



## FROM THE GARDEN TO THE CROSS

A 20-WEEK STUDY OF MANKIND, SIN, AND SALVATION

### WEEK 1—HANDOUT 1-3: GOD, TIME AND CREATION

#### 1. Eternity

By this we mean that God's nature (a) is without beginning or end; (b) is free from all succession of time; and (c) contains in itself the cause of time.

Deut. 32:40—"For I lift up my hand to heaven, And say, As I live forever..."; Ps. 90:2—"Before the mountains.... from everlasting.... thou art God"; 102:27—"thy years shall have no end"; Is. 41:4—"I Jehovah, the first, and with the last"; 1 Cor. 2:7—πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων—"before the worlds" or "ages" = πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου—"before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). 1 Tim. 1:17—Βασιλεῖ τῶν αἰώνων—"King of the ages" (so also Rev. 15:8). 1 Tim. 6:16—"who only hath immortality." Rev. 1:8—"the Alpha and the Omega." Dörner: "We must not make Kronos (time) and Uranos (space) earlier divinities before God." They are among the "all things" that were "made by him" (John 1:3). Yet time and space are not *substances*; neither are they *attributes* (qualities of substance); they are rather *relations* of finite existence. (Porter, *Human Intellect*, 568, prefers to call time and space "*correlates* to beings and events.") With finite existence they come into being; they are not mere regulative conceptions of our minds; they exist objectively, whether we perceive them or not. Ladd: "Time is the mental presupposition of the duration of events and of objects. Time is not an entity, or it would be necessary to suppose some other time in which it endures. We think of space and time as unconditional, because they furnish the conditions of our knowledge. The age of a son is conditioned on the age of his father. The conditions themselves cannot be conditioned. Space and time are mental forms, but not only that. There is an extramental something in the case of space and time, as in the case of sound."

Ex. 3:14—"I am"—involves eternity. Ps. 102:12–14—"But thou, O Jehovah, wilt abide forever.... Thou wilt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for it is time to have pity upon her.... For thy servants.... have pity upon her dust" = because God is eternal, he will have compassion upon Zion: he will do this, for even we, her children, love her very dust. Jude 25—"glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all time, and now, and for evermore." Pfleiderer, *Philos. Religion*, 1:165—"God is 'King of the sons' (1 Tim 1:17), because he distinguishes, in his thinking, his eternal inner essence from his changeable working in the world. He is not merged in the process." Edwards the younger describes timelessness as "the immediate and invariable possession of the whole unlimited life together and at once." Tyler, *Greek Poets*, 148—"The heathen gods had only existence without end. The Greeks seem never to have conceived of existence without beginning." On precognition as connected with the so-called future already existing, and on apparent time progression as a subjective human sensation and not inherent in the universe as it exists in an infinite Mind, see Myers, *Human Personality*, 2:262 *sq.* Tennyson, *Life*, 1:322—"For was and is and will be are but is: And all creation is one act at once, The birth of light; but we that are not all, As parts, can see but parts, now this, now that, And live perforce from thought to thought, and make The act a phantom of succession: there Our weakness somehow shapes the shadow, Time."

Augustine: "Mundus non in tempore, sed cum tempore, factus est." There is no meaning to the question: Why did creation take place when it did rather than earlier? or the question: What was God doing before creation? These questions presuppose an independent time in which God created—a time before time. On the other hand, creation did not take place at any time, but God gave both the world and time their existence. Royce, *World and Individual*, 2:111–115—"Time is the form of the will, as space is the form of the intellect (*cf.* 124, 133). Time runs only in one direction (unlike space), toward fulfilment of striving or expectation. In pursuing its goals, the self lives in time. Every *now* is also a succession as is illustrated in any melody. To God the universe is 'totum simul', as to us any succession is one whole. 233—Death is a change in the time-span—the minimum of time in which a succession can appear as a completed whole. To God "a thousand years" are "as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). 419—God, in his totality as the Absolute Being, is conscious not, *in* time, but of time, and of all that infinite time contains. In time there follow, in their sequence, the chords of his endless symphony. For him is this whole symphony of life at once.... You unite present, past and future in a single consciousness whenever you hear any three successive words, for one is past, another is present, at the same time that a third is future. So God unites in timeless perception the whole succession of finite events.... The single notes are not lost in the melody. You are in God, but you are not lost in God." Mozart, quoted in Wm.

