

Time and Space

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby explores the nature of time and space, highlighting the limitations of human understanding and the eternal and divine existence of God.

Scripture: Psalm 90:2, Psalm 139:7-10, Ecclesiastes 3:11, Isaiah 57:15, John 1:1, Romans 11:33, Colossians 1:17, Hebrews 11:3, 2 Peter 3:8, Revelation 21:1

Topics: "Eternity", "God's Nature"

Description

John Nelson Darby explores the concepts of time and space, emphasizing that our understanding of time is limited to the present moment, 'now,' and that all events are relative to God's eternal existence. He argues that while we can measure time through events, God's nature is unchanging and eternal, existing beyond our finite comprehension. Darby also discusses the limitations of our understanding of space, asserting that we can only conceive of it in relation to bounded areas, and that true infinity cannot be fully grasped. He concludes that our knowledge of God transcends time and space, as He exists beyond our finite perceptions. The sermon highlights the importance of recognizing God's eternal nature and our relationship with Him beyond temporal constraints.

Transcript

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TIME AND SPACE

I do not think we have any knowledge of time as time in itself. We measure from one event to another, but cannot without facts with intervals. Space is not exactly the same, because we discern it by a sense which sees an interval at one time. All I know of time is, "I am now." When I compare this with events, I am conscious that it is not "now:" there is time. As events only proceed from God, "I am" to Him never changes. He is in Himself always. Events come from His will, and are relative, not absolute. When I speak of an event before what happened to-day, I look at it as having happened in a "now " which is not present. This I extend by invented measures. "Infinite," I admit, we cannot know, though we know it is not "finite infinite." But without existence I do not understand time or eternity - but God is.

When I begin to count time, I count necessarily from "now," for I am now. I then speak of time not finishing in thought. Before and after make no difference whatever, save by events, and if I look after, I must imagine events or I cannot take a step beyond now. The starting-point in both is "now;" and I go on both ways from that and cannot finish.

Hence when Christ's eternal nature is spoken of it is said $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\ \acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\eta\ \nu\upsilon\ \grave{\alpha}\ \lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$. "In the beginning was the Word," all events and $\gamma\epsilon\nu\acute{o}\mu\epsilon\nu\alpha$ by which time had an existence being supposed. His is existence per se eternal and divine. When historical creation is spoken of, it is supposed God created. All things made came into being, there must have been a Creator. What we wanted to know was Creation. The highest, holiest, way of speaking of God was thus saying nothing about Him, but that He acted. As to Christ, it was of the utmost importance to know that He was before, and eternal.

But all the talk about "bounded" or "unbounded" space is a mistake. I know very well indeed what "bounded space" is: a field is a bounded space, because I know what a bound is, being bounded. That I can negate; but I never conceive any negative proposition. I can deny a bound when a bound is supposed, but it is no idea of the opposite at all. I cannot conceive all space as a known whole. My only conception of it is that it is not within the limits of my finite conception. But this is what "infinite " means. It is no positive idea, for then it is finite - has bounds.

If it be said that "we cannot conceive God," I answer, Certainly not by an idea. If I did, it must be adequate, and He would not be God. But I do know He is not within the range and capacity of my idea. And this is something very material in our knowledge. When it is said, "He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love," it is another thing. It is not an idea but a moral nature morally apprehended; and space, and time, and measures have no place in it at all. It is another order of things. Affections, even human, are not ideas.

Past time without a commencement is not possible thought; because when I say "past," I have already commenced with the "now." I do not see why infinite division cannot be thought-of, because the parts are bounded. I remember a teacher of Mathematics sought to show by a tangent an indivisible angle; but he had only to make a circle with a longer radius, and division was made.

The only idea I have of time is bounded by events which are not "now." But as far as without, then I seek to know it. I have no idea of time but the principle of eternity, only contradicted by experience. "I am" - that is not time as having duration, but in a point, and with a notion excluding bounded time, and so leading up to God Who is necessarily "I AM," the rearest approach to conceiving eternity; which in itself I cannot conceive. But I conceive God existing, and never doing anything but existing.

My only idea of space, save bounded or enclosed space, is practically infinitude, not conceived as so much (for then it is finite), but as simply endless, i.e. negatively. I do not say "existing time." Nothing properly exists in time which exists consciously; that is, consciousness is not cognisant of time. But I exist in space. Hence I do not begin it here, as I do time by "now." And I cannot conceive where a body cannot be unless where one is; that is, I only conceive space as space without measurement, but room where.

"Nothing" cannot become, because there is nothing to become; but this does not say that God could not speak, and cause to be made, create.

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