

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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The Omnitemporality of God

by Joel R. Parkinson

God and Time

How old is God? One popular answer is to say that God is infinitely old. However that is incorrect. God does not have an age as such, not even an infinite age. What time is it for God? There are 24 time zones in the world. Which one does He dwell in? To specify an exact time is to misunderstand what God is like. An atheist, no doubt, would exploit such conundrums about God and time and assert that God cannot exist. Some believers might dismiss such questions as esoteric or trite. However, God's relationship to time is an important theological issue that Christians have wrestled with since the days of the early church.

On one side are those who have advocated that God is atemporal or timeless. According to this view God exists outside of time in an "eternal now" that has no duration, no past, no future. All is comprehended by God in a single moment of unchanging present. Among those who have held this view are Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, Aquinas, Charles Hodge, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Gordon H. Clark. (John Calvin might have held something like this view, but he does not seem to have addressed the issue directly.) These men range from Roman Catholic to Neorthodox to solidly Reformed thinkers.

Most notable among these are probably Augustine and Boethius. Augustine (354-430) argued that God is timeless because that is the logical conclusion considering His attributes. For instance, if God is omniscient and knows everything, then He never learns anything and His knowledge is timeless and unchanging. Unlike Augustine, Boethius (c. 480-c. 524) believed that man has free will that is not determined by the predestination of God. So how could God foreknow future free will choices? Boethius hypothesized that God was timeless, standing outside of time as it were, and could therefore "see" all that happens in the past, present, and future in one fell swoop or glance.

God could foreknow the future because the future was immediately present to Him.

For those of us who are Calvinists this puzzle that Boethius struggled to solve is no puzzle. Men do not have free will in the Arminian sense of the will being able to will to change itself. God foreknows that which He foreordains (*Psalm 139:16, Isaiah 46:10-11, 48:3*) and God foreordains everything (*Ephesians 1:11*). Therefore God foreknows everything whether or not He is timeless. Augustine was on more solid ground by concluding that God is timeless from His attributes rather than speculating like Boethius did. Yet Augustine and Boethius illustrate how very different theologies may similarly embrace the idea of the timelessness of God.

On the other side of the historical question have been those who argue that God is temporal. According to them God is bound in time like the rest of us and He likewise experiences location and duration in time. They think that God must be in time in order to answer prayer and intervene in time by providence. Process theists Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and their followers radically fall in this camp. They believe that God "processes" or evolves with the world He created, and therefore moves through time with the rest of us. Open theists are also radically in this camp. Starting with the premise that man has free will, open theists like Richard Rice¹ and Clark Pinnock² infer that God - Who supposedly cannot control what man chooses to do - *cannot* foreknow the future free will choices of men. Therefore the future is "open" to be

¹ Richard Rice, *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free Will*, Bethany House Publishers, 1980, 1985, 39, 54.

² Clark Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge" in *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, edited by David and Randall Basinger, InterVarsity Press, 1986, 143-162.

what men make it to be and the particular outcomes are neither foreordained nor foreknown by God. So they say.

Somewhat more “evangelical” philosophers like Nelson Pike³, Stephen Davis⁴, and Thomas V. Morris⁵ opt for the temporal view of God, even if they reject some of the heretical extremes of process and open theism. So, like the timeless view of God, the temporal view of God has a fairly mixed and diverse group of adherents.

Then there are the agnostics (not about God’s existence, but about God’s relationship to time). John Calvin seems to have been indifferent or aloof about the topic. More recently Ronald Nash has seriously considered the question and concluded that he does not know whether God is timeless or not.⁶

In light of this historical debate, how should we approach the idea of God’s relationship to time? Does it matter? The relevance of God and time will wait for later since it depends somewhat on what conclusions are reached. For now the approach to the question should begin with two vital starting points: (1) The *definition* of time. (2) The definition of *omnitemporality* as an alternative to the temporality and atemporality of God. Then we will be equipped to examine relevant Scriptures and their *logical implications*.

Time Defined

Generally speaking, one of the deficiencies facing many positions on both sides of the historical debate has been a failure to adequately define “time”. There have been several biblical studies of time, but these often reduce to a study of biblical history.⁷ So what exactly is “time”?

