not watch baseball games the way we do. God sees every event in the game at once. He sees the ninth inning at the same time as he sees the first inning. Yet God does not conflate the ninth inning with the first inning. Now extrapolate that to world history: God can infallibly predict future events because he sees the future as he sees the past.\textsuperscript{4}

In contrast, consider human life. Infants are entirely dependent, bereft of the ability to communicate, coordinate movement, or reason. When infancy becomes adolescence, the baby grows into a child, with an increasing ability to communicate, move, and think. Since infancy, this child has undergone a physical and cognitive transformation, almost beyond recognition. As the child matures, he begins to organize his simple and limited experiences into wisdom. Humanity is proof that no man or woman has complete possession of the entirety of life in a moment. Every creature experiences life in a succession of moments: the past slipping away and the future ever just beyond the fingertips. All mankind is given is the “present.”

However, outside of time there can be an eternal present that is indistinguishable from past and future. God’s life does not degenerate or increase. It is complete all at once—an indefinite and persisting “now.” Eternality, then, is more than God’s everlasting nature in time. That God is eternal and timeless is indeed a higher perfection than if God were merely everlasting.

\textsuperscript{2} Stephen Charnock, \textit{The Existence and Attributes of God}, vol. 1, \textit{The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock} (1864; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2010), 1:175. Furthermore, he says, “God is not in His essence this day what He was not before, or will be the next day and year what He is not now. All His perfections are most perfect in Him every moment; before all ages, after all ages. As He hath His whole essence undivided in every place, as well as in an immense space; so He hath all His being in one moment of time, as well as in infinite intervals of time. … He is what He always was, and He is what He always will be.” Ibid., 1:178.

\textsuperscript{3} Geerhardus Vos explains, “The attribute of God whereby He is exalted above all limitations of time and all succession of time, and in a single indivisible present possesses the content of his life perfectly (and as such is the cause of time).” \textit{Theology Proper}, vol. 1 \textit{Reformed Dogmatics}, ed. and trans. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 10.

In contemplating God’s eternality, we must be careful not to assume that God’s life and existence are similar to ours. This makes discussions on eternality all the more difficult, as it is tempting to superimpose our experiences onto God in order to make Him easier to understand. This introduces the modern debate.

**Modern Debate**

While there are several theories of Divine eternality that deserve our critical attention, this study focuses on evangelicals who have modified the traditional view of eternality in their interactions with Open Theist critics. In many instances, criticism is not raised against God’s eternality *per se*, but instead against His timelessness. While timelessness is an inseparable component of God’s eternality, it is only fair to acknowledge that there is no self-proclaimed Christian (Open Theist or otherwise) who denies the duration of God’s everlasting nature.

Thus, the modern debate may be summarized in the following confession: For God to have true relationships, He must exist in the world in a give-and-take, relational manner. And in order for Him to enjoy true mutual relations, He must be able to undergo successions in His life. This is the belief of theistic mutualists. And it is most often espoused in three particular perspectives: Everlasting-Temporal God, Timeless-turned-Temporal God, and Timeless-and-Temporal God.

**Everlasting-Temporal God**

The first perspective is that of an Everlasting-Temporal God. The majority of philosophers reason that God is temporal, yet everlasting. By this, they mean that God never began to exist and will never cease to exist, yet still experiences temporal succession. God relates to time much like man does. His thoughts and actions are situated in time. For example, God experienced the Great Depression of 1929, and He also experienced the 2011 World Series. But He did not experience them at the same time; just as man had to wait 82 years between the events, so did God. He has existed in each past moment as it occurred, and He will exist in each future moment as it occurs. His actions are likewise temporal.

One of the chief proponents of this view is Nicholas Wolterstorff. He proposed that there is no biblical warrant for the belief that God is eternal. He contends that those who do hold to the eternality of God inherited and adapted this doctrine from Greek philosophy (e.g. Plato, *Timaeus*) rather than the Bible. Wolterstorff’s argument is centered on God’s relationship to time with a special emphasis upon the crucifixion. He argues that God is not eternal, but that He is everlasting. For many, to contend with such a claim seems to be nothing more than a quibble over words.

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5 Dolezal, *All That Is in God*, 79. Dolezal writes, “While the doctrine of divine eternity is commonly confessed, it is undoubtedly among the most difficult theological claims to understand.”

6 These designations are observed by Dolezal, *All That Is in God*, 89–95.

But words matter. By this claim, Wolterstorff is arguing that God is not eternal, but that He is endlessly temporal. In other words, God does not stand outside of time, but He endlessly stands within it, experiencing each and every moment as time crawls forward.

His logical argument is as follows: First, the Bible clearly shows a God who changes (consequently, he argues, any hermeneutic that denies these changes is invalid). Second, any being who changes is a temporal being. Third, “eternal” is a totalizing characteristic, so to be both temporal and eternal is an impossibility. In conclusion, because God appears to act in time, God is not eternal. Wolterstorff writes,

> What I shall argue is that if we are to accept this picture of God as acting for the renewal of human life, we must conceive of him as everlasting rather than eternal. God the Redeemer cannot be a God eternal. This is so because God the Redeemer is a God who changes. And any being which changes is a being among whose states there is temporal succession. Of course, there is an important sense in which God as presented in the Scriptures is changeless: he is steadfast in his redeeming intent and ever faithful to his children. Yet, ontologically, God cannot be a redeeming God without there being changeful variation among his states.8

In other words, the biblical text suggests a succession of time in God’s actions. Wolterstorff provides examples: God calling Abraham to leave Chaldea, instructing Moses to return to Egypt, and sending Jesus into the world. These events give the impression that God’s actions occur in time. And if God acts in time, then He cannot be timeless.9

Timeless-Turned-Temporal God

Other advocates of Divine temporality argue that God is timeless, but entered into time in order to have a personal relationship with His creation. William Lane Craig is a well-known proponent of this view. He says, “But in virtue of His creating a temporal world, God comes into relation with the world the moment it springs into being. Thus even if it is not the case that God is temporal prior to His creation, He nonetheless undergoes an extrinsic change at the moment of creation which draws Him into time in virtue of his real relation to the world.”10 He believes that the Bible

