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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

TRANSCRIPT

“The Attributes of God, part VI: The Eternity of God, or How Old is God?”

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee again for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures and we ask for the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us as we consider again one of the important facets of the being of our God. We acknowledge Lord our ignorance, our inability to comprehend Thee, and we simply pray Lord that the truth that Thou hast revealed to us may be illuminated by the spirit so that we may understand that which Thou wouldst have us to understand concerning thyself. May it also prove profitable to us building us up in our faith, edifying, strengthening us, and may it also help us in our daily lives. So we commit the hour to Thee with thanksgiving.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Our subject tonight is “How Old Is God? or The Eternity of God,” and first of all a few words of introduction. We are studying the attributes of God. And we have said the attributes of God are the perfections of the divine essence. Now we have said that they are seen in the Scriptures and we have said that they are seen in his works of creation, his work of providence, his work of redemption. And so in the Bible and in the works of God we see his attributes we see the perfections of his divine essence.

Some of these attributes are incommunicable, that is, there is little analogy to human nature. Others are communicable. They bear considerable analogy to human

nature. Among the incommunicable we have been studying, and we have one more to study after tonight is, immutability. We have considered his self-existence, his simplicity, his unity, his spirituality, his infinity, his immensity, his omnipresence which is another way of looking at immensity, and tonight we are going to look at the eighth or his eternity. And just again a quick review of what these terms mean, for they express to us the essential character of God’s being in his incommunicable properties. Self-existence refers to God’s independence and by this term there is marked out his complete self sufficiency. His self-existence is from himself.

Now he does not need us at all. He does not need any one of his creation or anything of his creation. He is the first cause of everything. Yet he himself is uncaused. And we pointed to Exodus chapter 3 verses 13-15 in which he said to Moses that his name was “I AM WHO I AM.” He is self-existent. Now, no one can truly and finely understand his self-existence. But that is what God is in his being.

Secondly, his simplicity. Now that is his freedom from compositeness and from distinction. That is, he does not have the experience of growing or failing as man does. He is simple. He is not made up of parts. He is one simple essence in being.

Third, his unity. And by this is there is referred to his oneness, and also his uniqueness which rises out of his oneness. “Hear O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord!” (Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 4). And Paul reiterates it in the New Testament when he says there is one God and Father of us all. Now since there is one God then we are to keep ourselves from idols, so John says, in his first epistle.

Fourth, his spirituality. He is not material in his essence. He subsists in an immaterial way. And so his spirituality is his immaterial subsistence. And that implies that he is a self-conscious, intelligent, emotional and volitional moral agent. He is a spirit. Or as some had said, he is simply a person, all that is involved in that except he does not possess a material body as you and I do.

Fifth, is infinity. Shedd said, one of our great theologians said “His infinity is the divine essence viewed as having no bounds or limits.” So when we say he is infinite we mean there is no bound or limit to his being. *Finis* in Latin means end or limit and so infinite means unlimited.

Now if that is true, that necessarily involves his perfection, and this infinite character of God having no bounds or limits pervades the essence and all of the communicable attributes. In other words, all of the attributes of God partake of the character of infiniteness. If we say he is loving in his communicable attribute, he is infinitely loving. We say he is merciful, he is infinitely merciful. If we say he is good, he is infinitely good. If we say he is just or righteous, he is infinitely righteous. And so these characteristics that pertain to his being pertain to his being pertain to all of his communicable and his incommunicable attributes.

Last time we discussed his immensity and his omnipresence and we said that these terms were related very closely to his infinity. In other words, his infinity in relation to space is his immensity. He fills all space and beyond. His omnipresence is related to that and we described or we tried to put these two together this way by his immensity he transcends all spatial limitations, and by his omnipresence he is imminent in or fills every part of space with his own being. So when we say he is immense we are saying he transcends all spatial limitations. He fills everything.

When we say he is omnipresent we mean that he is completely and wholly at every point within space and beyond. In other words, it is not part of God that is here and part of God is there and part of God is down there. He is not spread out all over this space that we are talking about, but at every point he is present with his whole being. So he fills everything and beyond. He transcends all but he is imminent. He is present. He resides in all of space as we know it. And so God is here and God is there and he is here completely and he is there completely and how he can be this it is difficult for us to understand, but he is God and we are man.