Commenting on Augustine, Gordon H. Clark wrote, “The *City of God* says, ‘For if eternity and time be rightly distinguished, time never to be extant without motion, and eternity to admit no change, who would not see that time could not have being before some variable creature had come into existence?’ (XI, vi). This means that there could have been no time before the creation of the world. It also means that eternity is different from time because *time is a function of change* and God is immutable.”⁸ Along these lines, “Time is the medium in which change occurs.” This is the best definition I have found of “time.”

³ Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness*, Schocken Books, 1970.

⁴ Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God*, William B. Eerdmans, 1983, 8-24.

⁵ Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God*, InterVarsity Press, 1991, 119-138.

⁶ Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God: An Exploration of Contemporary Difficulties with the Attributes of God*, Zondervan, 1983, 73-83.

⁷ For instance, Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, Revised Edition, Westminster Press, 1964, and John Marsh, *The Fulness of Time*, Harper & Brothers, 1952.

⁸ Gordon H. Clark, “Time and Eternity,” *The Trinity Review*, September-October, 1981, emphasis added.

To be sure, “Time is the medium in which change occurs” appears to be a descriptive and working definition rather than an essential definition. At first glance it does not tell us what the essence or makeup of time is. Nor is it as elegant and lofty as some philosophers or poets might like. Yet this rather prosaic definition gets at the heart of what time is and has several advantages.

(1) Change is how we tell time. Clocks, calendars, and circumstances all mark time by advances of hands or digits, rising and setting of the sun, progression of seasons, or other *changes*.

(2) Change is how we perceive time. “Time flies when you’re having fun.” Fast-paced events seem to speed up time because there is a lot of change. “A watched pot never boils.” Slow or no action seems to make time go slower or stand still because there is little change.

(3) Change is how we judge a person’s age. At a high school reunion people look young if they have not changed much. People look older if they have added pounds, gained wrinkles, or lost hair. “You haven’t changed a bit” normally means, “You don’t look any older.”

(4) Change is essential to time. In science fiction stories and television shows like *The Twilight Zone* “time stop” is envisioned as nothing changing. In these fanciful stories some poor soul might be unaffected and still be able to act while everyone and everything else is frozen in time. Yet for him time has not stopped. Indeed, if time was ever to stop no one would know it because nothing would change.

(5) Change is consistent with biblical concepts of time. “So the evening and the morning were the first day” (*Genesis* 1:5). At the outset a unit of time (a day) is distinguished by change (evening and morning). An *aeon* (age), *chronos* (lapsed time-period) and *kairos* (moment) are all distinguished by changes from prior times.⁹ Thus, rising and falling kings mark different times in the Bible as do a host of other changes in history. All these are changes from the past and therefore usher in new epochs of some sort.

Thus, “Time is the medium in which change occurs” seems to be a good description of time. It actually does get at the essence of time which is not a physical substance in itself that flows like water. Time is not a thing to be handled. Time is a relationship between events (changes) in history.

Actually, the clumsy way we seem to understand time points to its fundamental character. Some of the most fundamental ideas are the hardest to explain because they are basic and innate to the image of God. The concepts of

⁹ I know that James Barr refutes these rigid definitions of words for time in the Bible (*Biblical Words For Time*, Alec R. Allenson Inc., 1962, 1969). I merely mention them here as generalities. Even if the distinctions between these Greek words are blurred in biblical usage their essential common dependence on change(s) in history remains.

God¹⁰, logic (non-contradiction), cause and effect¹¹, right and wrong, and time are sometimes a struggle to define precisely because everyone already knows what they are. These possibly innate ideas—including time—are organizing principles for man.

Omnitemporality Defined

“Omni” means all or universal. “Temporal” means timely, related to or conditioned by time. So “omnitemporality” means all-timely. The notion of divine omnitemporality is aligned with timelessness, but is more comprehensive. It is substantially true that God is timeless in the sense that He has no specific location or duration in time. However, left unqualified or unexplained, the idea of timelessness leaves God open to the charge of inactivity or even helplessness. It might prompt the notion of Deism without even the initial creation. No doubt Augustine and Reformed thinkers after him have not meant this, but it is a charge leveled against a straw man by those who teach that God is temporal. Moreover, the “Wholly Other” view of God held by some Neo-orthodox folks involves a kind of timelessness that pretty much leaves Him on the sidelines.