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9 Another example he provides is God’s knowledge of time. He says God “knows what is happening in our history, what has happened, and what will happen. Hence, some of God’s actions are themselves temporal events.” Ibid., 83.
10 William Lane Craig, “Timelessness and Omnitemporality,” in *God and Time: Four Views*, 131–32. This view has been argued against by Brian Leftow. Leftow claims that if God is temporal, He is so essentially. Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, Cornell Studies in Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 273. Now suppose according to this view God comes to exist in time. Time had a beginning yet God did not have a beginning, so there is a bit of a conundrum. How can these three statements be reconciled? Time came into existence at the moment of creation (Gen 1:1), then God existed before creation, alone without the universe.
presents instances in which God existed before time, and other instances in which He relates to His temporal creation. Therefore, he concludes, God must have been timeless, but now is temporal.11

**Timeless-and-Temporal**

The third position is the most pervasive in modern evangelicalism. Scholars such as John Frame, Bruce Ware, John Feinberg, and Scott Oliphint represent this position.12 This view affirms that God is unchanging in His supernatural (atemporal) existence. However, like the previous two views, this view affirms that in order for God to maintain genuine relationships, He must enter time. Adherents of this position wish to maintain an aspect in which God remains timeless, and therefore changeless. Therefore, they reason that He is both timeless and temporal. In this scenario, God has two modes of existence: one timeless and one temporal. For example, Frame explains,

> Obviously, God is unchangeable in his atemporal or supratemporal existence. But when God enters into time, as a theophany, incarnate Son, or merely as present in time, he looks at his creation from within and shares the perspectives of his creatures. As God is with me on Monday, he views the events of Sunday as in the past, and the events of Tuesday (which, to be sure, he has foreordained) as future. He continues to be with me as Monday turns into Tuesday. So he views the passing of time as we do, as a process.13

He goes on to explain, “As an agent in history, God himself changes. On Monday, he wants something to happen, and on Tuesday, something else. He is grieved one day, pleased the next.”14 Thus for Frame, and other proponents of this perspective, there are two modes of existence in God: one atemporal and one temporal.15

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11 Craig, “Timeless and Omnitemporality,” 131–32.
12 Interestingly enough, K. Scott Oliphint says, “God freely determined to take on attributes, characteristics, and properties that he did not have, and would not have, without creation.” Oliphint, God with Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 110. And what might some of these “non-essential” characteristics be? Well, Oliphint explains temporality as one such characteristic, saying God “takes on temporal properties without in any way ceasing to be essentially eternal” (188).
14 Ibid., 377.
15 Ibid. “The difference between God’s atemporal and historical existence begins not with the creation of man, but with creation itself.” Here Frame expresses not only both modes of existence, but the moment when God enters into time as being at creation. So he at least concedes that time is created and not co-eternal with God.
In one respect, God, ‘in His atemporal existence,’ is unchangeable. Yet, with the creation of time, He enters into time in a temporal existence, and by it He changes along with creation. For Frame, these two modes are never at odds. This is one of the reasons Frame advocates “soft immutability.”

Frame admits the ostensible similarities between his views and those of process theologians. He says, “My approach bears a superficial resemblance to process theology, which also recognizes two modes of existence in God, transcendent and immanent, sometimes called the ‘primordial and consequent natures of God.’”

While Frame attempts to distance himself from process theology (with, admittedly, real and significant differences), the similarities are nevertheless unavoidable. Even Open Theist John Sanders recognizes them:

Some evangelical Calvinists (e.g., Bruce Ware and John Frame) who affirm meticulous providence claim to be classical theists while rejecting Divine timelessness or strong immutability or strong impassibility. Though these Calvinists may be closer to classical theism than freewill theists, it does not seem justifiable to call such modifications classical theism any more than it is justifiable to claim that Anglicanism is Roman Catholicism.

To be sure, similarities with Open Theism could be found in each of the temporal views of God outlined above. While there is not conformity among these scholars in how far they take their positions, they still share a similar presupposition—namely, that in order for God to engage in meaningful relationships (in any mutual way), He must be temporal (at least to some degree). Now, before considering the criticisms raised by these positions, it is important to discuss the nature of time itself, with particular attention being given to what Scripture says about God and time.

**Defining Time**

What is time? This deceptively simple noun has been and remains the battleground for understanding Divine timelessness. Most simply, time is that which is measured by clocks. It orders events, creating an understandable sequence of relationships—one after another after another. And time can specify the duration of an event. Primarily, time is used to measure when events occur, and the change that occurs between those events.

The classical theist’s understanding of Divine timelessness has been defined as follows: “God is above and beyond time. Again, God has no past, present, or

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18 K. Scott Oliphint says this, “The fact that God interacts at all with creation presupposes his covenantal character. Once he determines to relate himself to us, that relation entails that he take on properties that he otherwise would not have had. He limits himself while remaining the infinite God. The fact that he is Creator means that he is now related to something ad extra to which he was not related before.” *God with Us*, 110.
future.” 19 Given this assertion, it is necessary to distinguish between how both the Creator and His creatures relate to time. It is dangerous and all too common to conflate the two realities, and thus conclude that God’s existence mirrors that of His creation. Paul Helm explains these two perspectives,

From the Creator’s standpoint his creation is a timeless whole including as it does, the incarnation. However, from the standpoint of an intelligent creature the universe may be thought to be coeternal with God, for there may be no time when the universe is not. For such a creature the universe unfolds as a temporal sequence and because such an agent is in time, he is able to represent the universe as having a past, a present, and a future. 20

The purpose of this article is not to understand better the human perspective on time. Most would agree that humans experience the world temporally. Rather, this article focuses on whether or not God relates to time in the same manner. Concerning the philosophy of time itself, there are two schools of thought: the A-theory and the B-theory of time. These theories will be what we turn our attention to next.

A vs. B Theories of Time: Briefly Explained

Concerning the philosophical understanding of time, J. M. E. McTaggart has identified two opposing theories of time—namely, the A-theory and the B-theory. 21 Understanding these two theories is vital for grasping God’s relationship to time. According to McTaggart, the A-theory teaches an actual temporal progression that makes an ontological distinction between the past, the present, and the future: A (past), B (present), and C (future). The present (and often the past) is affirmed as real, but the future is not yet real. Reality is based on what has been or is being experienced. Thus, the future is yet to be real. There exists an objective “now” which has ontological significance of its own.