Now tonight we are turning to God’s eternity and it is not an easy subject. For example, I said to my wife last night, what is time? Have you ever thought of defining time? How would you define time? How would you define eternity? What would you say about eternity? Would you say eternity is timelessness? Well really that would not be quite true. Would you say that time was a slice of eternity? Something like that marked by a beginning and an end and progress? Is time created by God or is it something that is given before the creation? Or what do you think about that? Have you ever thought about things like that?

Well if you haven’t maybe your mind is beginning to be stretched a little bit. C.S. Lewis said that as far as he was concerned if he were trying to define eternity in time he might do it with an illustration that suggests a piece of paper infinitely extended. And if we can think of a piece of paper infinitely extended and then on that paper draw a short line, that line would begin, it would have a definite movement, and it would have a time that it ended and a place where it ended and that would be time. Well if that is helpful to you perhaps that is good, but that is not really, strictly speaking, a completely accurate definition of time.

I got down some of my books on philosophy and looked in order to find out what they had to say about time. And of course as some of you may know who’ve taken philosophy, this question has been disputed down through the centuries and they were talking about time hundreds and hundreds of years ago and not agreeing, and just a few hundred years ago and even in present day philosophy discussions still persist about time and no one seems to be able to completely satisfy someone else with a definition. So tonight we are talking about things that are very difficult—time, eternity.

Hodge in his theology has said that, citing another man, that in other words time is called the interval which a body in motion marks in its transit from one point of space to another. The interval which a body in motion marks in its transit from one point in space to another. So if we think of a body that moves from this point in

space to this time is the interval which marks that transit. But we know that is time. We would say yes, that’s time; it took five minutes for that to happen or it took four minutes or forty minutes -- that’s time.

Plato had an idea of eternity which is very similar to timelessness. It was the negation of time. But I think it’s much better to see time as something that God has created. He is responsible for time. It is he who has made it. It is he who has given time. And he shares in it because he works his purpose out in time. And so let’s think of time then as something that God has given. But as far as completely understanding it, if you are thinking that you are a little puzzled by this you have a great deal of company.

Augustine said many, many years ago that God created time. He said God created it because it began. But he went on to say what time is is very difficult, and his famous answer to the question was, “If no one asks me I know, but if I wish to explain it to someone who asks I do not know.” So it’s very difficult for us to understand time.

If we were to try to illustrate the two, eternity and time, perhaps we could illustrate it in this way. If we could think of a sea which never changes, we would have some picture of eternity; and then if we could think of a river in which the waters glide along and are swallowed up in the sea, then we would have that which may in some way illustrate time. So if we think of a sea, we may think of eternity. If we think of time, we may think of a river. But that is about as far as we can go.

Now tonight our outline, this part of it, is I have the subject at the top of the page the introduction. We are now at Roman I, The Nature of the Eternity of God. Now before we look at capital A, Its Relationship to Infinity, I want to make a comment concerning the word eternity. Now, we use the word eternity in different senses. Occasionally we use it in a secondary sense and by eternity we refer of a future world. For example, one of our friends dies and later we speak to one of our other friends about this and we say he passed into eternity. Now that, of course, is a sense of the word in

which it refers to the future world in distinction from this one. And not only the future world, but also the presence of God.

Now that is not a precise sense in which we are using the term eternity tonight. It is also used relatively in the Bible of long duration, but duration that is not eternal that is endless. The word, forever, the word, eternal, is used of things that are not forever, not eternal, very much as we do in our own English speech, for we occasionally use eternal and forever in ways that we indicate by the context do not really mean forever.

I might say -- and I’m not sure my illustrations are going to be too good because I am making these up -- but I might say as far as I’m concerned, I like Richard Nixon as a President so much that he can be President forever. Now I don’t really think that Nixon is going to be President forever and frankly I don’t want him President forever. But I might want him President as long as we are in this condition of life. And so my use of the term forever is determined by the context in which it is found. I might say in my mind to my mind Duane Thomas is the greatest running back in the National Football League whether he utters one word or not. And as far as I am concerned he can play half back on the Cowboys forever. Now I don’t really mean forever. I mean as long as there is a Cowboy team, and I have a hunch that they will not be playing in the millennium. [Laughter] So I am using that term in a relative sense.