Omnitemporality affirms that God is never and always in time in the same way He is nowhere and everywhere according to omnipresence. God is contained, pinpointed, or restricted to no particular place, yet He is present everywhere at once. All of God is here and all of God is everywhere. In the same way God is contained, pinpointed, or restricted to no particular time, yet He is in every time. All of God is past. All of God is now. All of God is future. And God does not change along the way. “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the ‘Almighty’” (*Revelation* 1:8). He is no older now than He was at the beginning. He is the same.

So to say that God is omnitemporal is to say that He has no location, extension, or duration in time just as He has no location, extension, or dimension in space. He is timeless just as He is spaceless. He is always, just as He is every-

where. To say that God is temporal would mean He is limited by being bound in time. To say that God is timeless might suggest that He is limited by being bound outside of time. To say that God is omnitemporal means that He is not limited by time at all.

Biblical Premises

One characteristic that is fairly common among those who advocate that God is temporal or bound in time is a failure to consider or expound Scripture on this subject. Many temporal theists routinely mention the Christian beliefs in answered prayer and divine providence, but reference and interpret no Biblical texts. There is also a rather cavalier tendency to dismiss the Bible as not really speaking much or at all to the topic of the temporality or atemporality of God. If this cavalier attitude was correct, then mere men would have no business speculating about God’s relationship to time because the secret things belong to God and are not ours to pry into (*Deuteronomy* 29:29). We should not approach the knowledge of God with a purely philosophical method. Pure rationalism is doomed to failure because it has no valid axiom or starting point to work from.

However, Scripture actually does have relevant things to say about the topic of time from various angles. The revealed things are ours to believe, obey, and draw conclusions from. The revealed things provide established premises from which we can draw logical conclusions that amount to good and necessary consequences. Presuppositionalism begins with the revealed truth of the Bible but does not stop there. Indeed, the Bible tells us meaningful things about the attributes of God, His relationship to time, and the nature of time that lead to the conclusion of divine omnitemporality. We will begin with the attributes of God.

Self-Existence and Omnitemporality

God is self-existent and depends on nothing outside Himself. He pre-existed creation. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (*Genesis* 1:1). And this creation was out of nothing. Before creation there was God and only God. Before creation there was nothing that could change. Before creation there was no time as such. It is false to believe that time stretches infinitely into the past. Time began with the creation of mutable things and beings. So when was God before there was a when? Obviously the answer is that there was no when, no time. If God pre-existed creation, then He pre-existed time. If God pre-existed time, then He is independent of time. If He is independent of time, then He is either timeless or omnitemporal. He cannot be temporal.

Someone might argue that once God made the universe – and time – that He thereafter bound Himself in time. It would be kind of like building a house and then living in it. However, a home builder can just as easily not move in or he can come and go as he pleases. To dwell in our own handiwork does not restrict us to that abode. So, yes, God may in some sense inhabit or manifest Himself in time once it was created, but He is not restricted by or bound in time.

¹⁰ Presuppositionalists know that one cannot prove the existence of God and that the so-called “theistic proofs” are logically invalid. Proving the existence of God is also irrelevant since awareness of God’s existence is innate to man as the image of God. From the beginning Adam could communicate with God and was responsible to God because he knew God. Adam did not need to learn about God. No one is born an atheist, even after the Fall.

¹¹ The empiricist David Hume went to great lengths to try to prove that we can have no concept of “cause and effect” from the observation of events (*An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Bobbs-Merrill, 1748, 1977, 84-87). However, he failed to admit that men nevertheless do have an idea of what “cause and effect” is. One possibility is that the notion of cause and effect is innate to man as the image of God. Infants and toddlers apply the concept in an immature way making wrong associations. Yet even the youngest child seems to naturally conclude that one thing is caused by another.

This amounts to omnitemporality. God is omnitemporal because He is self-existent.

Omnipresence and Omnitemporality

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built?” (*1 Kings* 8:27). King Solomon’s insight was profound. Although he built a temple for God at God’s instruction, Solomon knew and confessed that God would not be contained by the temple. Nor could God be contained by Heaven. God would manifest Himself uniquely in and through the temple in Jerusalem. God would rule from Heaven. But God is everywhere. That is omnipresence.