James, *Principles of Psychology*, 1:255—“All the inventing and making goes on in me as in a beautiful strong dream. But the best of all is *the hearing of it all at once.*”

Eternity is infinity in its relation to time. It implies that God’s nature is not subject to the law of time. God is not in time. It is more correct to say that time is in God. Although there is logical succession in God’s thoughts, there is no chronological succession.

Time is duration measured by successions. Duration without succession would still be duration, though it would be immeasurable. Reid, *Intellectual Powers*, essay 3, chap. 5—“We may measure duration by the succession of thoughts in the mind, as we measure length by inches or feet, but the notion or idea of duration must be antecedent to the mensuration of it, as the notion of length is antecedent to its being measured.” God is not under the law of time. Solly, *The Will*, 254—“God looks through time as we look through space.” Murphy, *Scientific Bases*, 90—“Eternity is not, as men believe, Before and after us, an endless line. No, ’t is a circle, infinitely great—All the circumference with creations thronged: God at the centre dwells, beholding all. And as we move in this eternal round, The finite portion which alone we see Behind us, is the past; what lies before We call the future. But to him who dwells Far at the centre, equally remote From every point of the circumference, Both are alike, the future and the past.” Vaughan (1655): “I saw Eternity the other night, Like a great ring of pure and endless light, And calm as it was bright; and round beneath it Time in hours, days, years, Driven by the spheres, Like a vast shadow moved, in which the world And all her train were hurled.”

We cannot have derived from experience our idea of eternal duration in the past, for experience gives us only duration that has had beginning. The idea of duration as without beginning must therefore be given us by intuition. Case, *Physical Realism*, 379, 380—“Time is the continuance, or continual duration, of the universe.” Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 39—Consider time as a stream—under a spatial form: “If you take time as a relation between units without duration, then the whole time has no duration, and is not time at all. But if you give duration to the whole time, then at once the units themselves are found to possess it, and they cease to be units.” The *now* is not time, unless it turns past into future, and this is a process. The now then consists of nows, and these nows are undiscoverable. The unit is nothing but its own relation to something beyond, something not discoverable. Time therefore is not real, but is appearance.

John Caird, *Fund. Ideas*, 1:185—“That which grasps and correlates objects in space cannot itself be one of the things of space: that which apprehends and connects events as succeeding each other in time must itself stand above the succession or stream of events. In being able to measure them, it cannot be flowing with them. There could not be for self-consciousness any such thing as time, if it were not, in one aspect of it, above time, if it did

not belong to an order which is or has in it an element which is eternal.... As taken up into thought, succession is not successive.” A. H. Strong, Historical Discourse, May 9, 1900—“God is above space and time, and we are in God. We mark the passage of time, and we write our histories. But we can do this, only because in our highest being we do not belong to space and time, but have in us a bit of eternity. John Caird tells us that we could not perceive the flowing of the stream if we were ourselves a part of the current; only as we have our feet planted on solid rock, can we observe that the water rushes by. We belong to God; we are akin to God; and while the world passes away and the lust thereof, he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” J. Estlin Carpenter and P. H. Wicksteed, Studies in Theology, 10—“Dante speaks of God as him in whom ‘every *where* and every *when* are focused in a point’, that is, to whom every season is *now* and every place is *here*.”

Amiel’s Journal: “Time is the supreme illusion. It is the inner prism by which we decompose being and life, the mode by which we perceive successively what is simultaneous in idea.... Time is the successive dispersion of being, just as speech is the successive analysis of an intuition, or of an act of the will. In itself it is relative and negative, and it disappears within the absolute Being.... Time and space are fragments of the Infinite for the use of finite creatures. God permits them that he may not be alone. They are the mode under which creatures are possible and conceivable.... If the universe subsists, it is because the eternal Mind loves to perceive its own content, in all its wealth and expression, especially in its stages of preparation.... The radiations of our mind are imperfect reflections from the great show of fireworks set in motion by Brahma, and great art is great only because of its conformities with the divine order—with that which is.”

Yet we are far from saying that time, now that it exists, has no objective reality to God. To him, past, present, and future are “one eternal now,” not in the sense that there is no distinction between them, but only in the sense that he sees past and future as vividly as he sees the present. With creation time began, and since the successions of history are veritable successions, he who sees according to truth must recognize them.