The B-theory, on the other hand, understands time as the expression of relationships between various points on the timeline. Concerning time, there are no privileged, absolute perspectives; there is no objective “now.” Therefore, the “now” or “present” is defined based on its relationship to events, not simply based on temporal order. A-theory is generally associated with temporalists (those who deny Divine Timelessness), and B-theory is generally associated with atemporalists (those who affirm Divine Timelessness).

Experiential Space/Time and Metaphysical Space/Time

In this debate, it is necessary to distinguish between experiential time and metaphysical time. Experiential time is the “time” in which temporal and finite

creatures experience existence. Metaphysical time, however, is not something temporal finite creatures can experience, but something they can explain with reference to God. While an A-theory of time is intuitive to our psychological experience, it is nonetheless an uncertain, imprecise, and subjective explanation of experiential time. Albert Einstein’s Relativity Theory has shown this to be true.22

Einstein’s Theory of Relativity sought to examine time through observable measurements.23 Subsequent scientific experiments and observations of high speeds and intense gravity fields have only helped to confirm Einstein’s theories that measurements of time by progression and temporal simultaneity are relative to the observer.24 These ever-active principles of time measurement mean that experiencing the passing of time varies based on gravity and speed, which has been visually observed in extreme circumstances. Therefore, the rate of measurement of time is relative, not static. There is no such thing as an absolute temporal reference frame.

The measurement of time between two individuals can be dramatically different. This is known as “time dilation.” For example, a person on an airplane breaking the sound barrier is traveling at a different rate relative to a person on a couch. This suggests that no two events happen in absolute simultaneity. Two events can appear to be simultaneous for one observer, and not simultaneous for another observer, yet both are equally true.25 Such scientific observations radically alter one’s perception of time and undermine naïve confidence in appeals to the subjective experience of time for metaphysical claims (upon which the A-theory is dependent).

As scientists have discovered the intricate interactions between space and time, they have begun to realize that the two are not separate entities. This discovery has led to the concept of four-dimensional space-time.26 This newfound understanding of the relationship between space and time has scientifically demonstrated the traditional Christian understanding that time is an aspect of creation. Therefore, since time is a created entity, it must either be transcended by its Creator, or it must be pre-existent with Him. Because space and time are parallel dimensions, we can conclude that God’s transcendent relationship to space must also be true for His relationship to time. Otherwise, we would have to conclude that time-space itself is co-equal with God. If time-space were co-equal with God, then there would be no validity to the creation account, or even to God Himself. In that case, “god” would be indistinguishable from space-time. Therefore, God is either co-equal with time-space, or time-space is created.

22 Specifically, it was Einstein’s theory of special relativity that dealt with the non-absoluteness of time with respect to non-accelerating observers, the general theory just generalized it to include acceleration and gravity. So, really it was the special theory of relativity that changed the discussion on time. And the explanatory power of these theories has been proven through experimentation by physicists subsequent to Einstein. To see how the two theories impacted the wider culture see: Walter Isaacson, *Einstein: His Life and Universe* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008).

23 Einstein was seeking to explain how space and time were “linked” for objects moving at the same consistent speed on the same line. However, for observers moving at different speeds and trajectories, time could not be said to be moving at the same speed for both of them.


26 Giancoli, *Physics for Scientists and Engineers*, 932.
God’s Relationship to Space and Time

Since the A-theory explains experiential time in an insufficient manner, the B-theory must be examined to see if it can more adequately explain experiential time, as well as metaphysical time, with respect to God. The temporal order of events in the B-theory of time is as a set: \((A, B, C, \ldots)\). A is the earliest event (or events) within this order, B the next, and so on. A causes B, B causes C, and so forth. For example, the boy hits a ball (A), the ball hits a window (B), the window breaks (C). The series of events is measured and distinguished based on each other, and none of those events take place simultaneously.

The B-theory asserts that the entire set \((A, B, C, \ldots)\) is eternally, or timelessly, created. Therefore, God stands in an independent relationship to the set and its events. Accordingly, metaphysical time (time in relation to God) does not have a tensed distinction of the “present/now.” The set \((A, B, C, \ldots)\) itself is not past/simultaneous–present/future, because there is no other event to which the creation of the temporal order could stand in relationship to Him. The created order \((A, B, C, \ldots)\), then, does not stand in temporal comparison to God, yet the events A, B, and C do stand in relation to each other in a measurable and temporal way, which is why events can be spoken of as occurring “in” time. They are earlier/simultaneous/later with respect to each other (experiential time/temporal), but not to God (metaphysical time/atemporal).

The A-theory suggests that God is necessarily “in” time, even from His own vantage point. The B-theory, on the other hand, holds that God remains “outside” of time. For B-theorists, not one moment in history is to be regarded as the “present” over the other moments of history, even though some occur earlier than others in relation to one another. Rather, all moments are in the same position with respect to God.

Since “time” is a created entity, no temporal event can be said to occur “before” creation. As there is no earlier event than creation, the creation of “time” occurs in eternity. Eternity should not be understood as existing within the temporal dimension. Creation is metaphysically dependent on the eternal decree of God. Therefore, God does not decree “in” time, but rather “with or concerning” time. He eternally, or timelessly, decrees. For example, event A at time \(t_1\), B at \(t_2\), etc. Therefore, the whole temporal order is timeless according to God’s will of decree, though the events in this order are temporal because of their temporal relations to one another.

Scriptural Foundations

It is essential to determine whether or not the exegetical evidence of Scripture supports the claims of the B-theory of time. However, simply examining relevant passages is not an appropriate way to begin such a study. At the hermeneutical level, there is a fundamental difference between A-theorists and B-theorists.\(^{27}\) The question

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\(^{27}\) The two primary debates are at the level of understanding the difference in the weight of didactic and narrative texts and the use of accommodation by God through means of anthropomorphisms. Helm explains, “At the heart of the theological differences between the Christian eternalist and temporalist is a
is this: does God accommodate His written revelation to the level of man’s understanding? One’s view of accommodation influences how one interprets the didactic and narrative texts of Scripture. Therefore, examining accommodation is foundational in establishing a proper exegetical methodology, especially as it concerns texts dealing with theology proper.

Theologians espousing the A-theory explain their exegetical method as “rescuing” biblical meaning from the confines of Greek philosophy. This approach often leads to an overly literal interpretation of texts concerning the ontological nature of God (which classical theists deem anthropomorphic). A-theorists often do so while asserting that the classical theists ascribe too much to accommodation as a result of their Greek philosophical influence.