Now I am leading up to something which is found in the Bible. For example, we are told in the Bible that the rite of circumcision is an everlasting rite (Genesis chapter 17, verse 14) We read, Is anything, did I say 17:14? I was reading 18:14. “But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people.” Now I said 17:14, but that’s not quite it. It’s verse 13. “A servant who is born into your house or is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.”

Now we know that in the New Testament times when our Lord died and the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom that the covenant of circumcision was

done away with. That is the sign of circumcision. But it was an everlasting covenant in the sense that it persisted as long as the conditions of the Old Testament required it, in an everlasting and unlimited sense.

In Deuteronomy chapter 15, verse 17 we have another illustration of this. Deuteronomy 15:17. We read “Then shall you take an awl and pierce it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your servant forever. And also you shall do likewise to your maidservants.” The incident in which Moses is giving instructions for a servant who wants to serve his master forever, and if he voluntarily wishes to do it then the master shall take him and he shall bore his ear through with the awl and he shall be his servant forever. Well, there are other laws in the Pentateuch that say that in the year of jubilee all the servants would go free. So forever means until the fifty year period is up. And so forever is used in that limited sense.

Now we want to dismiss both of these senses of forever; this temporary sense of forever and this sense of the future world from our mind when we talk about the eternity of God, for we are not talking about that which has to do with the future life and we are not talking about that which is temporal or limited.

Now Capital A. The Nature of the Eternity of God and Its Relationship to Infinity. Is infinity relative to space, is his immensity relative to duration? His infinity is his eternity. So you can see that infinity is related to eternity, and eternity is related to infinity. So relative to duration, God’s infinity is his eternity. Charnock has said, “As it is his immensity to be everywhere, so it is his eternity to be always.”

Capital B. Its relationship to endlessness. His eternity is duration without beginning, without end, and without succession. In other words, God does not have a beginning, he does not have an ending, and he does not know succession in the acquirement of knowledge or experience. Now he knows what you feel when you experience succession. You get up one day and you learn one thing, you get up another day and you learn another thing, you get up another day and you experience a third

thing, and so on in your life and there is succession. There is acquisition of knowledge; there may be loss of knowledge. God does not know anything like that. By his eternity he comprehends everything as if were only present now. He is the eternal God, and so he exists without beginning, without end, without succession.

Capital C. Its relationship to succession. Now this I have simply inserted because it is a debated thing. Does God have no understanding, or experience (would be a better word) experience of succession? In the sense that external events are always present to God whether in the past, the present, or future from our standpoint there is no succession to God.

Now it is possible that he does have the experience or knowledge of successive duration in human events. He may have a sense of succession in his own subsistence but does not he say, as I live? That may seem to suggest that God himself knows what it is to subsist in a sense of succession. But I am inclined to agree with one of the Southern theologians who said “the thing is too high for us.” We can understand some things about God. We can know that he does not see the past, present, and future and learn from that as we do. He sees it all as a present whole. But it’s possible that he does have some sense of succession.

We can say he has a simultaneous possession of his total duration. We come to ours gradually and peacefully. We come to understand the things we do day after day, part by part. God does not have that at all. In other words, when God looks down upon human affairs, Genesis chapter 1 and the creation of the world is just as present to him as the creation of the new heaven and the new earth, and he sees them all as a present. And just as God knows precisely what’s going on now and as this is present to us, so everything in human experience is present to God. He is the eternal God.

Let me illustrate it. Let’s suppose that the Cowboys came back to Dallas and today there was a great parade for them. Probably there would have been if they had all come back. And let’s suppose that in this parade there were three types of people. There were

black people, there were white people, and there were red people. And let’s suppose we were standing down on the corner of Akard and Main, and we watched the crowd go by, and we watched the black people go by, and we would turn to our friends and say, this parade has black people in it. And then the white people came by, and we would say, now this parade had white people. And then finally the Indians would come by, and we would say, now this parade had red people. And so our experience would be the black, white, red so that we would finally have a full understanding of what transpired in that parade.

But let’s pose for sake of illustration that instead of standing on the corner of Akard and Main we went up into one of Dallas’ higher buildings so that we could see the whole parade, and we saw it from beginning to end. And so we did not have any experience or any sense of seeing the succession, but we simply saw the whole parade, and we turned and said to our friend who was standing by us, the parade is made up of black and white and red people. We see it all as a whole.