We noted earlier that there are 24 time zones around the world. If God is omnipresent, then He is present in every time zone. He must therefore be present in 24 different times. On a limited scale this already suggests divine omnitemporality, even before we consider the farther reaches of the universe.

This relationship between omnitemporality and omnipresence is no mere analogy. It is no correspondence theory of truth where what we know is analogous to the truth but is not itself the truth. We know the truth of omnitemporality, we know the truth of omnipresence, and they go hand-in-hand.

In fact, omnipresence is bound up with omnitemporality and *vice versa*. Each divine attribute is an extension of the others and omnitemporality is no different in this regard. According to the Special and General Theories of Relativity, time is but the fourth dimension to the space-time continuum.¹² Time is part and parcel with space. Time affects space and space affects time. So if God is omnipresent, and if the theory of relativity is true, then God is necessarily omnitemporal. I will not argue here whether Einstein was right or not. Suffice it to say that omnitemporality is consistent with relativity (physical not moral).

Does relativity suggest anything else meaningful about the idea of omnitemporality? I believe it does. The theory of relativity asserts that no physical object may travel at or beyond the speed of light. The speed of light is constant regardless of the velocity of the frame of reference we measure it from. Exceeding the speed of light is impossible because as any object approaches the speed of light its mass increases exponentially so that the speed of light may never be reached. The more energy we put into something to move it faster, the more mass occurs to resist further acceleration.

People and other physical objects may not travel at or beyond the speed of light. This in effect rules out time travel for us. However, God is not a physical object. God is Spirit (*John* 4:24). He has no mass and therefore is not

limited by the speed of light. It is hard for us bodily creatures to conceive of it, but God is not bound by the speed of light. God, as Spirit, could theoretically travel faster than the speed of light (if He was actually localized and could change His location).

Now consider this: Suppose light leaves the Earth. Then suppose someone traveling faster than the speed of light follows that lightbeam. That someone will overtake light from the past and see as present events that happened in the past. In effect, traveling faster than the speed of light would enable a kind of time travel. God is not physical. God is not limited by the speed of light. God is not time bound. I am not suggesting that God sees the past by speeding past light beams. I merely point out that God is not limited in the way we are. God is omnitemporal because He is omnipresent.

This integral relationship between omnitemporality and omnipresence tends to strengthen the definition of time as the medium in which change occurs. Distance is a relationship between or along objects. Distance does not really exist on its own. Likewise, time does not really exist on its own. It is the lapse between or along events.

Omniscience and Omnitemporality

Closely related to omnipresence is omniscience. “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (*Hebrews* 4:13). This Scripture teaches that God knows everything and is everywhere.

There is a sense in which omniscience implies timelessness. God knows all things yesterday, today, and forever. He never learns anything. Therefore His knowledge never grows or changes. If God’s knowledge never changes, then in some sense His knowledge at least is timeless and unchanging.

But consider another angle to omnipresence and omniscience in the light of *Hebrews* 4:13. God is simultaneously present here and at a star, light years away from here as well. From the vantage point of that star He sees it as it is now. From the vantage point of Earth He sees it as it was light years ago.¹³ And from all the places in between He

¹³ The distance of light years between earth and stars does not prove an “old earth” and evolutionary theory. Although the speed of light is currently constant regardless of the velocity of the frame of reference from which it is measured, there is evidence that the speed of light has been in exponential decay through history. (See Paul D. Acklerman, *It’s A Young World After All: Exciting Evidences for Recent Creation*, Baker Book House, 1986, 71-77.) Some have traced the trajectory of this decay to an explosion in the speed of light a few thousand years ago corresponding to the creation of the universe. If this is so, then light now reaching us from distant stars would have emanated from the stars a lot faster and much more recently than we might otherwise think and the light beams would have slowed down over the ages before reaching us. Now “creation science” is a misnomer. Creation cannot be observed or repeated in an experiment. (Neither is the theory that the speed

¹² Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory*, Crown Publishers, 1961.

sees the same star as it was during all the times between. So because of His omnipresence, God sees the whole history of the star, at least up to this moment, all at once. This same divine awareness applies to everything in the universe. This is in effect omnitemporality. All times are present to Him now.

