

Eternal God

Psalm 90

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

Dan Elmendorf and I have a little joke around the concept of time. We used to talk about it and realized that we really couldn't get anywhere. We couldn't say much. We always ended with – usually Dan – saying: Time-- it's very profound. That was the sum of our reflections. The summit of our wisdom: Time: It's profound. But we are not discouraged. We are in good company. No less a genius than St. Augustine famously said: *What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know.*

This much we can say. For us creatures, even redeemed creatures, in this fallen world, time is a problem. Dan also used to always say: it's just one thing after another. Which is, on the one hand, completely uninteresting, but it's a way of saying we can't control the order and sequencing of things, the "when" of things.

Time frustrates us. We have regrets in the past, that we can't redo or correct. We are distracted and scattered in the present – if there even is such a thing as the present. Whatever the present is, it is a vaporizing thing. We cannot grasp it. It eludes us. Direct your attention to it and its gone. We worry and project out our cares into a future which doesn't even exist. Time is a problem for us. We find that time moves too fast – time flies we say. Life vanishes. You blink your eyes, and you are my age, and all your kids are grown, and your astonished at how old you are – and just how it happened. Where did the time go?

Or else time moves to slow – it crawls. It stops. The day drags. I was stuck in traffic forever. Kevin's sermon was interminable. We have too much of it, and we have to deal with it, so we say we're going to kill some time. But, of course, time is killing us – that's a murderous, lethal sun, up there. But it's tricky, it's not without its gifts. While its helping your vitamin D levels, its literally grinding you to dust and bones.

These are simply universally known realities. As one of our texts, Psalm 90, puts it:

You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals." A thousand years in your sight, are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.

Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—they are like the new grass of the morning: In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered.

Time --- while it is a gift -- is also something of a cage for us. We can't get out, and we will be swept away by it --- returned to dust. Like grass, like fading flowers. But notice, in Psalm 90, these well-known words: A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. Time, it turns out, is NOT a problem for God, for God is Eternal. And that is what we shall look at this morning. We will make three points. Eternal God. Eternal Redemption. And Eternal Perspective.

I. Eternal God

First, then, Eternal God. You might recall the WSC question on God, which we've referred to before. What is God? God is a spirit, infinite, ETERNAL and unchangeable, in his various attributes. So, God's eternity is another kind of meta-attribute. All the attributes imply all the other attributes. But we conceive of certain attributes as having a kind of priority. Here, we mean that all that God is, is eternal. His love, his glory, his goodness, his knowledge, his mercy, his dominion, are all eternal.

Stephen Charnock says: Without eternity, what are all his other perfections, but glorious yet withering flowers, a great but decaying beauty. Every perfection of God, he continues, would be an imperfection, if it were not ALWAYS a perfection. Without eternity nothing in God would be a perfection.

So, what do we mean when we say that God is eternal? Well, it turns out we will have to say a few things related to time. At its most basic, the idea is this: God transcends time (even as he transcends space). He is not in time, or constrained by, time. Time is a creature, and God is the Creator.

This is what Moses is getting at in Psalm 90 when he says: A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. He's not making a mathematical remark. As if two-thousand years would be like 2 days to God. That's not the point here. Peter expands on this (NT lesson) and says: "a day is like a thousand years AND a thousand years is like a day." So a long period of time is like a very short period of time, AND a short period of time is like a very long period of time. Taken literally, this would be absurd. But it's a poetic way of saying time, temporality, is irrelevant to God and his purposes. You can't count slowness with respect to God, Peter goes on to say, as humans (some) count slowness.

God, the text affirms, does not have the issues with time that we have. Time, duration, too slow, too fast – none of this applies-- because God transcends time.

A number of things follow from this. First, eternity means there is no succession of moments in God. Just as there is no beginning or end in God, indeed he IS the alpha and the omega, just as there is no beginning or end in God, so there is no middle, no movement from and to. No linear progression of time which marks us creatures. God does not get older. He experiences none of the changes associated with created time.

God has duration: He is, he is the Great I AM, he endures, he has duration, but not temporal succession. It is NOT just one thing after another for God. He lives in what the church has called the eternal now.

He sees and knows all things in one instantaneous action. He is not looking forward to next Tuesday, or even to the end of the world. To him all things, including the future, are immediately present. For in him there is no past or future. God watches the whole baseball game at once. He sees the 1st inning and the 9th inning simultaneously, without conflating the 9th inning with the 1st inning. This is what makes him the God who sees and knows and can declare the end from the beginning.

Boethius (5th c. philosophy, Consolation of Philosophy: In prison): Puts it this way: God's eternity is the whole, simultaneous and perfect possession of boundless life. (infinite, unchangeable, spirit)

Louis Berkhof, famous 20th c. Dutch Reformed theologian. His Systematic Theology is a standard work. Almost every contemporary Reformed pastor has probably had to read Berkhof in seminary. Berkhof says, echoing Boethius, and the whole tradition: God possesses the whole of his existence in one indivisible present.