Thomas Carlyle calls God “the Eternal Now.” Mason, Faith of the Gospel, 30—“God is not contemptuous of time.... One day is with the Lord as a thousand years. He values the infinitesimal in time, even as he does in space. Hence the patience, the long-suffering, the expectation, of God.” We are reminded of the inscription on the sun-dial, in which it is said of the hours: “Pereunt et imputantur”—“They pass by, and they are charged to our account.” A certain preacher remarked on the wisdom of God which has so arranged that the moments of time come successively and not simultaneously, and thus prevent infinite confusion! Shedd, Dogm. Theol., 1:344, illustrates God’s eternity by the two ways in which a person may see a procession: first from a doorway in the street through which the

procession is passing; and secondly, from the top of a steeple which commands a view of the whole procession at the same instant.

S. E. Meze, quoted in Royce, *Conception of God*, 40—“As if all of us were cylinders, with their ends removed, moving through the waters of some placid lake. To the cylinders the waters seem to move. What has passed is a memory, what is to come is doubtful. But the lake knows that all the water is equally real, and that it is quiet, immovable, unruffled. Speaking technically, time is no reality. Things *seem* past and future, and, in a sense, non-existent to us, but, in fact, they are just as genuinely real as the present is.” Yet even here there is an order. You cannot play a symphony backward and have music. This qualification at least must be put upon the words of Berkeley; “A succession of ideas I take to *constitute* time, and not to be only the sensible thereof, as Mr. Locks and others think.”

Finney, quoted in *Bib. Sac.*, Oct. 1877:722—“Eternity to us means all past, present, and future duration. But to God it means only now. Duration and space, as they respect his existence, mean infinitely different things from what they do when they respect our existence. God’s existence and his acts, as they respect finite existence, have relation to time and space. But as they respect his own existence, everything is *here* and *now*. With respect to all finite existences, God can say: I was, I am, I shall be, I will do; but with respect to his own existence, all that he can say is: I am, I do.”

Edwards the younger, *Works*, 1:386, 387—“There is no succession in the divine mind; therefore no new operations take place. All the divine acts are from eternity, nor is there any time with God. The *effects* of these divine acts do indeed all take place in time and in a succession. If it should be said that on this supposition the effects take place not till long after the acts by which they are produced, I answer that they do so in our view, but not in the view of God. With him there is no time; no before or after with respect to time: nor has time any existence in the divine mind, or in the nature of things independently of the minds and perceptions of creatures; but it depends on the succession of those perceptions.” We must qualify this statement of the younger Edwards by the following from Julius Müller: “If God’s working can have no relation to time, then all bonds of union between God and the world are snapped asunder.”

It is an interesting question whether the human spirit is capable of timeless existence, and whether the conception of time is purely physical. In dreams we seem to lose sight of succession; in extreme pain an age is compressed into a minute. Does this throw light upon the nature of prophecy? Is the soul of the prophet rapt into God’s timeless existence and vision? It is doubtful whether Rev. 10:6—“there shall be time no longer” can be relied upon to prove the affirmative; for the Rev. Vers. marg. and the American Revisers translate “there shall be delay no longer.” Julius Müller, *Doct. Sin*, 2:147—“All self-consciousness is

a victory over time.” So with memory; see Dorner, *Glaubenslehre*, 1:471. On “the death-vision of one’s whole existence,” see Frances Kemble Butler’s experience in *Sbedd, Dogm. Theol.*, 1:351—“Here there is succession and series, only so exceedingly rapid as to seem simultaneous.” This rapidity however is so great as to show that each man can at the last be Judged in an instant. On space and time as unlimited, see Porter, *Hum. Intellect*, 564–566. On the conception of eternity, see Mansel, *Lectures, Essays and Reviews*, 111–126, and *Modern Spiritualism*, 255–292; *New Englander*, April, 1875: art. on the Metaphysical Idea of Eternity. For practical lessons from the Eternity of God, see Park, *Discourses*, 137–154; Westcott, *Some Lessons of the Rev. Vers.*, (Pott, N. Y., 1897), 187—with comments on αἰῶνες in Eph. 3:21, Heb. 11:3, Rev. 4:10, 11—“the universe under the aspect of time.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Augustus Hopkins Strong, [\*Systematic Theology\*](#) (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 275–278.