

Of the Infinity of God, His Omnipresence and Eternity.

by John Gill

God's infinity is a fundamental attribute that encompasses his omnipresence and eternity, and is beyond human comprehension and understanding.

Scripture: Psalm 139:7, Isaiah 43:10

Topics: "God's Infinity", "Omnipresence and Eternity"

Description

John Gill expounds on the infinity of God, emphasizing His omnipresence and eternity as essential attributes. He explains that God's infinity means He is unbounded by space and time, existing everywhere and at all times. Gill illustrates that God's nature as a spirit allows Him to be present in all places simultaneously, and His eternal existence is without beginning or end. He argues that God's attributes, such as knowledge, power, and goodness, are also infinite, and that His eternal nature is foundational to understanding His divine essence. Ultimately, Gill asserts that God's omnipresence and eternity are crucial for grasping the fullness of His being and relationship with creation.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 1--Chapter 6

OF THE INFINITY OF GOD,

HIS OMNIPRESENCE AND ETERNITY.

The next attribute of God to be considered is, his "Infinity"; when we say that God is "infinite", the meaning is, that he is unbounded and unlimited, unmeasurable or immense, unsearchable and not to be comprehended. This attribute chiefly respects and includes the "omnipresence" and "eternity" of God; these are the two branches of it; he is not bounded by space, and therefore is everywhere; and he is not bounded by time, so he is eternal[1]: and that he is in this sense infinite appears from his spirituality and simplicity, before established; he is not a body, consisting of parts; was he, he would be finite; for body, or matter, is a creature of time, and not eternal; and is limited to a certain place, and so not everywhere; but God is a Spirit: though this barely is not sufficient to prove him infinite; because there are finite spirits, as

angels, and the souls of men; these are created spirits, and have a beginning, though they will have no end; which is owing not to themselves, but to the power of God, that supports them in their being; who could, if he would, annihilate them; and they are definitively in some place, and so, on all accounts, finite: but God is an uncreated Spirit; was before all time, so not bounded by it; and was before space or place were, and existed without it; and so not to be limited to it, and by it.

He is the "first Being", and from whom all others have their being; "Before him there was no God formed, neither shall there be after him; yea, he is the first and the last" (Isa. 43:10 44:6) and therefore there is none before him nor above him, to limit and restrain him: he is an "independent" Being; all creatures depend on him, but he depends on none; all things are "of" him, "through" him, and "to" him, as the first cause and last end of them[2]: all creatures live, and move, and have their being in him; but not he in them: men, angels, good and bad, are checked and limited by him; but not he by them.

He is "immutable"; this attribute has been already established; but if he changes place, or is moved from place to place, or is sometimes in one place, and sometimes in another, he would be mutable: and if he rose from non-existence into existence, or there is any end of his days, he would not be unchangeable; but he is the "same", and his "years shall have no end": immutability infers both omnipresence and eternity, the two branches of Infinity. We commonly say that sin is infinite, and the truest reason that can be given for it is, because God is the object of it; for as an act, it is finite, being the act of a finite creature; but with respect to the object against whom it is committed, it is infinite, and requires an infinite satisfaction; which none but an infinite person can give, and which Christ is in his divine nature, and so gave to his sufferings and death, in his human nature united to him, an infinite value and virtue, whereby justice had from them an infinite satisfaction.

God is infinite in all his attributes; and which are indeed, himself, his nature; as has been observed, and are separately considered by us, as a relief to our mind, and helps to our better understanding it; and, perhaps, by observing some of these distinctly, we may have a clearer idea of the infinity of God. His "understanding" is infinite, as is expressly said (Ps. 147:5), it reaches to, and comprehends all things that are, though ever so numerous; to the innumerable company of angels in the highest heavens; to the innumerable stars in the lower ones; to the innumerable inhabitants of the earth, men, and beasts, and fowl; and to the innumerable creatures that swim in the sea; yea, not only to all that are in being, but to all things possible to be made, which God could have made if he would; these he sees and knows in his eternal mind, so that there is "no searching of his understanding" (Isa. 40:28), there is no end of it, and therefore infinite.

The same may be said of his knowledge and wisdom, there is a bayov, a "depth", the apostle ascribes, to both; and which is not to be sounded by mortals (Rom. 11:33), he is "a God of knowledge" or "knowledges", of all things that are knowable (1 Sam. 2:3), he is the only and the all-wise God; and in comparison of him the wisdom of the wisest of creatures, the angels, is but folly (Job 4:18). The power of God is infinite; with him nothing is impossible; his power has never been exerted to the uttermost; he that has made one world, could have made millions; there is no end of his power, and his making of that, proves his "eternal power", that is, his infinite power; for nothing but infinite power could ever have made a world out of nothing (Rom. 1:20; Heb. 11:3).