Now that is the way God sees all of the affairs of time. He sees them all as a perfect whole. The reason for this is that he is eternal. If he were gaining in knowledge, if he were gaining in experience, he would not be omniscient. And so because he is omniscient he knows everything and every point of time, and so he sees everything as it is an eternal now to him. That’s why in the Bible in Isaiah chapter 55, verse 8 the prophet says, “My Thoughts are not like your Thoughts.” Let me read that text. It is Isaiah chapter 55 verse 8. “For My Thoughts are not your Thoughts. Neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord.” And in Isaiah chapter 46, verse 10, we read, “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done. And so God is one who declares the end from the beginning.”

Someone has said, “He has lived already, all our tomorrows, and he has lived all our yesterdays.” Now do not misunderstand me. I am saying that God fully understands our finite form of learning things by succession. He understands. He knows exactly what

we feel, but he does not, he is not limited to that form of the acquisition of knowledge through experience. He knows our experience, but to him he is the eternal God.

Now that is a wonderful truth when you think about it because that means that while it’s true he looks at everything as a big now, he knows precisely the experience that we had. He knoweth our frames and that we are dust. And so he comprehends all of our needs because he is the eternal God.

One final thing. It’s relationship to memory. Memory belongs to the finite mind and consequently God neither remembers nor does he forget. I know what you are thinking. Well aren’t there some texts of Scripture that say that God does not remember my iniquities any longer? Yes, that’s true, but the point of those texts such as Hebrews chapter 10, verse 17-18 where that is found the point of those texts is he does not remember their guilt. He does not forget them in the sense that he no longer can remember them. If I were to stand before God and say, do you remember my sins, he would not say, no I have forgotten all about them. He would know precisely what they were far more than I ever knew, but he would not have remembered them in the sense that he had remembered them against me, for Jesus Christ had died for them, and so as a result of that he does not remember sins against me, but he does not forget anything for he does, memory belongs to the finite mind, and he neither remembers nor forgets all knowledge; every piece of knowledge there is is present to him at the present moment. He is the eternal God.

Now this is a great thing. It’s a great thing to have a God like this. There is a story told by a man who used to be editor of the *King’s Business*. A magazine that used to be published, I presume it still is, by the Biola Bible institute, now the Biola Bible College and Dr. White was the editor of it, and he told a story in the *King’s Business* about his first experiences as a young pastor. And he said he was pastor of this church and he received a call one morning when we was still very young in the ministry, and it was a call from a very elderly man to come and see him. And they called him Father

Junkins, and he was about eighty seven years of age and he was the outstanding Christian in the village.

And Dr. White said that it was one of his first experiences of trying to help people that were dying and he prayed God would give him something to say to this elderly man when he went to see him. And as he walked in the room this very godly Christian said, “Pastor, I’m dying.” For years I have been feasting on the promises of God, but this morning when I awakened I could not remember a single one of the promises. What shall I do?

And Dr. White said then the Lord gave him an answer which he had used many times since visiting scores of dying saints during the forty years that elapsed. He said to him, “Father Junkins, do you think that God will forget his promises?” And he said I shall always remember the sweet smile that came over the face of the old saint as he looked up at me. Praise God, he said. That’s wonderful. He will remember then, won’t he? And he said, I went on at that point and started repeating some of the promises to him. But in a few minutes he waved his hand at me and said I’m tired, I will just fall asleep and trust him to remember his promises to me. [Laughter]

Now you know when we have an eternal God, who because of his eternity has all knowledge as a very present now before him, coupled with his omniscience, then we do not have to worry about remembering the promises either. So many people think that God is going to bless me only if I remember the promises. My dear friend, it is God who gave the promises. And he remembers them and he will fulfill them to us. And it’s good for us to get rid of the idea that I must merit God’s blessings in some way by remembering his promises. I’m not suggesting you close the Bible and say Lord, you know the Bible. Now everything that you want to happen to me is right here in the word. I’ll just let you do it. No. That’s not the point. But it is true that we are not blessed because we remember the promises. We are blessed because he remembers the promises.

Now we want to move on. Romans 2. The Evidence for the Eternity of God.

And there are two types of evidence.

Capital A. The Scriptural Evidence. So let’s have a little scriptural exercise now and look at some of the texts of Scripture that pertain to the eternity of God. First of all Genesis 21, verse 33. And I’m reading from the New American Standard Version and so if you notice some slight changes from the Authorized Version that’s the reason. I am trying to read through this version and enjoying it quite a bit. Verse 33. “And Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God.” The Everlasting God.