Regarding “accommodation” passages, temporalists follow Nicholas Wolterstorff’s principle, which is to “affirm as literally true Scripture’s representation of God unless one has good reason not to do so.”28 This is in contrast to the eternalist view of Scripture as intrinsic accommodation to finite creatures. John Calvin best represents the B-theorist’s understanding of accommodation. He did not believe it was a “fall-back strategy” for “difficult” passages, but an essential part of God’s self-revelation.29 Ultimately, the question of accommodation is how an infinite being relates to finite creatures. Paul Helm’s explanation for Divine dialogue represents the position of classical theists:

On the eternalist view, in revealing his will God must accommodate himself to human spatiotemporal conditions by the use of sensory, figurative, anthropomorphic language about himself, particularly by using the language of change. So at the heart of the idea of divine accommodation is a logical point: it is a logically necessary condition of God's dialogue with his creatures that the divine dialogue partner must recognize that such creatures must act and react in time. If dialogue is to be real and not make-believe, then God cannot represent himself to such creatures by only revealing one immutable thing, for then dialogue, real dialogue, would be impossible.30

Both the A-theorist and the B-theorist perspectives of time assume, at some level, accommodation. The question is: who, or what, determines when, or if, accommodation is occurring in Scripture? Or is accommodation always taking place, just to varying degrees? Because both groups have different hermeneutical presuppositions concerning accommodation, there are four elements which influence both hermeneutical presuppositions. These four elements are: (1) the historical different estimate of what constitutes such a good reason as not to take some scriptural representation of God literally.” Paul Helm, “Response to Nicholas Wolterstorff,” in God and Time: Four Views, 215.


29 Wicks, “Is It Time to Change?,” 51.

influence, (2) the intensity of accommodation, (3) the role of genre, and (4) the weight of didactic passages.

First, the history of the church sides overwhelmingly with the eternalist understanding of accommodation. Those who wish to argue that the entire history of the church has had a false understanding of accommodation must do more than merely assert it. They must prove it. The consistent and pervasive affirmation of the eternalist understanding of accommodation in Christian history, which in turn has led to an understanding of Divine timelessness, is inescapable. This will be the focus of the latter portion of this study. However, the burden of proof rests with the A-theorists to prove that the overwhelming testimony of the church has been consistently in error.

Secondly, because of their hermeneutical presuppositions concerning accommodation, temporalists have an arbitrary delineation for when they do or do not understand expressions as accommodation. They likewise cannot account for varying degrees of accommodation. For them, accommodation is either occurring, or it is not. However, the eternalist understands that accommodation is necessary for an infinite God to reveal Himself to finite creatures; therefore, all revelation is accommodation.

The eternalist understands accommodation to always be taking place. But there is room for degrees of intensity, or levels, of accommodation. Did God literally need to be “refreshed” after creation (Exod 31:17)? According to Wolterstorff’s rule, the temporalist should understand this as literal. However, when temporalists do not interpret this, and other similar passages, as literal, they are doing so based on an arbitrary logic, which is precisely what they accuse eternalists of doing. Just as the temporalist has to make an arbitrary decision about “accommodation” in God’s resting, they must make similar decisions when the biblical authors say that God “forgets,” “remembers,” or “changes His mind,” that is, unless they are willing to understand all of these as literal occurrences.

Third, the temporalist often fails to consider the genre distinctions of Scripture when assessing accommodation. Passages containing Divine dialogue take place in narrative portions of Scripture (which are rife with anthropomorphic language). As narratives, these conversations unfold sequentially. Temporalists conclude, then, that since God is presented as participating in time-bound dialogue, He must therefore be “in” time. The temporalist ascribes metaphysical and ontological teachings to God’s essence based on verses that were never intended to support such positions. When recounting dialogue, the biblical authors were not using twenty-first century language. When Scripture is speaking of God’s essence and recounting God’s interaction with His creation “in” time, genre should be taken into account. We must be careful not to suppose God’s interactions “in” time demand that He be contained, or metaphysically defined, by it.31

Fourth, as a result of this hermeneutical misunderstanding of genre, temporalists tend to grant more authority to narrative passages than didactic passages for

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31 William Lane Craig, “Response to Nicholas Wolterstorff,” in God and Time: Four Views, 222. He writes, “I think it naïve to take Scripture's representation of God as literally true unless one has good reason not to. By ‘good reason not to’ Nick apparently means, judged by his method, some teaching in Scripture to the opposite effect Nick concludes that we should take the temporal descriptions of God literally. But this hermeneutic is insensitive to the genre(s) of Scripture” (222).
establishing theology proper and God’s metaphysical relationship to time. However, it seems only fitting that didactic passages be given greater weight in metaphysics than more impressionistic narrative passages.\(^{32}\) Eternalists understand that Divine action “in” time is consistent with a timeless God. But God’s actions “in” time do not define God’s essence, nor were they intended to do so.

In regard to theologically understanding God’s relationship to time, one’s approach to relevant texts must be based on a proper hermeneutic that analyzes the full context. As James Barr explains, “A valid biblical theology can be built only upon the _statements_ of the Bible, and not on the _words_ of the Bible.”\(^{33}\) A lexical study of time is an incomplete approach. The teaching of the text and its meaning should determine one’s metaphysical understanding of God’s essence.

**Scripture: Accommodation Regarding Eternality and Temporality**

As we turn our attention to the teaching of Scripture regarding God’s relationship to time, the insufficiency of lexical studies is apparent. For example, even the usage of the terms for “eternal,” in both Old and New Testaments, lacks the precision and consistency one might anticipate. The word “eternal” means without beginning or end. Nevertheless, Scripture uses this term for many things that have a beginning and end. For example: eternal mountains (Gen 49:26; Deut 33:15); eternal life (John 10:28; Titus 1:2); eternal weight of glory (2 Cor 4:17); and eternal heavenly home (2 Cor 5:1). All of these had a beginning. There was a beginning to the mountains of the earth, the eternal life of the believer, and the heavenly dwelling place Christians will inhabit forever. Even the earth had a beginning (Gen 1:1) and yet is said to be eternal (Ps 104:5). So a study of the term “eternal” does not provide as much clarity as we might hope.

