

Daniel Morrison

SESSION 4 | ETERNALITY

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Stephen Charnock: “We cannot comprehend God as he is, but we must not fancy him to be what he is not.”
- B. CJ Mahaney: “Part of what it means to mature as a Christian is to grow comfortable with mystery.”
- C. John MacArthur: “All orthodox doctrine is like an unresolved chord.”

II. STATEMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

- A. God’s eternity *has not* been historically understood as everlasting existence forwards and backwards on some sort of temporal time-strand.
- B. Historical/Classical Christian Theology posits God’s eternity as something not merely quantitatively distinct from time, but *qualitatively* distinct.
 - 1. Herman Bavinck: “Between eternity and time there is a distinction not only in quantity and degree but also in quality and essence.”
- C. God’s eternity means that God (a) has no beginning, (b) has no end, and (c) “experiences no successive states of being,” (James Dolezal).
- D. Gerhardus Vos: “Eternity is that attribute of God whereby He is exalted above all limitations of time and all succession of time, **and in a single indivisible present possess the content of his life perfectly.**”
- E. Francis Turretin: True eternity has been defined by the Scholastics to be ‘the interminable possession of life – complete, perfect, and at once.’ Thus, it excludes succession no less than end and ought to be conceived as a standing, not a flowing, now. The reason is because nothing flows away with time from the life of God as from ours. **God has every moment at once whatever we have dividedly by succession of time.** Hence philosophers have well said that neither the future nor the past (he will be or was), but only the present (he is) can properly be applied to him. For the eternal duration of God embraces indeed all time – the past, the present, and future; but nothing in him can be past or future because his life remains always the same and immutable.

- F. Boethius: “God’s eternity is the whole, simultaneous and perfect possession of boundless life.”

III. SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT

- A. First, recall the accommodated way in which Scripture often speaks to us about God. In this case, according to James Dolezal, “*There is an acute non-symmetry between the temporally shaped terms and concepts we use to describe God’s eternity and the ontological reality of that eternity to him.*”
- B. Exodus 3:13-14: ¹³Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” ¹⁴ God said to Moses, “**I AM WHO I AM.**” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘**I AM** has sent me to you.’
1. John 8:58: “Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I Am.**”
- C. Psalm 90:1-4: Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world. From everlasting to everlasting you are God. You return man to dust and say, ‘Return, O children of man!’ *For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.*
- D. 2 Peter 3:8: But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.
- E. Jude 24-25: “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, **before all time** and now and forever.”
- F. Titus 1:2: “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accord with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, **promised before the ages began...**”
- G. 2 Timothy 1:8-9: “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus **before the ages began.**”
- H. Job 36:26: “Behold, God is great, and we know him not; the number of his years is unsearchable.”

- I. James 1:17: "Every good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

IV. APPLICATION

- A. God is worthy of our choicest affections.
 1. Stephen Charnock: "Is not everything to be valued according to the greatness of its being? How then should we love him, who is not only lovely in his nature, but eternally lovely, having from everlasting to everlasting all those perfections centered in himself, which appear in time."
- B. If God is eternal, so too is his covenant with us.
- C. Humility
- D. Thankfulness
- E. Eternal and unfading joy as our future in heaven
- F. The fearfulness of eternal judgment
- G. Augustine: "My mind is on fire to solve this most intricate enigma. O Lord, my God, my good Father, through Christ I beg you not to shut against me the door to these truths, so familiar yet so mysterious. Do not slam the door in the face of my desire, nor forbid me entrance to that place where I may watch these things grow luminous as your mercy sheds its light upon them, Lord. To whom should I put my question about them? **And to whom should I confess my stupidity with greater profit than to you, who do not weary of my intense, burning interest in your scriptures?** Give me what I love; for I love indeed, and this love you have given me. Give this to me, Father, for you truly know how to give good gifts to your children; give me this gift, for I have only just begun to understand, and the labor is too much for me until you open the door. Through Christ I implore you, in the name of that holy of holies, let no noisy person stand in my way. I too have believed, and so I too speak. This is my hope, for this I live; to contemplate and delight in the Lord. See how old you made my days; they are slipping away, and I know not how."

Good lectures to listen to by James Dolezal on this topic: go to www.monergism.com and search “James Dolezal” and you’ll find several lectures on The Eternality of God and other related topics.

Primary works cited:

- ⇒ *All that is in God*, James Dolezal
- ⇒ *The Existence and Attributes of God*, Stephen Charnock
- ⇒ *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Francis Turretin
- ⇒ *Reformed Dogmatics Volume 2*, Herman Bavinck
- ⇒ Augustine’s *Confessions*, Book 11.