His "goodness" is infinite, he is abundant in it, the earth is full of it, all creatures partake of it, and it endures continually; though there has been such a vast profusion of it from the beginning of the world, in all ages, it still abounds: there is no end of it, it is infinite, it is boundless; nor can there be any addition to

it; it is infinitely perfect, "my goodness extends not to thee" (Ps. 16:2). God is infinite in his "purity, holiness, and justice": there is none holy as he is; or pure and righteous, with him; in comparison of him, the most holy creatures are impure, and cover themselves before him (Job 4:17,18; Isa. 6:2, 3), in short, he is infinitely perfect, and infinitely blessed and happy.

We rightly give him titles and epithets of "immense" and "incomprehensible", which belong to his infinity. He is "immense", that is, unmeasurable; he measures all things, but is measured by none; who can take his dimensions? they are "as high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know?" If the heavens above cannot be measured, and the foundations of the earth beneath cannot be searched out, how should he be measured or searched out to perfection that made all these? (Job 11:7-9; Jer. 31:37).

As there is an height, a depth, a length and breadth in the love of God, immeasurable (Eph. 3:18), so there is in every attribute of God, and consequently in his nature; his immensity is his magnitude, and of his "greatness" it is said, that it is "unsearchable" (Ps. 145:3), and therefore, upon the whole, must be "incomprehensible"; not only cannot be comprehended and circumscribed by space, or in place, "for the heaven of heavens cannot contain" him; but he is not to be comprehended by finite minds, that cannot conceive of him as he is; his omniscience is "too wonderful" for them, and "the thunder of his power who can understand?"

Somewhat of him may be apprehended, but his nature and essence can never be comprehended, no not in a state of perfection; sooner may all the waters of the ocean be put into a nutshell, than that the infinite Being of God should be comprehended by angels or men, who are finite creatures; infinity is an attribute peculiar to God, and, as has been observed, its two chief branches are "omnipresence" and "eternity"; which will be next considered. 1. The "Omnipresence" of God, or his ubiquity, which, as it is included in his infinity, is a branch of it, and strictly connected with it, it must, be strongly concluded from it; for if God is infinite, that is, unbounded with respect to space and place, then he must be everywhere; and this is to be proved from his power, which is everywhere: as appears, not only in the creation of all things, as the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, the earth, and the ends of them, and all that is in them; but in his providence, supporting and sustaining them; for not only the creatures have their being in him, and from him, and therefore he must be near them; but "he upholds all things by his power", they consist in him, he provides for them, and preserves them all; and which is the argument the apostle uses to prove that he is not far from them (Acts 17:27, 28).

The omnipresence of God may be argued from the distributions of his goodness to all; to angels and glorified saints, who partake of his special favours; to all men on earth, to whom he does not leave himself without a witness of his kindness to them, giving them food and raiment, and all things richly to enjoy; he is present among them, and opens his hand and plentifully and liberally communicates to them: as well as from his universal government of the world by his wisdom; for his kingdom rules over all, the kingdom of nature and providence is his, and "he is the Governor among the nations".

And as he is everywhere by his power and providence, so he is by his knowledge; all things are naked and open to him, being all before him, and he present with them; though he is in the highest heaven, he can see and judge through the dark clouds, and behold all the inhabitants of the world, and their actions: and since these attributes of power, wisdom, and knowledge, are no other than his nature, or than himself, he must be everywhere by his essence; and which is most clear from the omnipresence of the divine nature in Christ, who, as a divine person, was in heaven, when he, as man, was here on earth (John 1:18 3:13),

and, indeed, unless he was omnipresent, he could not be in whatsoever place two or three are gathered together in his name, or be in the midst of the candlesticks, the churches, or with his ministers, to the end of the world (Matthew 18:20, 28:20), for though this is to be understood of his gracious presence, yet unless he was omnipresent, this could not be vouchsafed to all the saints, and all the churches, in all ages, at different places, at the same time; as when they are worshipping in different parts of the world; as in Europe, so in America.