Why is this? These passages are examples of accommodation. What is true of each of these realities is that they have a temporal beginning and proceed through a succession of moments, either to end long into the future (like the mountains or the earth), or never to end, such as souls or angels.\(^{34}\) Hence, the biblical writers often used the term “eternal” in a comparative manner.

The biblical authors also use the term “eternal” to emphasize that an event has always been in the mind of God—within His eternal will. However, every event that has ever transpired has eternally been in the mind of God. Nevertheless, Scripture speaks of the eternal covenant (Gen 17:7, 8), eternal promises (Num 10:8; 15:5; 18:8, 11, 19, 23), and even God’s eternal dwelling place (1 Kings 8:13; 9:3; Ps 132:14).

It should be noted that the A-theory demands these texts be interpreted literally. There is no room for accommodation in the A-theory. But not only does Scripture ascribe “eternal” language to temporal things, it also ascribes “temporal” language to God in ways that even the A-theorists would not interpret literally. That temporal

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\(^{32}\) Wicks, “Is It Time to Change?,” 51–52.


\(^{34}\) Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, III.10.2. Gill, Body of Divinity, 45. Thomas Aquinas called this “aeviternal” when something is characterized by eternity when it is not eternal. *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1912; repr. Raleigh, NC: Hayes Barton Press, 2006), Ia.10.5.
language, being used non-literally of God, can be seen when God is called the “Ancient of Days” (Dan 7:9, 22), or when He is said to have “unending years” (Ps 102:27). If these passages were understood literally, as the A-theorists insist, we would end up with a god whom we believe simply to be very old. This would leave us with a god who is not God. The writers of Scripture expect more of us as readers. As Brakel said,

Even when years or days, or past and present times are attributed to God, and He is called the Ancient of Days and other similar expressions, such is merely done from man’s standpoint. The reason for this is that we, insignificant human beings incapable of thinking and speaking about eternity in a fitting manner, may by way of comparison—which in reality is a very unequal comparison—comprehend as much of eternity as is needful for us to know. Nevertheless, in doing so we must fully divorce God from the concept of time.35

It is natural to wonder why Scripture accommodates in the way that it does. Why do the biblical authors use eternal language for temporal things, and temporal language to describe eternal matters? Because man is fixed in time. Without temporal language, it would be difficult to understand the enduring nature of God. Therefore, Scripture stoops down to explain God’s existence to us in a way that is commensurate with our experience.

Historical Argument

Now it seems the temporalist refuses to accept accommodation in certain situations regarding God’s work in time. In the estimation of the atemporalist, these refusals to accept accommodation are very subjective. So the question naturally follows, how should we understand the Bible on this matter? How should the modern interpreter examine his personal interpretation so as not to create a new version of God in the process? While not an infallible rule, a safe guide in this matter is to consider what the history of the church has taught concerning the matter.

The church has historically affirmed, taught, and defended the timelessness of God. Granted, some of the articulation regarding timelessness is more philosophical and theoretical than scriptural in nature, but that is no reason for the church to avoid understanding God’s relation to time. While the debate may trend more philosophical than most Christians prefer, the issue is no less important. The debate is over the very essence of God. Thus, throughout her history, the church has searched into these matters and has concluded that God is timeless.36 The following is a brief survey of that search.


36 The A-theorist, anti-classical theist, Clark Pinnock similarly observed this; “No one should criticize the Fathers for trying to integrate current philosophical beliefs and biblical insights. If the God of
The early church was filled with affirmations of the timelessness of God. Living and ministering during the time of the apostles, Ignatius of Antioch (estimated to have lived between A.D. 35–50 and A.D. 98–107) was a defender of Divine timelessness. In connection to several comments dating before the creeds of Christendom, there was a common teaching that Christ was waiting in heaven “till his enemies are put under his feet.” To this Ignatius added, “Look for Him who is above all time, eternal and invisible.” Ignatius’s declaration that Christ was “above all time” was a declaration of God’s timeless existence. While God may be and act “in” time, He is in no way constrained by it, hence Ignatius’s statement that He is “above all time.”

Another early-church proponent of the timelessness of God was Athenagoras the Athenian (c. A.D. 133–190). Athenagoras declared himself to be an Athenian, a philosopher, and a Christian. He wrote, “We are not atheists, therefore, seeing that we acknowledge one God, uncreated, eternal.” The eternity of God, as previously defined, is God’s independent self-existence as He was before time. Since God cannot be measured by time and because He is infinite, He is said to be eternal. In Athenagoras’ time, the claim that God was terrestrial or contingent was considered atheistic in nature. “Eternal” is, therefore, a synonym for timeless.

This same position regarding the eternality of God is seen in Justin Martyr (A.D. 100–165). In his address to the Greeks, Justin Martyr reasoned that the Greek philosophers owed much of their understanding to Moses and the “ancient Christian teachers.” When Scripture says of God, “I am the first,” and, “there is no other,” Martyr explained, “But either of the expressions seems to apply to the ever-existent God. For He is the only one who eternally exists, and has no generation.”

God’s sovereign control of future events—His ability to decree and predict—is another element of the timelessness of God. He speaks of future events as certain even though, in experiential time, they have yet to occur. He can do so because His interaction with time is entirely different than ours. Tatian (A.D. 120–180) wrote, “I was led to put faith in … the foreknowledge displayed of future events, the excellent quality of the precepts, and the declaration of the government of the universe as centered in one Being.”

the universe and of truth is one, theologians should try to integrate all of the truth that they know from any quarter.” Clark Pinnock, *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 106.


39 Athenagoras the Athenian, “A Plea for the Christians,” in *ANF*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 2:131. Here Athenagoras is defending the teaching of the philosophical pursuit of the question of God’s location and affirms that God is everywhere, that is, God is unconstrained by any time or place.