This is remotely like looking at a comic strip in a newspaper. The comic strip has a logical and chronological progression. Yet we can read it in order, or we can glance at the whole strip at once, or we can read it backwards starting with the last frame. The cartoonist may have beheld the whole as a complete concept before he ever set out to draw the individual frames. Being outside the bounds of the two-dimensional newspaper page, we can see the whole as we please. How much more can God see the whole of time as He pleases, past, present and future?

Furthermore, the cartoonist or reader standing outside the newspaper page can intervene at will in the cartoon. He can draw a moustache on a character or blot out a face he does not like. So to be outside the confines of a context does not preclude outside intervention in the context. Also, the reader can tell what time it is in the comic strip. I can read a clock in a comic strip and I can tell which frame comes before and after others without being in the time of the comic strip.

This is not to say that life is a comic strip (though the theological opinions held by some are indeed comical). Nor is this to claim that God's omnipresent vision of stars or the analogy of a comic strip fully explain or exhaust God's independence of time. The main point is simply that if God is omniscient as *Hebrews* 4:13 asserts then He must be omnitemporal.

Sovereignty and Omnitemporality

All Christians give lip service to the sovereignty of God. Reformed theology gives full place to the sovereignty of God. Daniel recognized God's sovereignty even over time. "He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding" (*Daniel* 2:21). True, Daniel was thinking about time in terms of historical eras marked by the rise and fall of kings in history. Yet even though Daniel was primarily thinking about God controlling historical events, that *ipso facto* means that God controls time as such. Our working definition is, "Time is the medium in which change occurs." If God providentially controls the changes in history, then He controls time. If God controls everything in history

of light has always been constant scientific since we cannot observe or repeat experiments to measure it in the remote past.) Creation is known by faith in God's revealed word. Yet existing evidence aligns with creationism. For Bible-believing Christians the terminology of "light years" is phenomenological language describing things as they appear to have been (such as the sun rising when we all know it is the Earth that is rotating on its axis).

(*Ephesians* 1:11), then He controls all time. God is omnitemporal because God is sovereign.

Likewise Jesus affirmed the Father's sovereignty over time. "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (*Acts* 1:7). To control events in history is to control time because time is just the changing relationship of events and created things.

Immutability and Omnitemporality

"For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob" (*Malachi* 3:6). "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (*Hebrews* 13:8). Orthodox Christians accept the doctrine that God is immutable. If God does not change, and if time is the medium in which change occurs, then God is either timeless or independent of time.

The Creation of Time

The attributes of God imply that He is timeless (as Augustine argued) or, more comprehensively, He is omnitemporal (as I would argue). Lest someone wonder whether we are being too speculative, there are several Scriptures that speak more directly about time that confirm that God is omnitemporal.

"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" (*Hebrews* 1:1-2). Most English translations render "*aeons*" as "worlds". However, "*aeons*" is a distinctly temporal noun consistent with the theme of speaking "*at various times*", "*in time past*" and "*in these last days*." Normally an aeon is an age or an era, a period of time marked by some distinctive quality. Thus, the Victorian Age during the reign of Queen Victoria, the Age of Flight since the Wright Brothers took off, or the Nuclear Age since 1945. The point here is that through Jesus Christ God made the aeons or ages. He made time itself in which He has spoken to His people. Some will say that God just made or determined the historical events that mark or distinguish the ages. Yet we have seen that time does not exist on its own. To create things and create events is to create time. And for God to create time He must be independent of time.

"By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (*Hebrews* 11:3). This Scripture also states that God framed the "*worlds*" (*aeons*) in temporal terms, meaning He made time.

The Decree Before Time

"[God] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (*2 Timothy* 1:9). "In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began" (*Titus* 1:2). God's decree to elect and save particular men was before

time began. If God existed before time began, then He is independent of time. This is certainly consistent with the idea that God is omnitemporal.