Now if God, personally considered, or in anyone of the divine Persons, is omnipresent, then God, essentially considered, must be so. The presence of God may be observed in a different manner; there is his glorious presence in heaven, where he, in a most eminent manner, displays the glory of his majesty to angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect; and there is his powerful and providential presence with all his creatures, giving them being, and supporting them in it; and there is his gracious presence with good men, regenerating, sanctifying, comforting, and refreshing them; dwelling in them, carrying on his work of grace in them, to fit them for himself in glory; and all suppose his omnipresence: the heathens acknowledge this attribute; Anaxagoras calls him an infinite mind; and Pythagoras[3] defines him, a mind that is diffused throughout all the parts of the world, and goes through all nature; and Sallustius[4] observes, that he is not contained or comprehended in place.

So the Jews say[5] the Shecinah, or divine Majesty, is everywhere; and they call God Mwqm, "place", by an antiphrasis, as Buxtorf[6] observes, because he is not local, who is not contained in any place, but gives place to all; and so the Jews themselves say[7], that he is the place of the world, but not the world his place, for he is without the world, and fills all worlds; and they further say[8], he is so called because in every place where the righteous are, he is with them; or as Aben Ezra[9], expresses it, because every place is full of his glory; agreeable to which Philo, the Jew[10], says, *autov eautw topov he is place, full and sufficient to himself.*

This attribute is most clearly expressed in several passages of Scripture, as particularly in Psalm 139:7-10 where the Psalmist asks, "Whither shalt I go from thy Spirit?" which, if it is to be understood of the third Person, the Spirit of the Father, and of the Son; if there is no going from him, then not from them, since the same nature is in the one as in the other; if there is no going from God, personally considered, or as in any of the divine Persons, then not from him, as essentially considered: or by his Spirit may be meant himself, for "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24).

He adds, "Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" not his gracious presence, for a good man would never seek to flee from that, nothing being more desirable to him; nor is there anything he more earnestly deprecates than to be cast away from it (Ps. 4:6, 7, 51:11), but his essential presence, which is everywhere; it is in the Hebrew text "from thy face"; and face signifies the essence and nature of God, which is invisible and incomprehensible (Ex. 33:20), then the Psalmist goes on to enumerate all places that could be thought of to flee to, and yet God was there; "If I ascend to heaven, thou art there": could he by any means climb up to heaven, there God is in all the glory of his Majesty; there is his palace, his habitation, and his throne.

"If I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there": whether the place where the wicked are turned, and the apostate angels cast; there God is sustaining them in their being, pouring in his wrath into their consciences, and continuing the punishment inflicted on them: or whether the grave is meant, which is sometimes the sense of the word used, and is a bed to saints (Job 17:13), there God is watching over their dust, preserving it from being lost, in order to raise it up at the last day.

"If I take the wings of the morning", and fly as fast as the morning light, which soon reaches the furthest parts of the earth; or as the rays of the sun, which dart from east to west, at its rising, instantly; "and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea"; in the most remote islands of it, or in the uttermost parts of the western shore; "even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me": there should he experience the providential goodness and special favour of God to him; who leads, guides, and upholds his people at the ends of the earth, where some of them sometimes are, and where they have his presence (Isa. 45:22, 24:16), see a like enumeration of places in Amos 9:2, 3[11].

Another passage of scripture, proving the Omnipresence of God, is in Isaiah 66:1. "Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool". So immense is he that he sits upon the one, and treads on the other: "Where is the house that ye build unto me?" or where can a house be built for him? what place can be found for him he is not possessed of, and does not dwell in already? Stephen, the proto-martyr, produces this to prove, "that the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; that is, cannot be included in them, and limited to them, since he is everywhere, in heaven and in earth (Acts 7:47-50).

But nowhere is the Omnipresence of God more expressly declared than in Jeremiah 23:23, 24. "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not afar off?" yea, he is both; he not only observes persons and things in heaven, which may be thought at hand, and near him; but persons and things on earth, and those at the greatest distance; he is as near to, and as present with the one as the other; and he sees and knows all that is done by them, as if he was at their elbow; and therefore adds, "Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him, saith the Lord?"

As some might foolishly imagine, supposing him to be limited and confined to heaven above, and was not present to see what was done below; especially in the dark and distant places of the earth: "Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?" not only with inhabitants, and with all things, the effects of his power and goodness; but with his nature and essence, which exceeds all bounds of place and space. Hence the Jews call God by the name of "Makom", place; because he fills all places, and is contained in none; is not local and is infinite.

Nor is this to be disproved by other passages of Scripture, which may seem, at first sight, to discountenance or contradict it; not such as speak of mens' departing and fleeing from his presence, as Cain and Jonah are said to do (Gen. 4:16; John 1:3), for Cain only went either from the place where he and the Lord had been conversing; or from the public place of worship, at the east of the garden of Eden, where were the symbol of the divine presence, an altar, where he and his brother had sacrificed.