Now in 1 Timothy, chapter 1, Paul speaks about this God, this God of the ages. I do not have this listed there but let me just read that text. You needn’t turn to it. I’ll read it for you. 1 Timothy, verse 17. “Now to the King eternal, literally to the king of the ages, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Let’s turn now to Psalm 90. This was the text that I wanted to read for the scripture reading and I’ve saved it for now. Psalm 90. And let’s read verses 1 through 6. Psalm 90. This is a psalm about God’s eternity and man’s transitoriness, the heading of my version says. It’s a prayer of Moses and Moses was an old man when he wrote that probably. “Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world. Even from everlasting to everlasting. Thou art God. Thou hast turned man back into dust and dust say return O children of men. For a Thousand years in thy sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night. Thou hast swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; in the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; Toward evening it fades and withers away.”

Now look at these texts and particularly verse 2 for a moment. Before the mountains were born or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world even from

everlasting to everlasting Thou art God. Moses the old man celebrates God’s eternity which is a comforting and an alarming fact. Charnock has said what Moses is saying here when he says Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations is that Thou hast kept open house for us, and of course the point of Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations is that just like a house is a place in which we are protected, so God is the one who protects us. When the storms come what do we do? Do we walk out in the yard and look up at the sky? No, we race for our homes because our homes are places of protection for us. They protect us from the wind and the weather. Lord Thou hast been our house in all generations. Before the mountains were born or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world even from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God.

Now notice some of the truths in that verse. First place, the world had a beginning being: before the mountains were born or Thou didst give birth to the earth. The earth is not eternal. It was once nothing. It’s had a very long duration. But nevertheless there was a time when it was nothing.

Second, the world owes its being to the creating power of God. He says Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world. It could not bring into being of itself. It was nothing. It had a founder, a maker.

Third, God was in being before the world. The cause must be before the effect. That word which gives being must be before that which receives being. And so if he were the one that formed the earth he existed before it. This being is from eternity from everlasting. This being shall endure to eternity to everlasting, and there is but one eternal God from everlasting to everlasting: Thou -- Thou alone art God. That’s an amazing statement, isn’t it?

Now Moses of course could only understand this by revelation. He did not sit down and reason this out. It was something that God gave him. Now look at verse 4. “For a Thousand years in Thy sight are like yesterday when it passes by or as a watch in the night.” Charnock says this, “As one day is to the life of a man, so are a thousand

years to the life of God. The Holy Ghost expresseth himself to the capacity of man to give us some notion of an infinite duration by a resemblance suited to the capacity of man. If 1,000 years be but as a day to the life of God then as a year is to the life of man, so are 365,000 years to the life of God. And as seventy years are to the life of man, so are 25,450,000 years to the life of God. Yet still, since there is no proportion between time and eternity we must dart our thought beyond all those.”

So in other words, all God is doing is trying to get over to us the fact that he is eternal and we are very, very temporal. A thousand years are as a day, like yesterday when it passes by to God. One day is with the Lord as with a thousand years -- that is he can do everything that man can do in a thousand years in one day and more. And not only is one day like a thousand years, but a thousand years is as one day.

You know, no man has even lived even a day in the sight of God. Methuselah came almost up to one day. A thousand years in the sight of the Lord is like one day. Can you think of that nine hundred and how ever many years he lived, nine hundred seventy five years, all those years passing by year after year? You know I’m getting awfully tired, and I’m only fifty six. It’s been a long time; I can remember Roosevelt. [Laughter] I can remember Harding. I wanted to say I can remember Woodrow Wilson, but while I was living then, I don’t remember the man. I can remember all of those things. Just think of that. I have been living a long time. I am an old man. Now think of Methuselah. If he were standing he would say, now that was my childhood. I lived nine hundred and something years, to God that’s less than a day. It’s like he got up this morning and he was dead this afternoon to God. But that’s only a figure. That’s only an attempt to explain in human language something of what eternity must be. But it only gives us an impression. It does not really tell us.

Now let’s turn over to one of our other texts. Psalm 102, verses 26 through 28. Verse 25 really is where we begin in the English text. “Of old Thou didst found the earth, and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. Even they will perish, but Thou doest

endure; and all of them wear out like a garment; like clothing Thou will change them and they will be changed. But Thou are the same in Thy usability. And Thy years will not come to an end in eternity.” Now that’s an amazing picture.