The Divine Equivalence of Time

Moses prayed, “For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it was past, and like a watch in the night” (*Psalm* 90:4). Likewise Peter wrote, “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (*2 Peter* 3:8). Many Christians read these two Scriptures relatively. They think that Moses and Peter meant that for God a thousand years and a day are similarly short compared to an indefinitely long period of time since eternity past. However, time as such did not exist before angels and the world were created. Time does not stretch into the everlasting past. Time began in *Genesis* 1:1. If we add up the chronology of generations and the reigns of kings in the Old Testament we will come up with an age of about 6,000 years for the world. Some reputable scholars have suggested that the time periods mentioned in *Genesis* are not exhaustive and that the world might be more like 10,000 years old. Either way, a thousand years and a day are not the same by a long shot in comparison with several thousand years! No, Peter, who believed in a young earth, did not mean that a thousand years and a day are the same *relative* to the short history of the world. He meant that with the Lord a thousand years and a day are the same *absolutely*. God is not time-bound. He grasps all time and all time periods, whether long or short, in one present glance. He sees all time at once all the time; which is to say that God is omnitemporal.

Peter’s assertion rules out a temporal God and requires either a timeless or omnitemporal God.

The Atonement and Time

“All who dwell on the earth will worship [the beast], whose names are not written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (*Revelation* 13:8). Obviously the Lamb was slain historically when Jesus Christ was crucified in the Roman Empire. That was well after the “*foundation of the world*.” Presumably John meant that before Christ was executed in time God comprehended His redemptive act and the salvation of the elect whose names are written in the Book of Life. In other words, Christ’s death was present to God’s mind before it actually happened in human history. This again suggests God’s omnitemporality. It also partly explains the redemption of the elect in the Old Testament before Christ made atonement on the cross. However I will not press this point since the syntax of this Scripture has raised some questions as to whether it was the Book of Life or the slaying of the Lamb or both that were “*from the foundation of the world*.”

Omnitemporality Over Timelessness

The concept of divine omnitemporality holds several advantages over the terminology of timelessness. Omnitemporality is more consistent with the terminology of

omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence. Omnitemporality more directly relates God’s relationship to time with His omnipresent relationship to space. Omnitemporality positively attributes power and freedom to God rather than negatively suggesting a limitation on God as the word “timeless” does. (I suspect that most of those in the past who have called God “timeless” would agree with the notion of omnitemporality and did not mean to imply that God is somehow restricted or bound from intervening in time. At any rate, omnitemporality avoids the false charges of temporal theists who say that if God is not temporal then He cannot answer prayer or act in history.) God intervenes miraculously and providentially because He is in every time without being confined to any time. Indeed, omnitemporality at once embraces the transcendence and imminence of God while timelessness suggests a transcendent but hands-off God.

Objections Answered

Can a timeless God intervene in history? Can He answer prayer? Is a timeless God inactive or impotent? Could He become incarnate? Are time statements meaningless for a timeless God? What about temporal statements about God in Scripture? These are some of the questions raised against the timelessness of God. Once we consider that God is positively omnitemporal rather than negatively timeless many of these questions and assertions fall by the wayside. Yet a few arguments for the temporality of God should be considered in the light of omnitemporality.

We have already answered the claim that an omnitemporal God could not intervene in history or answer prayer. He is in every time, so there is nothing to prevent Him from acting in any time. (Remember that we have lots of comic strips in spite of the fact that their illustrators are not bound in the frame of reference that they depict.)

Stephen T. Davis asserts that if God is timeless then, “Temporal terms have no significant application to him.”¹⁴ Take for example the statement, “God existed before time began.” This is supposedly a meaningless statement because “before” is a time reference and to reference someone timeless to a time is incoherent.

One problem with this argument is that it assumes “before” is a time word when it is a relationship word. The number “One” comes *before* the number “Two” mathematically, but I can say the number “Two” *before* the number “One” chronologically. It is called counting backwards. And “One” did not exist chronologically *before* “Two.” One thing may come “before” another chronologically, logically, causally, or in priority. So “before” is not a time word as such. To say that “God existed before time began” is not the same as, “God existed in time before time began.” The first statement is coherent; the second statement is not.

Remember that time is the medium in which change occurs. If we apply this meaning to the proposition at hand then,

¹⁴ *Logic and the Nature of God*, 10.

“God existed before time began” becomes, “The Unchanging Being existed before change began.” Or, more simply, “There was no change before change began.”

This is perfectly logical and coherent. It is also no different than saying, “God existed before space began.” Finally, even if temporal words might have no application to a *timeless* God, temporal words would coherently have application to an *omnitemporal* God who is in all times.