Jonah's fleeing, was withdrawing himself from the service of God, and declining to go on his errand; foolishly imagining, that, by going beyond sea, he should avoid being urged to his duty; but he soon found his mistake, and that God was everywhere, and could meet with him by sea and by land. Likewise, not such that represent God as descending from heaven; as at the building of Babel, at the cry of the sin of Sodom, and on mount Sinai (Gen. 11:5, 7, 18:21; Ex. 19:18, 20), for these only denote some more than ordinary manifestations of his presence, or exertion of his power; as at Babel, by confounding the language; at Sodom, by destroying that, and the other cities; at Sinai, by giving the law out of the midst of fire, attended with thunder and lightning.

Nor such as speak of the Lord not being with wicked men; particularly what Moses said to the disobedient Israelites, "The Lord is not among you; and he will not be with you" (Num. 14:42, 43) which he might very

truly say, since the ark of the covenant, the symbol of the divine presence, remained in the camps and went not with them (Num. 14:44), nor had they any reason to believe that God would be so with them, as to prosper and succeed them, when they acted contrary to his express command: nor is God ever in such sense with wicked men, as with good men; namely, by his gracious presence: but this hinders not, but that he is with them by his omnipresence and power, supporting them in their being.

Nor such passages which relate the departure of God from men; as from Samson and Saul (Judges 16:20; 1 Sam. 28:15), since this only respects the withdrawment of uncommon bodily strength from the one; and wisdom and prudence, courage and greatness of soul from the other; leaving him to the fears, distractions, and confusions of his mind; without any hope of success in war: nor such portions of Scripture which express the desertions and distance of God from his people, and their desires that he would return to them, and not cast them away from his presence (Ps. 10:1, 80:14, 51:11), since these only respect his gracious presence, the deprivation of that, and the return of it; the manifestations of his love and favour, and the withdrawment and renewal of them.

And whereas it is urged against the omnipresence of God, that he is said to be in heaven, and that to be his habitation, and that men pray unto him as their Father in heaven (Ps. 115:3; Isa. 63:15; Matthew 5:9). In what peculiar sense God may be said to be in heaven, has been observed already; nor is he ever said to be in heaven "only", but in many places to be on earth also, and elsewhere (see Deut. 4:39; Isa. 66:1); though he is not contained in any place, as not on the earth, so neither can the heaven of heavens contain him (1 King 8:27), he was before there was any space or place; his nature, and so this attribute of omnipresence, were the same then as now: and should it be asked, Where did he dwell then?

I answer, In himself, in his own immensity and eternity (see Isa. 57:15). The objection from the pollution of the divine Being, through sordid and filthy places, in which he must be if omnipresent, scarce deserves any regard; since bodies only touch them and are capable of being defiled by them; not spirits, even created ones, as angels, and the souls of men; as the angel in the filthy den of lions where Daniel was, was not; nor the souls of men that are in filthy bodies; much less God a pure, infinite, and uncreated Spirit, who can no more be affected by such means, than the sun is, by its rays striking on a dunghill. 2.

The "Eternity" of God belongs to his infinity; for as he is not bounded by space, so neither by time, and therefore eternal. He is often called "the everlasting God", and the "King eternal" (Gen. 21:33; Deut. 33:27; Isa. 40:28; Jer. 10:10; Rom. 16:26; 1 Tim. 1:17), yea, eternity itself (1 Sam. 15:29), and is said to inhabit it (Isa. 57:15). These words, "eternal, everlasting", and "for ever", are sometimes used in an improper sense, as of things which are of a long duration, but limited, and have both a beginning and an end; as the everlasting possession of the land of Canaan, granted in the everlasting covenant of circumcision, and yet both are now at an end (Gen. 17:7, 8) the rites and ceremonies of the law of Moses are said to be ordinances and statutes for ever; and yet they were designed to continue but for a time, and have been long since abolished (Num. 10:8, 15:15, 18:8,11,19, 23), the temple built by Solomon is said to be a settled place for God to abide in for ever; yea, he himself says, that he would put his name in it for ever; and it should be his rest for ever; and yet it has been demolished long ago (1 King 8:13, 9:3; Ps. 132:14), the thrones of David and Solomon are said to be established for ever, and yet, if taken in a literal sense, they are no more: indeed, if understood spiritually, as David's Son and Antitype, his throne will be for ever and ever (2 Sam. 7:12,16), the earth is said to abide, and not be removed for ever (Ps. 104:5; Eccl. 1:4), yet both that and the heavens shall perish, though not as to substance, yet as to quality, form, figure, and present use.

