

God Is Eternal

Psalm 90, Revelation 1

Have you ever strolled through an old cemetery and tried to read the words chiseled into the tombstones? Names and dates from the 1700s and 1800s may not be easy to decipher. Tombstones are made of rock—usually granite. A rock is a symbol of permanence. The Bible says, “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust.” The Prudential Insurance Company uses the Rock of Gibraltar in its company logo as a symbol of permanence. Yet rocks wear away from wind and weather. This was brought home to Michiganders back in 2006, when the most prominent turret of the Miners Castle along the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore collapsed and fell into Lake Superior. It had been an icon and a favorite of tourists for many years. Now the monument is not as near imposing. Rocks are hard and enduring, but they, like everything else, wear away. Some day they will crumble into dust. Nothing in this physical world is permanent.

But as we saw two weeks ago, God is not physical; he is a *spirit*—a person without a body. The Psalmist, when he thought about the nature of God, prayed, “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and *thy years shall have no end*” (Ps. 102:25).

This is the third in a series on Westminster Shorter Catechism question and answer 4, “What is God? God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.”¹ The first two messages were “God Is a Spirit” and “God Is Infinite.” Today, we consider the topic “God Is Eternal.”

1. Our Old Testament Text

Our Scripture for exposition and application today is Psalm 90. The heading to this Psalm says, “A prayer of Moses the man of God” (תְּפִלָּה לְמֹשֶׁה אִישׁ־הָאֱלֹהִים). Do not miss the importance of this statement. Most of the Psalms were composed around the time of David, “the sweet Psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam. 23:1), about 1000 BC. Fully 75 of the 150 Psalms are attributed to David. Moses lived about 1500 BC—a full 500 years earlier. To put that in perspective, consider that our country came into existence as a separate nation in 1776—247 years ago. I am old enough to remember the celebrations of our country’s 200th anniversary in 1976. Now, our country is pushing 250 years. That’s just half the amount of time that this Psalm is older than the other Psalms. This is the only Psalm attributed to Moses, the man who led Israel out of Egypt and went up on Mount Sinai to receive the law of God.

¹ <https://opc.org/sc.html> retrieved 8-19-23

Psalm 90 is the oldest Psalm. It is approximately as old as the Torah—Genesis—Deuteronomy—and the book of Job. It is appropriate that the oldest Psalm makes the case that God himself is even older! Let’s look at that now.

Here is the venerable Moses, writing the oldest Psalm, saying, “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, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.”

The importance of this text can hardly be overemphasized, for it teaches in no uncertain terms that God is eternal. Imagine the Rocky Mountains. They’ve been there a long time. They were there when you and I came into the world, and they will be there a long time after you and I leave this world. They are, for all practical purposes, pretty much an emblem of something that is eternal, and yet we know that if this world lasted long enough, the Rocky Mountains would eventually erode away. Believe me, we do not expect that this will ever happen during our lifetimes! So the inspired prophet Moses writes, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.”

Actually, the archaic language of the KJV brings out a nuance that we do not have in our modern idiom: “from everlasting to everlasting, *thou* art God” (מֵעוֹלָם לְעוֹלָם אַתָּה אֱלֹהִים). The “you” is actually singular: “*thou* art God.” In early modern English there were two second-person pronouns: “you” meant a group; “thou” (or its companions “thy” and “thee”) meant one person alone. A man might have said to his children, “I love *you*,” but he would have said to his wife, “I love *thee*.” That word *thee* would have meant “I love thee *alone*; I love thee in a way that I love nobody else in all the world; my love for thee is exclusive.” That’s the way marriage is supposed to be: a man and wife willingly committing themselves exclusively to one another for life in mutual love. Such a marriage is a picture of Christ’s love for his church.

A little poem that’s been up on our refrigerator for many years is by Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672). The Puritan Anne Bradstreet was married at 16 and was one of the original settlers at Massachusetts Bay Colony. In her poem “To My Dear and Loving Husband,” the first couplet reads: “If ever two were one, then surely we. If ever man were loved by wife, then thee.” Listen to that second line again: “If ever man were loved by wife, then *thee*.” “Thee” is second person *singular*. Bradstreet was addressing her dear and loving husband, and no one else. In the language of her day she would have said to him, “I love *thee*,” not “I love *you*.” Her love for her husband was exclusive.

When the inspired prophet wrote, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, *thou* art God,” he was addressing the true God alone. What he was

saying was true of Jehovah—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three Persons, one God—*alone!* Jehovah *alone* is from everlasting to everlasting, Jehovah alone is the true God.