Does an omnitemporal God know what time it is? Yes, He does. A timeless being might or might not conceive of time depending on what we mean by timeless. An omnitemporal being is always aware of the time at all times by definition. I am not omnitemporal, but I can still figure out what time it is in Japan without being in Japan’s time zone. I can see what time a clock says in a movie without being an actor in the movie. I can think about what time it was when a certain historical event in the past happened without living in the past. How much more does God, who is omnitemporal, know what time it is all the time? The objection that God cannot know what time it is if He is timeless or omnitemporal does not compute.

Opponents of timelessness (and presumably omnitemporality) sometimes argue that Scripture applies temporal statements to God who must therefore be temporal. For instance, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (*Psalms* 90:2). We have already dismissed the idea that “before” implies a temporal condition for God. *Psalms* 90:2 adds the thought that “from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” Supposedly this means that God existed in time stretching infinitely into the past and will exist in time infinitely into the future.

First, it should be noted that Moses is speaking, not the Lord. So *Psalms* 90 is from a human perspective. As we perceive it, God has always existed as long as there has been an always. But this does not limit God to existing in a specific time.

Second, we might suspect an element of anthropomorphism here where God is spoken of in human terms to condescend to our ability to understand. However, we really do not need to resort to anthropomorphism in this instance.

Third, “everlasting” is sometimes used in Hebrew thought to denote a long time.¹⁵ One’s love or commitment might

be “everlasting”, even though the context of marriage clearly limits the commitment to one’s lifetime before death. As long as I am around I will love my wife. As long as I am alive, I will protect my wife. These are everlasting in the Hebrew sense. In this sense, God has been everlasting into the entirety of the past and entirely into the future. The expression says nothing about how far backward “everlasting” goes. Nor does it preclude God from existing before time began. It just says He has been here all the time.

Finally, it says, “You are God.” To borrow an idea from Jesus (*Matthew* 22:32) it does not say, “You have been and will be God.” The tense is present, even in reference to God’s existence in the everlasting past and everlasting future. In essence this suggests omnitemporality. We have already seen that the follow up, “For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday” (*Psalms* 90:4) aligns better with omnitemporality than with temporality.

So What?

Who cares whether or not God is omnitemporal? There is a temptation among some to think that such issues are trivial and academic, without bearing on the Christian life. While the omnitemporality of God may not be a doctrine as high on our list of priorities as the Trinity or justification by grace through faith alone, it is not to be dismissed as irrelevant.

Anything Biblical is worthwhile (*2 Timothy* 3:16-17) and we have seen that what Scripture says about the attributes of God, God’s relationship to time, and time itself all imply divine omnitemporality. Furthermore, anything that can be known about God is worthwhile to know. It is no trivial thing to contemplate the being of God in any of His attributes. Indeed, one of the most vital reasons to understand and uphold the omnitemporality of God is that it consistently preserves other divine attributes. As we have seen, one cannot consistently believe in the Lord’s self-existence, omnipresence, omniscience, sovereignty, and immutability without accepting omnitemporality as well. It is no accident that many thinkers who explicitly reject the timelessness or omnitemporality of God are less than orthodox on God’s attributes in general. Stephen T. Davis, for instance, begins by dismissing the timelessness of God and then in subsequent chapters progressively questions or denies the omniscience, immutability, foreknowledge, and omnipotence of God.¹⁶

“But what about me?” someone might wonder. “What does divine omnitemporality do for me?” Theology should not be self-centered. Theology is about God, not ourselves. Those who push doctrine aside for the sake of “practical Christianity” are rejecting Christianity. However, doctrine and theology do have positive implications for the Christian life. So we can expect the idea of God’s omnitemporality to likewise affect our lives for the good.

¹⁵ *Exodus* 40:15 promised Aaron’s sons, “an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations.” Here “*everlasting*” is qualified by “*their generations*” which would not necessarily be eternal. Not to mention the fact that Jesus Christ’s priesthood fulfilled and displaced the Aaronic priesthood. *Deuteronomy* 33:15 juxtaposes, “the ancient mountains” with “the everlasting hills.” Indeed, hills may last as long as the world does, but they are hardly eternal. Then *Habakkuk* 3:6 says, “the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills bowed.” The mountains will last a long time, but how could eternal mountains be scattered?

¹⁶ *Logic and the Nature of God*, 1983.