You see what the Psalmist has said concerning God and the New Testament and Hebrews he will point out to us it is Jesus Christ that he is really speaking about. He is saying here is the world and the world is the product of God, and the Son stands apart from the world and over and above it he is before it because he laid the foundations. He says of old Thou didst found the earth, so he is before it, and he is after it, for when the earth waxes old it will wear out like a garment. And like clothing, Thou wilt change them and they shall be changed. And so he is before it because he created it, he will be after it because some day he will roll it up just like a scroll.

And while the earth waxes old down through the centuries, Jesus Christ or God in his eternity and in his immutability stands over against it unchanging. Not growing old. He’s not one day older today than he was yesterday or the day before. He is eternal. And so he does not grow gray hairs; he does not have wrinkles on his face he does not have to see the doctors, various types in order to patch up the old body which is falling to pieces. He doesn’t need any of that for he is the eternal God. Psalm 102, verses 25 through 27. We’re in constant flux, but he is not. Isaiah chapter 57, verse 15. For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, now I think your text probably says, who inhabits eternity. The Hebrew text says who dwells in eternity.

Again another text on his eternity. Turn to Isaiah chapter 41, verse 4, “Who has performed and accomplished it, calling for the generations from the beginning. I, Jehovah, am the first, and with the last, I am He.” The self-existent God who is the first, and with the last, he is eternal.

1 Timothy chapter 1, verse 16. Take a look at a New Testament passage or so. Look at all of these passages so that you may see them with your own little two eyes. Now listen. All rights and yet for this reason -- now I have given you the wrong text.

That should be 1Timothy 6:16 and I made a mistake in my notes. Notice, let’s read verse 15. “Which he will bring about at the proper time -- He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, he is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Who alone possesses immortality,” that is, he cannot die “and dwells in unapproachable light whom no man has seen or can see.” This is why I think we shall never see God the Father. We shall see the Son. We know the Father through the Son, but we cannot see God even when we are in heaven. We are still the creatures and he is the eternal God. But notice, “who only possesses immortality.”

Now Revelation chapter 1, verse 8. By the way, when I said I do not think we shall not see the Father, that’s an opinion of mine. When we get to heaven and Paul says, I want to correct some of the things Lewis told you, It’s true that we are going to see the Father. Well then come around and tell me, I told you so if that’s the way you feel now; [laughter] but I don’t think that will be the outcome of this myself. And remember I picked the Cowboys to win on Sunday too. [More laughter] Verse 8. Revelation chapter 1: I am the Alpha and the Omega. Now that of course is the way of saying I am the beginning and I am the end of all knowledge for it is from the alpha to the omega that the whole alphabet of the Greek language is comprehended. So to be the alpha and the omega is to be everything. I am the alpha and the omega, says the Lord God, who is who was and who is to come. That’s just a way of saying in our language that there isn’t any time at which he is not. He is I am throughout all time. He is the one who was continually existing. He is the one who is at the present time continually existing. And he is the one who is to come and thus he shall be there, too, so he fills all of time and then he says, the almighty. And you will notice that his eternity is connected with his omnipotence and vice versa. So.

Now Hodge in going through these things that are said about the eternity of God says two things are taught by these verses. Now these verses are not precisely mine. I picked some that I think are better than some he had. But nevertheless these things are

taught. First, God is without beginning of years or end of days. To him there is never past nor future. All is present. People always are looking and rightly so for analogies. But do we have any analogy of human experience to this sense of completeness and the knowledge of God so that everything is “now”? Well, perhaps we can think of something like that. It has been the common experience of many of men who have been brought to the brink of death and then brought back to say that they have had the experience at the brink of death of having a seemingly instantaneous picture of their life go before their eyes. You undoubtedly have read of people that have had that experience.

Mr. Shedd in his theology speaks of Frances Kimball Butler’s records of later life and in the story she is describing her experience during a fearful storm in the sea. In the sea, and this is what she said out of her own experience. “As the vessel reeled under the tremendous shock the conviction of our impending destruction became so intense in my mind that my imagination suddenly presented to me the death vision, so to speak, of my whole existence I should find it impossible adequately to describe the vividness with which my whole past life presented itself to my perception, not as a procession of events filling up a succession of years, but as a whole, a total, suddenly held up to me as in a mirror, indescribably awful combined with the simultaneous, acute and almost despairing sense of loss, of waste, so to speak, by which it was accompanied. This instantaneous involuntary retrospect was followed by a keen and rapid survey of the religious belief in which I had been trained and which then seemed to me my only important concern.”