Sometimes this phrase "for ever", only respects the year of jubilee (Ex. 21:6), and, at most, but during life (1 Sam. 1:28). Some creatures and things are said to be everlasting, and even eternal, which have a beginning, though they have no end; and this is what the schools call "aeviternity", as distinct from eternity: thus angels, and the souls of men, being creatures of God, have a beginning; though, being immaterial and immortal, shall never die. The happiness of the saints is called eternal glory, "eternal weight of glory; eternal life; an eternal inheritance; an house eternal in the heavens" (1 Peter 5:10; Titus 1:2; 2 Cor. 4:17, 5:1; Heb. 9:15).

And the misery of the wicked is signified by suffering the vengeance of eternal fire, by everlasting fire, and everlasting punishment, (Jude 1:7; Matthew 25:41, 46), yet these have a beginning, though they will have no end; and so are improperly called eternal. Eternity, properly so called, is that which is without beginning and end[12], and is without succession, or does not proceed in a succession of moments one after another; and is opposed to time, which has a beginning, goes on in a succession, and has an end: it is the measure of a creature's duration, and began when creatures began to be, and not before, and is proper to them, and not eternity, which only belongs to God.

Thales being asked what God was, answered thus, what has neither beginning nor end[13], which is eternity. A Jewish writer[14] defines it, "in which there is no former nor latter; nor order, nor succession of times; it being without motion". And which Boetius[15] expresses in a few words, "Eternity is the interminable or unbounded and perfect possession of life whole together." And is thus described, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Ps. 90:2).

Eternity, in this sense, is peculiar to God; as he only hath immortality, so he only has eternity; which must be understood not of the Father, or first person only, but of the Son and Spirit also; who are, with the Father, the one God; and possess the same undivided nature; of which Eternity is an attribute. So the Son, though as to his human nature, was born in the fulness of time; yet, as to his divine nature, "his goings forth were from of old, from everlasting": and as Mediator, in his office capacity, he was "set up from everlasting, or ever the earth was" (Mic. 5:2; Prov. 8:23, 24).

The Spirit of God was concerned in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and so must be before them; and which is the only idea we have of eternity, that it is before time and creatures were (Gen. 1:1, 2; Job 26:13; Ps. 33:6), and, according to some, the Spirit is called, "the eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14). Eternity is true of God, essentially considered, and in the sense explained, is to be proved, and that he is without beginning, without end, and without succession. 2a.

First, That he is without beginning, or from everlasting: this is put by way of interrogation (Hab. 1:12), not as a matter of doubt, but of certainty, and is strongly affirmed (Ps. 93:2), and may be proved, 2a1. From his nature and being; as from his "necessary self-existence": the existence of God is not arbitrary, but necessary: if arbitrary, it must be from his own will, or from the will of another; not from his own will, which would suppose him in being already; and then he must be before he existed, and must be, and not be, at the same instant; which are such contradictions as cannot be endured: not from the will of another, for then that other would be both prior and superior to him, and so be God, and not he: it remains, therefore, that he necessarily existed; and if so, then he must be eternal; since there was none before him; nor can any reason be given why he should necessarily exist at such an instant, and not before.

His eternity may be argued from a state of "non-existence" he must have been in, if not eternal; and if so, then there was an instant in which he was not; and if there was an instant in which he was not, then there was an instant in which there was no God; and if so, there may be one again in which he may cease to be; for that which once was not, may again not be; and this will bring us into the depth of atheism; unless it could be supposed, which is quite irrational, that there was a God before him, and that there will be one after him; but this is strongly denied by himself; "Before me there was no God formed; neither shall there be after me" (Isa. 43:10).

The eternity of God may be inferred from his immutability, which has been already established: these two go together, and prove each other (Ps. 102:27), they are both to be observed in the great name of God, Jehovah, which signifies, he is, and was, and is to come, and takes in all time; but he is bounded by none, and is eternally the same; for if he is not eternal, he must have passed from non-existence into being; and what can be a greater change, than to come out of nothing into being?