Personally, I have found the study of the Lord's relationship to time to be a challenging mental exercise. In other words, it was fun. Yes, fun. One of the problems with some modern Americans is that they want to be spoon-fed easy information and entertainment. Many do not want to take initiative to learn anything, much less something profound. The result is couch potatoes with minds that do not venture very far beyond the television or video games. Alas, many Christians can be the same way. They want dynamic worship services that provide a temporary high before a week of drudgery instead of the sustaining bread of God's Word. If we would once in a while allow ourselves to explore a challenging subject, whether theological, philosophical, scientific, or historical, we might find that the exercise strengthens our minds to be more effective and efficient in practical daily tasks. We might even be better equipped to fulfill our calling. To that end, the study of God's omnitemporality is one way to keep the wheels turning so our thoughts do not seize up and our minds become atrophied.

The knowledge of God's omnitemporality also humbles us which is always good medicine. God's omniscience lets us know we are not so smart. God's omnipotence lets us know we are not so strong. God's omnitemporality lets us know we are not so timely. God is beyond comprehending completely, and omnitemporality at once informs us about God while reminding us that He is unimaginably beyond us in all His capacities. And so we are humbled and worship.

Being made in the image of God, our views about ourselves and fellow men inevitably are shaped by our view of God. Man as the image of God is always less than God, yet above other creatures. If we are atheist, believing there is no God, then man as the image of God is reduced to an animal and we will treat other men accordingly with abortion, euthanasia, racism, and other evils. If we believe that God is limited and carnal, then our view of ourselves is not raised that much. If we hallow God's name and exalt Him to the highest place, then the "distance" between us and God increases immensely, but so also does our own elevation rise above the rest of creation that we have been given dominion over. This is essentially the gist of *Psalms* 8. Thus, the more magnificent we believe God is, the more humbled we are before Him and the more exalted we are above other creatures. The way to be exalted (not individually, but as the image of God) is to exalt God, and omnitemporality exalts God over time. In other words, Christ-esteem is the path to inner peace and confidence; self-esteem is the path to selfishness and sin.

Speaking of the image of God implies that sanctified men should reflect the attributes of God in a limited but meaningful way. God is omniscient knowing everything; Christians should know the truth and keep learning. God is omnipotent possessing all power; Christians should be potent and productively fulfill their callings. God is omnipresent being present everywhere; Christians should be available and approachable to other people for service and reconciliation. God is sovereign having control over everything; Christians should have self-control. God is immu-

table; Christians should at least be stable and predictable. All of God's attributes are reflected in the image of God.

Along these lines since God is omnitemporal then Christians should be timely. The sanctified Christian should be faithful and responsible with his or her duties in the present moment (*Proverbs* 10:26, 12:24, 15:23, 19:16, 22:3, 24:33-34, *Ecclesiastes* 3:1-8, *I Corinthians* 14:33, *Ephesians* 5:15-16). In other words, Christians are called to be on time because God is always on time and never late. Oddly, some Christians revel in their lateness for church, meetings, work, social gatherings, and the like. Somehow they think they are spiritual if they are "led by the Spirit" instead of ruled by the clock.

I have actually heard it preached that in some primitive cultures being on time is an insult to the host and being late is considered proper. So, we are told, we should not consider timeliness to be essential to responsible life. On the contrary, being on time is integral to faithfulness. "A word spoken in due season, how good it is!" (*Proverbs* 15:23), but a word spoken late is a waste of breath. "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself" (*Proverbs* 22:3), but one who is late in heading for the basement is blown away by a tornado. Moreover, the notion that Christians are justified in being late because some cultures glorify lateness is absurd. Some cultures treat idolatry, magic, voodoo, revenge, drunkenness, and drug abuse as moral goods. That does not mean Christians should adopt these practices. At any rate God's omnitemporality and the Biblical call to faithfulness challenge the Christian to make the most of his time and to be on time.

The bottom line is that believers should always seek to know the truth. Omnitemporality preserves other attributes of God. Omnitemporality challenges our minds. Omnitemporality prompts wonder and worship. Omnitemporality humbles us. Omnitemporality exalts man as the image of God above other creatures. Omnitemporality calls for our own timeliness and faithfulness. Consequences do not prove omnitemporality is right. Yet anything with these potential results cannot be a waste of time or thought.

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