40 Ibid., 2:133.


42 Tatian, “Tatian’s Address to the Greeks,” in *ANF* (1999), 2:77.
One of the clearest statements on Divine timelessness from the first century is from Theophilus of Antioch (A.D. 120–183). He wrote:

This is the attribute of God, the Highest and Almighty, and the living God; not only to be everywhere present, but also to see all things and to hear all things. He is by no means to be confined in a place. For if he were, then the place containing Him would be greater than He; for that which contains is greater than that which is contained. For God is not contained, but is Himself the place of all.43

The argumentation (as seen here) of the early church assumes that if God is constrained by time, then time must become greater than Him. Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150–215) explained God’s existence as being in eternity. He also expressed God’s existence and interaction with time as fundamentally different than that of finite creation when he wrote, “Eternity, for instance, presents in an instant the future, the present, and also the past of time.”44 God’s existence is described by eternity because He cannot be contained by time. Clement wrote, “Such an one is persuaded that God is ever beside him, and does not supposed that He is confined in certain limited places.”45 Perhaps the best description of God’s timelessness by Clement is as follows: “God is not in darkness or in place, but He is above both space and time, and qualities of objects. Wherefore neither is He at any time in a particular point, either as containing or as contained, either by limitation or by section. … Though heaven be called His throne, not even thus is He contained.”46 Clement understood that time is in fact a place—a plane of existence that is different than God’s essential existence. God is “above both space and time,” and is not even contained by heaven itself, though it is His very resting place.

Another early teacher of timelessness was Irenaeus of Lyons (A.D. 130–202). Philip Schaff calls Irenaeus “the most important witness of the doctrinal status of the Catholic Church at the close of the second century.”47 Irenaeus affirmed the transcendence and uniqueness of God. The reason God, in order to express Himself, must accommodate to human understanding is because He is so unique. “Now what has been made is a different thing from him who makes it. The breath, then, is temporal, but the Spirit eternal.”48 In the classical theistic understanding of God’s timelessness, two doctrines are often connected: (1) Divine simplicity (God is not comprised of many parts), and (2) Divine immutability (God is incapable of change). Concerning the first, Irenaeus wrote, “He is a simple, uncompounded Being, without diverse members, and altogether like, and equal to himself:”49 This establishes God’s transcendence and the need for men to understand God on His own terms, not imagining Him to be a man while seeking to understand who He is in and of Himself.

45 Ibid., 2.533.
46 Ibid., 2.348.
49 Ibid., 1:374.
“In this respect God differs from man, that God indeed makes, but man is made; and truly, He who makes is always the same.”

Therefore, if God is immutable, as the Creator of time He cannot become dependent upon nor constrained by time, as that would entail change in Him. In his pivotal work, Against Heresies, Irenaeus declared that, “God alone, who is Lord of all, is without beginning and without end, being truly and forever the same, and always remaining the same unchangeable Being.” This directly impacts how Irenaeus understood God’s relation to time. “They are ignorant what the expression means, that heaven is [His] throne and earth [His] footstool. For they do not know what God is, but they imagine that He sits after the fashion of a man, and is contained within bounds, but does not contain.” God cannot be contained by anything in creation, which would include time itself.

Therefore, after the testimonies of Ignatius of Antioch, Athenagoras the Athenian, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, Clement of Alexandria, and Irenaeus of Lyons, it is reasonable to conclude that the doctrine of Divine timelessness was pervasive in the first and second centuries church.

Third Century

Like the second century, the third century church was convinced of and invested in Divine timelessness. Tertullian (A.D. 160–220) succinctly explained God’s eternal existence and his definition of “eternity” when he wrote, “Eternity has not time. It is itself all time.” The church fathers consistently referred to God’s existence as eternal in order to distinguish Him from temporal creatures. God’s existence cannot be measured by time, because time is a creation of His hands. God’s existence cannot be questioned by time.

Tertullian affirmed the eternality of God when he said:

This rule is required by the nature of the One-only God, who is One-only in no other way than as the sole God; and in other way sole, than as having nothing else (co-existent) with Him. So also, He will be first, because all things are after Him; and all things are after Him, because all things are by Him; and all things are by Him, because they are of nothing.

Tertullian believed that nothing was co-eternal with God. This means that time itself was created, not co-existent with God.

Origen was another third-century proponent of timelessness (A.D. 182–254). He grappled with the incarnation and God’s interaction with time. He made clear that when the Second Person of the Trinity became incarnate, He was not completely

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51 Ibid., 1:411.
52 Ibid., 1.465.
contained by what He took on. He neither lost nor changed His existence when He became a man. Origen wrote:

The God of the universe may, through His own power, descend with Jesus into the life of men. The Word that was in the beginning with God (who is also very God) may come to us. However, He does not give up His place or vacate His own seat, in doing so. It is not that one place becomes empty of Him. Or that another place did not formerly contain Him is not filled.55

Therefore, when entering into time, God does not remove Himself from His timeless existence, nor trap Himself in the confines of time. Origen also wrestled with the concept of man’s glorification after the consummation of the ages. He writes, “And we do not ask the question, ‘How shall we go to God?’ as though we thought that God existed in some place. God is of too excellent a nature for any place: He holds all things in His power, and is Himself not confined by anything whatsoever.”56 Although Origen embraced a number of unorthodox teachings, he did not appear to deny the classical attributes of God. Likewise, in regard to the doctrine of timelessness, Origen seems to have followed the uniform teaching of the church prior to him.

Another example of third century teaching on timelessness is from Mark Minucius Felix (A.D. 150–270). Felix expressed that God can simultaneously be “in” time and “in” eternity (outside of time). So while God is upholding, containing, directing, and moving time itself, He is not losing His eternal existence. Felix explains:

For from where is God afar off, when all things heavenly and earthly, and which are beyond this province of the universe, are known to God, are full of God? Everywhere He is not only very near to us, but He is infused into us. Therefore once more look upon the sun: it is fixed fast in the heaven, yet it is diffused over all lands equally; present everywhere, it is associated and mingled with all things; its brightness is never violated. How much more is God.57

Not only is God omnipresent in time, but He neither loses nor leaves His eternal essence to become constrained by a temporal existence.

Many more issues related to timelessness are expressed in the third century. Origen explained God’s relation to time in that He is not changed upon entering time nor contained within it when He does. Second, Mark Minucius Felix explained how God’s omnipresence in time does not change His essence as eternal (timelessness). In other words, God can simultaneously be inside and outside of time.