Moreover, God is the most "perfect Being"; which he would not be, if not eternal; for not to be, or to have a beginning, is an imperfection; and it is an humbling consideration to man, a creature of time, that he is but "of yesterday" (Job 8:9). And if God was not eternal, let his beginning be when it may, in comparison of an eternity past, it would be but as yesterday; which can never be admitted of. Add to this, that God is the "first Cause" of all things, and therefore must be eternal: all wise and thoughtful men acknowledge a first Cause; and in their reasoning rise from one cause to another, until they arrive to a first Cause, and there stop, and which they truly call God; for otherwise there would be no subordination of causes: if there was not a first Cause, there would not be a second, nor a third, &c. but all would be first, and all eternal; and if God is the first Cause, then he is without a cause, and therefore must be eternal; hence he is so often called "the first and the last"; a phrase expressive of his eternity (Isa. 41:4, 44:6, 48:12).

He is the "Creator" of all things, the heavens, earth, and sea, and all that in them are; and therefore must be before all things, as every artificer is before his work made by him; and if before all creatures, then before time, which begins with them, and therefore from eternity, since we can conceive of nothing before time but eternity. 2a2. The Eternity of God may be proved from his "attributes", several of which are said to be eternal, or from everlasting: the "power" of God is expressly called his "eternal power"; and is proved to be so by the works of creation, to which it must be prior (Rom. 1:20).

The knowledge God has of all things is from eternity; though the things known are in time, his knowledge of them is before time; "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world", ap' aiwnov, from eternity (Acts 15:18). The "mercy" of God is eternal, it is said to be "from everlasting to everlasting" (Ps. 103:17). And so the "love" of God, which is no other than himself, for "God is love" (1 John 4:16), his love to his Son, "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person", was from everlasting; before the earth, the hills, and mountains were formed, then was he by him, "as one brought up with him", his darling and delight (Prov. 8:30), our Lord himself says, his Father loved him before the foundation of the world (John 17:24), and as early did he love his elect in him; for he loved them as he loved him (John 17:23), even with an everlasting love, a love which is both from everlasting and to everlasting (Jer. 31:3). 2a3.

That God is Eternal, may be argued from his purposes, counsels, and decrees; which are said to be "of old", that is, from everlasting (Isa. 25:1), this is true of them in general; for no new purposes and resolutions rise up, or are framed by him in his mind; for then there would be something in him which was not before; which would imply mutability. Besides, they are expressly said to be "eternal" (Eph. 3:11), and

if they are eternal, then God, in whom they are, and by whom they are formed, must be eternal also.

In particular, the purpose of God, according to election, or his choice of men to everlasting life, is eternal; not only was before men had done any good or evil (Rom. 9:11), but they were chosen by him "from the beginning" (2 Thess. 2:13), not from the beginning of the gospel coming to them, nor of their faith and conversion by it; but from the beginning of time, and before time, even "before the foundation of the world", as is in so many words expressed (Eph. 1:4), wherefore God, that chose them to salvation, must be eternal.

Christ is eminently called the elect of God, being as Man and Mediator, chosen out from among the people (Isa. 42:1; Ps 89:19), and the appointment of him, to be the Redeemer and Saviour of men, or the preordination of him to be the Lamb slain for the redemption of his people, was before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20), and therefore God, that foreordained him thereunto, must be as early. 2a4. The Eternity of God may be concluded from the covenant of grace, styled an "everlasting covenant" (2 Sam. 23:5), not only because it will endure immoveable and unalterable for ever, but because it was from everlasting; for though it is sometimes called a new covenant, yet not because newly made, or only newly manifested; but because it is always new, and never waxes old.

Christ, the Mediator of it, and with whom it was made, was set up from everlasting as such; and his goings forth in it, representing his people, and acting for them, were from of old, from everlasting (Prov. 8:22, 23; Mic. 5:2), and he had a glory with God in it before the world began (John 17:5), there were blessings of goodness laid up in it, and with which Christ, the Mediator of it, was anticipated; yea, the people of God were blessed with these spiritual blessings in Christ, as "they were chosen in him before the foundation of the world; and had grace given them in him before the world began" (Eph. 1:3, 4; 2 Tim. 1:9).

Promises also were made as early to Christ, and to them in him, into whose hands they were put, and in whom they are, yea and amen; particularly, eternal life was promised by God, that cannot lie, before the world was (Titus 1:2). Now if there was a covenant made by God from everlasting, and Christ was set up by him so early, as the Mediator of it; and there were blessings of grace, and promises of grace, made by him before time was, then he must be from everlasting. 2a5. It may be proved from the works of God in time: all creatures are the works of his hands; all beings have their being from him; and time beginning with them, he that made them must be before all time, and therefore eternal: this is the argument used to prove the eternity of Christ, the Word, that he was in the beginning, that is, from eternity with God; "because all things were made by him, and that he is the firstborn of every creature, and before all things, because all things are created by him, and by him do all things consist" (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17), and the same proves the eternity of God; for all things are from him, and so have a beginning; but he from whom they are, is from none, has no cause of his being, and therefore must be eternal.