This One is, in the opening words of that same Psalm 90: Our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or he brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting he is God.

Even here, we see we have to use temporal sequencing language. From everlasting TO everlasting. But from everlasting to everlasting does not move anywhere. It ends where it starts, with the One who just is eternal God. And this eternity, Scripture asserts in numerous places: Psalm 93:2: You throne is established from of old, you are from everlasting. Thus, in 1 Timothy 1 he is called the King eternal. God inhabits eternity, Isaiah tells us.

And this timeless existence is attributed to the whole Trinity. God is eternal, but more concretely, the Son is the Messiah who is from everlasting, according to

Micah 5. The Son was in the beginning with God and was God. The Son is the One who says: before Abraham was, I AM.

Psalm 102, which is applied to the Son in Hebrews chapter 1, says this: In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

*They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
Like clothing you will change them, and they will be discarded.
But you remain the same, and your years will never end.*

The eternal Son, who remains the same, whose years never end, is contrasted here with the whole changing, perishable heavens and earth. And the Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity, hovering over the formless creation in the beginning, is called the eternal Spirit in Hebrews 9.

Anselm, the great 11th c. theologian and monk summarizes in the form of a prayer: Through your eternity you were, you are, and you will be. And since being past is different from being future...how does your eternity exist always as a whole?

Anselm sees the impenetrable mystery of God's whole eternity. And he concludes: You simply are – existing beyond all time. You do not exist yesterday or today or tomorrow. For yesterday, today, and tomorrow are nothing other than temporal distinctions. You are not in space and time, but all things are in you. For you are not contained by anything, but rather you contain all things. (Eternal God)

II. Eternal Redemption

Our second point then is Eternal Redemption. I hope you can see the deep connection between the being of God and our salvation. Our salvation is eternal because God is eternal. The eternal God secures eternal redemption. This happens because the Son, the eternal Son, who is before all things (Col. 1), enters time for our salvation. And in his human nature – not in his divinity – but in his humanity, he is subject to all the realities of time. He has to grow and learn, and do things in sequence, and wait for his hour, and tell people his time has not yet come. He wrestles and sweats and pleads with the Father about the upcoming passion. He enters into our death-laden time, our time which can not be disentangled from entropy and decay.

And through his resurrection, he abolishes death, he brings life and immortality to light, and is raised up in the new time, the time of the eschaton, the time of the new creation. The time when, for bodies like the transfigured body of our Lord,

time is not a problem, but a sheer joy. And because he who does this in our flesh, is the Eternal God, he secures for us eternal life (diff kind of eternity, ours has a beginning but no end), and eternal, everlasting, immortal, imperishable glory. God calls us, Peter says, to his ETERNAL glory in Christ.

As Hebrews 9 puts it: He enters the heavenly sanctuary securing ETERNAL redemption, that those who are called might receive the ETERNAL inheritance.

Because He lives forever, and reigns forever, we too shall live and reign with him world without end. And even now, in the midst of our struggles heartaches and weaknesses, we have his eternal consolation. Deuteronomy 33 says: The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

III. Eternal Perspective

Finally, eternal perspective. The eternal God secures eternal redemption and now summons us to have an eternal perspective. It turns out that the eternity of God, and the salvation we have in him, requires a displacement in us. One which we resist ferociously. We, who are oriented to history, timebound, temporal, visual, sensory, linear creatures, are called to heavenly, eschatological, eternal mindedness.

And note, you cannot have this both ways, we are not called to add in an eternal perspective, we are called to dislodge temporal, earthbound affections, for ones that are invisible and heavenly. Prominent here are two texts. First, 2 Corinthians 4: Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

For this light momentary affliction (all the afflictions of this time) is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Notice how stark, how otherworldly, how unlike our actual condition. We look NOT to things that are seen. Shocking really. Can you see it? Then its not something to focus on. We look not to things that are seen, but to things that are unseen. Why? Why are we to be fixated seers, gazing upon the invisible realm?

Because things seen – remember Psalm 102 about the whole created order – it shall be rolled up like a garment and perish – things seen are transient.

And things unseen are ETERNAL. The unseen God is Eternal, and the unseen heavenly realm is ETERNAL, and we too are to look to things ETERNAL. Not in addition to temporal things, but INSTEAD of them.

In the words of the Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter: As all things will presently be swallowed up in eternity, so I think the present apprehension of eternity should now swallow up all other things in the soul.

A second text here is Colossians 3:1-4:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. That's eternal perspective.

Our life, eternal and indestructible, is now hidden with Christ in God. We live, raised up with him, in the realm, not of things temporal, but in the realm of the eternal. This perspective should be a sheer delight for us. But, as CS Lewis puts it: "We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us...like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mudpies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Our destiny is to glorify and enjoy God forever. And embracing this perspective, eternal and heavenly, is a way for that gladness to begin now, and in earnest. For, as the Psalmist says, in his presence there is fullness of joy; at his right hand are pleasures forevermore. Eternal pleasures, flowing from the eternal God to creatures in full possession of eternal life. Eternal Glory be to God. Amen.

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