56 Ibid., 4:625.
Fourth Century

The doctrine of timelessness was no less prominent in the fourth century. The church fathers of the fourth century not only affirmed the immutability, simplicity, and eternality of God and equated these doctrines with God’s timelessness, but they also taught in detail on God’s timelessness. Concerning the timelessness of the Godhead—and Jesus Christ in particular—Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 313–386) said:

Two fathers He hath: one, David, according to the flesh, and one, God, His Father in a divine manner. As the Son of David, He is subject to time, and to handling and to genealogical descent: but as Son according to the Godhead, He is subject to neither time nor place, nor to genealogical descent: for His generation who shall declare God is a Spirit. … The Son Himself says of the Father, the Lord said unto Me, Thou art My Son, today have I begotten Thee. Now this today is not recent, but eternal: a timeless today, before all ages.⁵⁸

The previous examples explained how the creation of time in no way changes the eternal existence of God, that time does not contain Him in any way, and the nature of His interactions with time. But it was Cyril of Jerusalem who assembled all these teachings and ascribed to God the attribute of “timeless.” Even though the timeless existence of God was understood in the first three centuries of the church, in the fourth century the various threads concerning God’s essence were at last woven together in the term “timeless.”

Another example of the attribute of God’s timelessness is seen in Hilary of Poitiers (A.D. 315–367). He explains:

His nature forbids us to say that He ever began to be, for His birth lies beyond the beginning of time. But while we confess Him existent before all ages, we do not hesitate to pronounce Him born in timeless eternity, for we believe His birth, though we know it never had a beginning. But while we confess Him existent before all ages, we do not hesitate to pronounce Him born in timeless eternity, for we believe His birth, though we know it never had a beginning.⁵⁹

Hilary wrote a significant amount on the timeless existence of God. He even used John 1:1 to elaborate on the doctrine of timelessness. Concerning John 1:1, he writes, “For His was has no limit of time and no commencement; the uncreated Word was in the beginning.”⁶⁰ Likewise, the transcendence of God makes equating or expressing God’s essence and existence by comparing Him to time improper. Regarding the timeless existence of the Trinity, Hilary wrote, “He, the Author of all things, must have an immeasurable existence. For time is a cognizable and divisible measure of

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⁶⁰ Ibid., 9:56.
extension, not in space, but in duration. All things are from Him, without exception; time then itself is His creature.”

The church fathers of the first three centuries of the church taught and believed in Divine timelessness. They explained God’s inability to be constrained by time and His eternal nature. Nevertheless, they were not as explicit as the fourth century fathers. In the fourth century, the previous teachings concerning God were harmonized and articulated as Divine timelessness.

Fifth Century

There is not another theologian—in his time nor perhaps since—whose name holds more weight than Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354–430). John Frame tells of a joke in Augustine’s day that asked, “What was God doing before he created the world?” The response: He was “preparing Hell for people who pry into mysteries.”

However, like the previous church fathers, Augustine did not regard timelessness as a mystery. He understood that to believe God to be temporal was a serious philosophical problem. Augustine thus continued to expose the logical problem of positing time as co-eternal with God. For him, it was pure ignorance to think of God as having to wait the passage of time in order to create. Therefore, Augustine attributed to God the characteristic of timelessness. God was doing nothing “before” creation, because there was no such thing as time before creation.

Because God is timeless, one cannot say that He waited an infinite amount of time to create. God’s existence is not measurable by time, nor what has been called eternity. This view has been defended by atemporalist theologians ever since.

Augustine helped with the defining characteristics of the atemporalist (the B-theory) understanding of God when he wrote, “The distinguishing mark between time and eternity is that the former does not exist without some movement and change, while in the latter there is no change at all.”

Furthermore, he explained, “The world was made not in time but together with time. For what is made in time is made after

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62 Augustine, “Confessions,” NPNF1, 1:167; also Feinberg, No One Like Him, 391.
63 Modern philosophers believe that time is itself pre-existent, and therefore God is infinite, because His existence is in time. However, this is a philosophical impossibility. If time were pre-existent, the present time could never have been reached for God to create. This is known as the Kalaam argument. See William Lane Craig and Quentin Smith, Theism, Atheism and Big Bang Cosmology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), particularly Chapter 1. Feinberg, No One Like Him, 389–91, concurs, citing the Kalaam argument that an actual infinite is impossible, because it is not possible to have an infinite number of events occur, so we would never reach the present. A natural conclusion from this is that God cannot be actually (temporally) infinite, but must be timeless. Therefore, it is more accurate to say that God is eternal or timeless rather than infinitely temporal.

Even if it were possible to assume, for the sake of argument, that God has always existed in time, a logical impossibility still presents itself. Brian Leftow shows the illogic of a temporal God’s choosing to wait any amount of time to create when He exists unchanging by Himself. Brian Leftow, “Why Didn’t God Create the World Sooner?” Religious Studies 27 (1991): 157–72. The strength of this argument is clearly seen in Wolterstorff’s weak response. In Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Response to Critics,” in God and Time: Four Views, 238, Wolterstorff does not give much attention to this argument. In general, Temporalists cannot provide a persuasive argument for why God would delay creating.

64 Augustine, “Confessions,” 1:167.
65 Ibid., 1:165.
one period of time and before another, namely, after a past and before a future time. But, there could have been no past time, since there was nothing created by whose movements and change time could be measured.”

Augustine also taught that time was created, and that God preceded time in timeless eternity. He wrote, “Nor dost Thou by time precede time; else wouldest not Thou precede all times. But in the excellency of an ever-present eternity Thou precedest all times past, and survives all future times. … It is silly for them to excogitate a past time during which God was unoccupied, for the simple reason that there was no such thing as time before the universe was made.” He adds, “And no times are co-eternal with Thee.”

Middle Ages

One of the most influential teachers in the Middle Ages was St. Anselm (1033–1109). Anselm defended and presented timelessness from a different perspective than the early church fathers. Feinburg explains that Anselm, in Proslogium, argued from Divine perfection to atemporality, asserting that Divine timelessness is a necessary perfection for a perfect being, because being eternal is greater than being temporal. Anselm understood eternality as timelessness, as did the early church fathers, but rather than arguing from immutability, he argued from perfection. Anselm described the perfection of God’s timelessness when he wrote:

Thou wast not, then, yesterday, nor wilt thou be to-morrow; but yesterday and to-day and to-morrow thou art; or, rather, neither yesterday nor to-day nor to-morrow thou art; but simply, thou art, outside all time. For yesterday and to-day and to-morrow 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. For nothing contains thee, but thou containest all.