So creation is made a proof of his eternal power and Godhead (Rom. 1:20), creation proves his eternity, and his eternity proves his deity. Hence Thales said[16], "The most ancient of Beings is God." 2b. Secondly, That God is to everlasting, and without end, may be proved from his "spirituality" and "simplicity", already established; what is mixed and compounded, and consists of parts, may be resolved into them again, and so be dissolved, as bodies may; but spirits, such as angels and the souls of men, being immaterial, are immortal, and continue for ever; and God being a Spirit, an infinite and uncreated one, simple, and uncompounded of parts, must much more be so; and therefore is called, "The incorruptible God" (Rom. 1:23).

It may be argued from his "independency", he is self-existent; the first Cause, and without any cause; he is the only Potentate, "God over all, blessed for ever", and dependant on none; there is none above him, nor superior to him, that can put an end, to his being; nor can it be thought, he being in such a state of infinite happiness, would ever put an end to it himself. His eternity is to be proved from his "immutability"; for those, as before observed, infer one another. God is immutable, and therefore without end; for what can be a greater change than for a being not to be?

Hence God is opposed to creatures, to mortal men, whose flesh is as grass, the most changeable and perishing of anything, and even to the heaven and the earth, they being such; but he is unchangeably the same; and so there is no end of his years (1 Peter 1:24, 25; Ps. 102:26, 27). This may be inferred from his "dominion" and government; he is, and sits King for ever; he is an everlasting King, his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation, and will never end (Jer. 10:10; Ps. 10:16, 29:10; Dan. 4:3), and therefore he himself must be to everlasting.

Moreover, he is not only called the living God (Jer. 10:10), but is often said to "live for ever and ever" (Rev. 4:9,10, 10:6). Hence his purposes and decrees are never frustrated, because he ever lives to bring them into execution: men take up resolutions, and form schemes, which, by reason of death, are never executed; their purposes are broken, and their thoughts perish; but "the counsel of the Lord stands for ever; and the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11), and therefore he himself must endure for ever: his promises are all fulfilled; not only because he is able and faithful to perform, but because he continues for ever to make them good; and therefore is said to "keep truth for ever" (Ps. 146:6).

His covenant is firm and sure; more immoveable than rocks and mountains; it stands fast, with Christ, for ever, and God commands it for ever; because he ever lives to keep it. His love is to everlasting, as well as from it; he rests in it; nothing can separate from it; and "with everlasting kindness he gathers his people, and has mercy on them"; and therefore must be for ever: his grace, mercy, and goodness, continually endure, and therefore he himself must; and "he will be the portion of his people for ever"; their everlasting ALL in ALL; and they shall reign and dwell with him for evermore.

All which proves him to be without end. 2c. Thirdly, The Eternity of God, or his being from everlasting to everlasting, is without succession, or any distinctions of time succeeding one another, as moments, minutes, hours, days, months, and years: the reasons are, because he existed before such were in being; "Before the day was, I am he" (Isa. 43:13), before there was a day, before the first day of the creation, before there were any days, consisting of so many hours, and these of so many minutes; and if his eternity past, may it be so called, was without successive duration, or without succeeding moments, and other distinctions of time, why not his duration through time, and to all eternity, in the same manner?

Should it be said, that days and years are ascribed to God; it is true, they are; but it is in accommodation and condescension to our weak minds, which are not capable of conceiving of duration but as successive: and besides, those days and years ascribed to God are expressly said not to be as ours (Job 10:5). He is, indeed, called, "The Ancient of Days" (Dan. 7:13), not ancient "in" days, or "through" them, as aged persons are said to be in years, and well stricken in them; not so God: the meaning is, that he is more ancient than days; he was before all days, and his duration is not to be measured by them.

And it may be observed, that the differences and distinctions of time are together ascribed to God, and not as succeeding one another; he is "the same yesterday, today, and for ever"; these are all at once, and together with him; he is he "which is, and was, and is to come" (Heb. 13:8; Rev. 1:4), these meet together

in his name, Jehovah[17]; and so in his nature; he co-exists, with all the points of time, in time; but is unmoved and unaffected with any, as a rock in the rolling waves of the sea, or a tower in a torrent of gliding water; or as the rod or pin of a sundial, which has all the hours of the day surrounding it, and the sun, by it casts a shade upon them, points at and distinguishes them, but the stile stands firm and unmoved, and not affected thereby: hence it is that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years; and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8).