Consider the words “from everlasting to everlasting” (used twice). The Hebrew word for “everlasting” is עולם *‘olam*; עולם means (depending on context) *long duration, antiquity, futurity*.² אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָם is a name for God, “the *everlasting* God”: Abraham “planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God” (Gen. 21:33). In the phrase מֵעוֹלָם עַד-עוֹלָם it means *from eternity past to eternity future*. This phrase is used three times in the Bible: “*from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God*” (Ps. 90); “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel *from everlasting to everlasting*” (Ps. 106:48); “the mercy of the LORD is *from everlasting to everlasting* upon them that fear him” (Ps. 103:17). How significant: God himself is from everlasting to everlasting, his blessedness is from everlasting to everlasting (he is worthy of worship from everlasting to everlasting), and his covenant *mercy* (רַחֲמֵי) is from everlasting to everlasting! Significantly, as long as God exists, his covenant mercy exists. God and his covenant mercy are inseparable. We do not have to worry that God might die and be succeeded by another.

In the US, presidents issue executive orders. These are not strictly constitutional, but Congress and the courts rarely challenge them. One president might issue a particular executive order, but then another president might be elected to succeed him and issue an executive order overturning the previous president’s executive order. But our God is not like the president of the United States. God’s covenant mercy is from everlasting to everlasting—same as his person. Our salvation is absolutely dependent on God’s covenant mercy. The apostle Paul writes: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his *mercy* he saved us” (Tit. 3:5). We cannot earn our salvation; it is not by works of righteousness that we have done. Salvation is a free gift (“the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord,” Rom. 6:23); it is given to us according to his mercy. Our salvation is entirely dependent on God’s covenant mercy, and (thanks be to God!) regarding the God of heaven—the true God—his covenant mercy is *eternal!* In eternity past the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—one God—covenanted together to save his elect people. The Father sent the Son.³ The Son came in time, born of the virgin Mary, taking on human flesh, dying on the cross for the sins of his people; he was buried, and the third day he rose from the dead. Raised to life, he was seen by eyewitnesses who also saw him ascend to heaven, where he sits at the right hand of the Father, interceding for the saints according to his will. God is eternal, so our salvation is eternal. God will never

² Brown, Driver, Briggs lexicon, עולם (Logos Bible Software)

³ John 5:30, 36, 37, 39; 6:44, 57; 8:16, 18, 29, 42; 12:49; 14:24; 17:21, 25; 20:21

relinquish his authority to another; as long as he lives—which is forever—our salvation is secure in Christ!

You and I and the creation did not exist in eternity past. In eternity past, there was only God. When God spoke and said, “Let there be light,” then the created order began and time began. The creation exists in time, but God is *above* time. He has always existed from eternity past, and he will continue to exist after the last day, and on into eternity future. He gives us eternal life through his Son Jesus Christ. If we trust in him, we will live in fellowship with him in paradise for all eternity. John 3:16 informs us that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have *everlasting life* (ζωὴν αἰώνιον)” Some translations have “eternal life,” but it is more accurate to say “*everlasting life*”; for we were once “*dead* in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1), but when we were regenerated and given spiritual life by the sovereign working of the Holy Spirit, then we came “alive unto God” (Rom. 6:11). The life we have is everlasting—it will continue on into eternity future—yet it had a definite beginning, when we were converted by the Holy Spirit. But God had no beginning; rather, he has always been! Deuteronomy 33:27 is assuring: “The *eternal God* is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” Because God is eternal, our salvation is secure!

Also contrast the eternal God, the creator of all things, with the idols and images used in false worship. Psalm 96:5 declares that “all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens.” The true God is eternal; he is above time. False idols and images are material, made from materials that are part of the creation. They have not existed from eternity. They are recent. They are not creators but created things. This was part of the message that was given to the prophet Jeremiah. He was instructed: “Thus you shall say to them: ‘The gods that have *not* made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens’” (Jer. 10:11). They did not exist in eternity past, and they will not exist in eternity future. They are *not* eternal. How pathetic to worship something that is not eternal, something that is destined to pass away! There is something very special about this verse. It is the only verse in the prophets that is not in Hebrew but in Aramaic, the language of Babylon. God wanted this message to get out to the idol worshipers of Babylon: the so-called gods you worship did not create the heavens and the earth; they are not eternal; they are destined to perish!