Anselm and other atemporalists believed that temporality was inferior to eternality. Though this may be denied by temporalists, it is important to examine the claim. First, if it is not true that timelessness is a greater perfection than temporality, then the creation of time would have been necessary, not free. Second, if God remains timeless, it is reasonable to see how He can control all time, because He is outside of it. Consequently, the greater is able to control the lesser. Hence, Anselm was quick to call timelessness a Divine perfection.

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70 Feinberg, No One Like Him, 382–83.
Anselm’s second line of argument was from simplicity to timelessness. This argument can be read in detail in his *Monologium*. The doctrine of simplicity teaches that God is not made up of parts. As humans are comprised of parts, they are defined by and dependent upon the relationship of these parts. If a man’s legs are not working, his movement is hindered. If a man’s mind is not working, his reason is hindered. The examples of humanity’s dependence on the operation of parts is endless. God, on the contrary, is simple. He is simple in that He is neither defined by, nor dependent upon, parts. Therefore, God cannot be defined nor dependent on the “parts” of time. Thus, in Anselm’s words, God can be said to be “with” space and time, but not “in” space and time. This distinction is critical, because it is an expression of God’s perfect existence. To say that God exists “in” time would be to constrain Him. Rather, God exists “with” time, so that His existence is unconstrained, and yet, He can freely interact with time without undergoing change.

The most influential Christian thinker in the Middle Ages, some would consider of all time, was Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225–1274). Aquinas was perhaps the first theologian to see each of the three major doctrines used in the previous 1200 years of the church—simplicity, immutability, and eternality—as being interconnected, best expressed in, and necessitating the timelessness of God. Because God is not made up of parts (simplicity), He is therefore incapable of change (immutability). If time is defined by change, then God must likewise be eternal (timeless). Aquinas wrote:

We have shown already that the notion of eternity derives from unchangeableness in the same way that the notion of time derives from change. Eternity therefore principally belongs to God, who is utterly unchangeable. Not only that, but God is his own eternity, whereas other things, not being their own existence, are not their own duration. God, however, is his own invariable existence, and so is identical with his own eternity just as he is with his own nature.

For Aquinas, these attributes are clear, logical, and essential to understanding who God is. To deny timelessness would be to deny God’s immutability, simplicity, and eternality.
Within the Middle Ages, the most well-known theologians were forthright proponents of timelessness. Calvin and the Magisterial Reformers likewise stood upon this classical tradition. Indeed, no major Christian teacher up to, and through, the Reformation deviated from the centrality of the timelessness of God.

**Practical Implications**

Is there any practical consequence to such a debate? Is this mere ivory-tower speculation? There are immense practical applications—most importantly the eternal (unending) states of heaven and hell. Christians are said to have eternal life. John 5:24 says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life.” In the future, those who believe in Jesus and trust in Him alone for their salvation will inherit eternal life. But what exactly is meant by eternal? Mark 10:30 says, “But that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.” Eternal life is a reflection of the eternal will of God for His elect—accomplished by Christ in the temporal realm, producing ongoing results for believers. When Christians are granted eternal life, it does not mean they pre-existed in an eternal way as the Son did. Rather, man has an immortal (or eternal) life that has a beginning, but no end.

The eternal timelessness of God, on the other hand, which promises heaven, also issues threats of hell. Jesus promised exactly that in Matthew 25:46, “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” It is no coincidence that Scripture tells of an eternal God, and also of an eternal hell. An offense against a temporal being merits a temporal consequence. If you steal from someone, your offense against that temporal being is a temporal offense, resulting in a temporal consequence (e.g. fine or jail time). But an offense against a timeless, eternal God is of far greater consequence. All of your sins offend Him eternally, and therefore, require a consequence commensurate with that offense—an eternal consequence. This explains why hell contains eternal fire (Matt 25:41; Jude 7) reserved for those who offend Him forever (Jude 13), why their punishment is never quenched (Mark 9:48), and why they will be tortured day and night forever and ever (Rev 20:10). Hell is a place of eternal destruction (2 Thess 1:9).

Thomas Goodwin wrote that every “wretched soul in hell … finds that it shall not outlive that misery, nor yet can it find one space or moment of time of freedom and intermission, having forever to do with him who is the living God.” Because eternal hell is an expression of the eternal nature of God’s holy justice, it is all the more necessary for believers to warn unbelievers of the eternal consequences of their rejection of the Savior. Those who consider God a temporal being must find reason for the eternality of His judgment; they must answer why His judgments go on forever. Why would unbelievers not merely receive a temporal punishment?

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79 This is known as aevidernity. Eternity is an existence that has no beginning or end. Time, as we know, has a beginning and an end. However, aevidernity has a beginning but no end. This is the kind of existence that spiritual beings dwell in other than God, such as angels.
There are, as well, more practical benefits for believers. The eternal nature of God and the eternal consequences of sin should promote deeper forgiveness in temporal creatures. All offenses against us are mere temporal offenses. If God can forgive us of eternal offenses, then certainly we can forgive temporal offenses here on earth. This is why we are told to forgive others, because God is the one who judges the living and the dead.

Considering the criticisms regarding timelessness (creation, God’s relationships and actions, and the incarnation), it is essential to remember that the eternality of God belongs to His incommunicable attributes. This explains why understanding the timelessness of God proves so difficult, because we cannot experientially grasp timelessness. Nevertheless, we can understand it conceptually. It is fitting and necessary that we talk and think about God with precision and care. Whether God is working in time as the Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, as the incarnation, or in future judgment, we must insist that God, in His very being, is not changed by these temporal activities.

Conclusion

It has been my intention to demonstrate the exegetical basis and historical milieu for the doctrine of timelessness. When evangelicals undermine timelessness, they do not do so in a vacuum. They do so against the results of consistent scriptural exegesis, the overwhelming affirmation of church history, and, with great consequence, the very character of God.

The debate over the timelessness of God is not an inconsequential quarrel over academic minutiae. Tampering with this one attribute triggers an eroding effect that ripples through the other attributes of God. Evangelicals who deny timelessness must account for the implications their denial has upon immutability, simplicity, and eternality. If you diminish, redefine, or alter any of the doctrines of God, you have created an altogether different god. Bavinck wrote, “One who says ‘time’ says motion, change, measurability, computability, limitation, finiteness, creature.” 81 If we manufacture and serve a temporal god—a god whom we have made subject to his own creation—we serve a creature of our own imagination, not the historic God of the Christian faith.

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