I think all of us have had something of an experience like this that is we have either had something like this ourselves or else who have had others tell us the same thing. Well that illustrates at least what we mean when we say God has a complete comprehension of all knowledge and because he is the eternal God. You probably also have heard other illustrations. Mr. Hodge in his theology speaks of people who were resident in a new country for many, many decades of years and had lost all sense of the ability to speak their native language because they had been gone for so many years.

And then who have as they were just about to die been known to speak that old language fluently and understand it perfectly. It had come back completely to them.

Still more wonderful, he says, is the fact that uneducated persons hearing passages read in an unknown language, Greek or Hebrew, for example, have years after, when in an abnormal state, repeated those passages correctly without understanding their meaning. And so we have this experience of inhuman experience of being able to comprehend things that we were never able to comprehend in our normal consciousness and things passed before our eyes as a whole. It illustrates spiritual truth.

Now frankly I think this experience explains why Pat Boone speaks in tongues because he speaks in his book about how he had one night he was uttering a few words and he asked his wife what he was uttering and she said well that was some Latin phrase. Now he had it all wrong. The grammar was very poor and if the Holy Spirit was giving him those words to speak the Holy Spirit’s Latin grammar was not too correct. But the real reason that he was uttering these word in Latin was that as a boy he had had these phrases come before his mind and then being in this abnormal state, this unstable state, that so many get into when they do speak in tongues, it had come back to him so he repeated it, and he was repeating it. And he probably repeated it precisely as he learned in class when his Latin teacher gave him a C for not having it down perfectly. But this only illustrates of course what God has in perfection.

Now the logical evidence. From his self-existence from his immutability from his infinity and from his omnipotence. So we are trying to point out the evidence for the eternity of God. And the eternity of God this evidence for his eternity follows from these doctrines for the truth of God are like a pane of glass. That is they form a whole. Because he is self-existent, he is eternal. Remember he said I AM WHO I AM. Now he could not be who I am if there were a beginning or an end. He might say I am for a while, but he cannot really say I am in the sense that I have always been I am and always will be if he is not eternal. So his self-existence demands his eternity. As our Lord

referring to the Father said, as the Father has life in himself; but if he were not eternal he could not say I have life in myself. If he could be made to exist then he would not have life in himself. So his self-existence demands his eternity. You cannot have a self-existent person who is not an eternal person. And so in the nature of the case one attribute demands the other.

Second, from his immutability. Now I want you to turn with me to Malachi chapter 3, verse 6. Now I know it is illegal and unfair to ask you to turn to one of the Minor Prophets, but nevertheless let’s do it because this is a great text. We are going to talk about this next time when we meet because this has to do with the immutability of God. But I just want to talk briefly about it tonight. Malachi chapter 3, verse 6. That’s the last book of the Old Testament. Just before man, so I know you can easily find it. I know most of you already have it. Malachi chapter 3 verse 6. Page 1333 in my edition of the Bible. Malachi giving the words of God says, “For I, the Lord, do not change. Therefore O sons of Jacob you are not consumed.” I, the Lord, now Jehovah is the name of God which marks him out as the self-existent one. Remember I am comes from the word from which Jehovah comes. And so he says I am Jehovah. I am the self-existent God. Therefore I do not change. And so his immutability is related to his self-existence. If anything begins, it changes and thus is not immutable. If it does not change and never has changed, then it must be eternal, and so consequently our doctrine of immutability is also evidence for eternity.

Third, From his infinity. Infinity implies perfection. But finite duration is contracted within limits of time, hence it is not perfect. If his being could fail, he is not perfect. His infinity which demands perfection demands eternity.

And fourth, From his omnipotence. We read Revelation, chapter 1 in which God called himself the Almighty One. Now almighty does not correspond and harmonize with a nature that had a beginning. If he had a beginning, he was once nothing and at one time he could do nothing and so he is not really omnipotent. By the way, there is a text

which is quite interesting in Isaiah. It’s chapter 2 verse 22 and in this text God says I do not want you to take account of man because his breath is in his nostrils. Pay no attention to man because his breath is in his nostrils. Well if God’s breath is in his nostrils, if he is not an eternal person, then we should pay him no account either. So his omnipotence is an attribute a property that a man’s is eternity.