After teaching the doctrine that God is eternal, Psalm 90 contrasts it with our mortality: “You turn man to destruction, and say, ‘Return, O children of men.’ For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night. You carry them away like a flood; they are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up: in the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers.” Do not miss the contrast: God himself is

eternal: “from everlasting to everlasting” but man is mortal. All of us are subject to physical death; all of us are going to die.

A few years ago a man I know, a grandfather, told me how he had ridden his motorcycle down I-69 at 140 miles per hour at 3 o’clock in the morning. I was stunned. That is an incredibly reckless thing to do. If one tiny thing had gone wrong, if he had hit a crack in the pavement at just the wrong angle, or if there had been a mechanical malfunction, or a tire had blown, he could have lost his life—not to speak of his legal liability. He did it just for the thrill of outrunning the police. He tempted death and got away—this time!

Yet all of us are going to die. All kinds of people die—old, young and in-between; healthy, sick; rich, poor; strong, frail. Man knows not his time. “Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”⁴ This is why the Scriptures tell us, “now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”⁵ We have the present; we may not have the future. Today is the day to submit to Christ. Today is the day to own our sins, to acknowledge that our only hope is Christ, to humble ourselves before him, and to beg for his mercy. The Savior promises, “him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”⁶ We cannot do this in our own strength, but quickened by the Spirit we can say with David, “Help me, O LORD my God: O save me according to thy mercy” (Ps. 109:26).

Again, further contrasting our mortality with God’s eternity, the Psalmist writes: “The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Two months ago the energetic wife of a dear pastor friend died suddenly just a few days after her seventieth birthday. Last month a beloved senior member of our church breathed her last at age 92. Just yesterday I heard of a Christian man, a father of eight, who died unexpectedly in his early sixties. My own dear mother-in-law has attained the age of a hundred and a half; she is in good health for her age, but she longs to go to heaven. Man knows not his time. In a fallen world life is short. But God is eternal, and those who look to him in faith have the promise of living in his blessed presence forevermore. “There shall be no night there: they need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:5). The God who is from everlasting to everlasting promises life “forever and ever.” Clearly, this is all of grace! Man holds no bargaining power over God. We cannot force ourselves into his presence and

⁴ Prov. 27:1

⁵ 2 Cor. 6:2

⁶ John 6:37

impose our demands. There is no higher authority that can compel God to do the creature's will.

Those of mankind that are predestined unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, has chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love⁷—praise his holy name! “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

We have shown from Psalm 90 that God is eternal: “from everlasting to everlasting”—that is, from eternity past to eternity future—“you are God.” He is, in the words of Isaiah 57, “the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy.” He is Lord over time. He is not bound by time. He is never late, nor is he ever early; his timing—as everything else about him—is perfect. Dear saint of God, if you take refuge in him, you will be forever safe.

2. Our New Testament text

Not only does the Old Testament teach that God is eternal, so also does the New. Our New Testament text was Revelation chapter 1. There we read, “John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him *who is and who was and who is to come*, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. ‘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.’”

The reference here is to God the Father, distinguished from the Lord Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead. Two persons of the Holy Trinity are named. Twice it describes God as the one who *is* and who *was* and who *is to come* (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος). God is described as the one who “is.” The God of heaven is not the God who *used to be*; he is the God who “is”! He is the eternal God, the “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14). He dwells in the eternal present. But not only is he the God who “is”; he is the God who *was* and who *is to come*. Here are clear references to eternity past and eternity future. God is the God who inhabits eternity, who is not bound by time, who is sovereign over time, Creator of time, Lord of time.

He is the God who sent his Son who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood. We are fallen creatures; we fell in our forefather Adam. “As in

⁷ Adapted from https://opc.org/wcf.html#Chapter_03 accessed 8-19-23

Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22). We have inherited Adam’s sin. We have also sinned in our own person: “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” But our Savior loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood. He went to the cross and died in the place of unworthy sinners. Our sins were laid on him, and his perfect righteousness is given to us as a free gift. We cannot earn our way to heaven. Even our best works are like filthy rags in the sight of him who is of purer eyes than to behold evil. But Christ loved us and lived and died for us. By his life he accomplished in our place the perfect righteousness demanded of God. And in his death, all our sins were laid upon him. “God, the just, is satisfied.”⁸ If we look to Christ in faith, he will save us.

Scripture is clear: God is eternal; we are mortal. But the second Person of the Holy Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ, made himself mortal, that we might live with him eternally. Praise his holy name! Amen.

⁸ <https://www.trinitypsalterhymnal.org/hymns/before-the-throne-of-god-above/> accessed 8-20-23