But if his duration was successive, or proceeded by succeeding moments, days, and years; one day would be but one day with him, and not a thousand; and a thousand days would answer to a thousand days, and not be as one only. Besides, if his duration was measured by a succession of moments, &c. then he would not be "immense, immutable", and "perfect", as he is: not "immense", or unmeasurable, if to be measured by minutes, hours, days, months, and years; whereas, as he is not to be measured by space, so not by time: nor "immutable"; since he would be one minute what he was not before, even older, which cannot be said of God; for as a Jewish writer[18] well observes, it cannot be said of him, that he is older now than he was in the days of David, or when the world was created; for he is always, both before the world was made, and after it will cease to be; times make no change in him.

Nor "perfect"; for if his duration was successive, there would be every moment something past and gone, lost and irrecoverable; and something to come not yet arrived to and obtained; and in other respects he must be imperfect: the "knowledge" of God proves him without successive duration. God knows all things, past, present, and to come, that is, which are so to us; not that they are so to him; these he knows at once, and all together, not one thing after another, as they successively come into being; all things are open and manifest to him at once and together, not only what are past and present, but he calls things that are not yet, as though they were; he sees and knows all in one view, in his all-comprehending mind: and as his knowledge is not successive, so not his duration.

Moreover, in successive duration, there is an order of former and latter; there must be a beginning from whence every flux of time, every distinction proceeds; every moment and minute has a beginning, from whence it is reckoned, so every hour, day, month, and year: but as it is said of Christ, with respect to his divine nature, so it is true of God, essentially considered, that he has "neither beginning of days, nor end of life" (Heb. 7:3). In short, God is Eternity itself, and inhabits eternity; so he did before time, and without succession; so he does throughout time; and so he will to all eternity.

The very heathens[19] themselves had a notion of their supreme God, as eternal: and this is the definition Thales gave of God; for being asked, What is God? answered, What has neither beginning nor end; and therefore calls him, the most Ancient[20]. Sallustius[21] denied that the nature of God was made, because it always was. ENDNOTES:

[1] to ton apanta apeiron yronon kai thn apeirian periecon telov aiwn estin, Aristot. de Coelo. l. 1. c. 9.

[2] apeiron ara to en, ei mh te archn mh te teleuthn ecei, Plato in Parmenide, p. 1117. "nihil cum habeat extremum, infinitum sit necesse est", Cicero de Divinat. l. 2. c. 50.

[3] Ambo apud Lactant. de fals. relig. l. 1. c. 5.

[4] De Diis, c. 2. "Jovis omnia plena", Virgil. Bucolic. eclog. 3.

[5] T. Bab. Bava Bathra, fol. 25. 1.

[6] In rad. Mwq.

[7] Vid. Baal Aruch in voce Mwqam.

[8] Pirke Eliezer, c. 35.

[9] Praefat. ad Comment. in lib. Esther.

[10] Leg. Allegor. l. 1. p. 48.

[11] "Quo fugis Encelade, quascumque accesseris oras--sub Jove semper eris"-----Virgil.

[12] ta d'aidia, agenhta kai afyarta, Aristot. Ethic. l. 6. c. 3.

[13] ti to yeion, to mhthe archn econ, mhthe teleuthn, Thales in Laert. l. 1. Vita Thalet.

[14] R. Joseph Albo in Sepher Ikkarim, l. 2. c. 18.

[15] Consolat. Philosoph. l. 5. p. 137.

[16] presbutaton twn ontwn, yeov, agenhton gar, apud Laert. ut supra.

[17] Plato observes, that to a temporal being we say of it, "it is, and was, and will be; "but to the eternal Being, "th sto estin monon, to him only it is, "in Timaeo, p. 1051.

[18] Joseph Albo in Sepher Ikkarim, fol. 66. l.

[19] "O pater, O hominum, ivumque aeterna potestas", Virgil. Aeneid, l. 10. v. 17. "Alii Dii aliquando Dii non fuerunt, sed Jupiter ab aeterno fuit Deus", Pompon. Sabin. in ibid. dihkwn ex aiwnov atermonov eiv eteron aiwna, Aristot. de Mundo, c. 7.

[20] Laert. Vita Thalet. l. 1. p. 23, 24. Plutarch, Sept. Sap. Conviv. vol. 2. p. 153.

[21] De Diis, c. 2.

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