Finally Romans 3. The Application of the Eternity of God. Let me just say a few things here as we close. First of all in instruction. What is the practical benefit of the doctrine of the eternity of God? Well, my dear friends, how foolish is it if God is eternal for us to bring our complaints against God? Let me illustrate. I have a little granddaughter. Her name is Debby Monroe. Now she is extremely cute and she already has one everlasting, used in the local sense, everlasting admirer, her grandfather. But you know she is totally ignorant of the consequences of ninety eight percent of the things that she does. And she is very quick to complain against her mother to her mother, she complains to her father, she complains to her grandmother, she complains against her grandfather. But she is utterly ignorant in her complaints, because of course I have nothing but desire for her best. So does her grandmother, so does her mother, so does her father. Everybody has nothing but her best in mind. But she complains.

Now my dear Christian friends, you are a little speck of dust in the sight of God and you complain against God. You complain against the eternal God. If you think the infant is ignorant because she complains against her parents, how much more foolish is it for us to complain? How foolish is it for us to sin against God if he is the eternal God? How dreadful to lie unto the judgment of an eternal God? Charnock says, “The counsels of a boundless being are not to be scanned by the brain of a silly worm that hath breathed but a few minutes in the worm.” That is what you are: a silly worm who has breathed only a few minutes proportionately in this worm. But it’s a terrible thing to lie unto the judgment of an eternal God because that judgment is eternal.

Second, in consolation, or capital B. Habakkuk says, I won’t ask you to turn there but Habakkuk says in chapter 1, verse 12, “Art Thou not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, my Holy One? We will not die.” His promises -- if he is the eternal God -- his promises are eternal and he has expressed them to us in an everlasting covenant. As Hebrews chapter 13, verse 20 says, He who is the God who cannot lie, who is the eternal God, has given us eternal life according to his promise, Paul says in Titus. And so if his promises to me come from an eternal God who cannot lie, and if his promises are eternal promises, then my dear friend those promises are going to be fulfilled.

And furthermore if God is an eternal God, then down through all of the centuries and centuries and ages and ages ad infinitum of time I shall enjoy God just as much as I ever enjoyed him in my life. He is the infinite God. Infinitely enjoyable. Infinitely faithful to his promises. And further, he will protect us infinitely against our enemies. R. A. Torrey once said, “The God of the future is greater than the God of the past.” What he meant by that statement was that the resources of God are greater than all of his expenditures up to the present time, that his potential is larger than his payments up to this present time. Now of course it is not true to say that the God of the future is greater than the God of the past, but it is alright if we are looking at it from the standpoint of our experience.

Now we have experienced great blessings from God. We look back and we have been saved and we have been brought to this present time. And we know the presence of the Holy Spirit and we know all the blessings of life. He has taken us through some deep experiences of life and he has been our ever present help in the time of need. But the God of the future is greater than the God of the past. And we shall have greater and greater experiences as the years go by because he is the eternal God.

Finally, an exhortation with regard to ourselves. I want to repent of my sins. They are always present with God. My sins. The years do not make any change. If I have sinned twenty five years ago and I’ve never confessed that sin, that sin is before God

just as right as if I committed it ten seconds ago. I want to look at my pride in the light of his eternity. Remember that I am a worm. I am like the grass that is green in the morning and fades in the afternoon. I am like a flower. Like a day lily. I’m like a smoke. My life is like a sign. No man ever yet lived the day in God’s sight, not even Methuselah. That’s my life. And with regard to him how worthy then is he of our choicest affections, our strongest desires of communion, and our best service. The beauties of this world are transitory and they are disappearing. But our God is from everlasting to everlasting. May God help us to respond to the eternity of God and the transitoriness of man. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the things that we are learning of Thine essence. How great Thou art. How great Thou art. Enable us Lord to worship in spirit in truth and to serve faithfully to thy glory.

For Jesus’ sake, Amen.

[Announcement] We will not meet next Tuesday or the Tuesday thereafter. I am going to be in Philadelphia at a conference next week, and then coming back home I want to stop off and see my mother at Charleston. So I will not get back in time for the class so the next two times. Then we will have our lesson on the immutability of God, then we will turn to the good part of our course, the communicable attributes.