

ATTRIBUTE OF ETERNALITY Exodus 3:14; Deut. 33:27

"And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you."

"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them."

The God of the Bible is not known to this generation. The God of the Bible is not preached to this generation. To most today the God of the Bible is as Paul stated on Mars hill, "the unknown God." Therefore a study of the attributes of God will help enable us to know the God of the Bible and His dealings with mankind.

There are five essential attributes of God. These are the attributes that reveal God as God, and that none else can claim. They are woven throughout the entirety of Scripture as God reveals Himself to us. These five attributes are:

- (1) Eternality---perpetual or without end.
- (2) Immutability---unchangeable.
- (3) Omnipotent---all power or sovereign.
- (4) Omniscient---all knowing.
- (5) Omnipresent---everywhere present, God is a Spirit (John 4:24)

What is an attribute?

An attribute is something **God is**, it is not a characteristic, a trait, or a quality, but what **He is**. Man is defined by qualities, traits, and characteristics, but not God. When the Scripture says, "God is love," God is revealing to us what He is. He further says, "And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exodus 34:6). Here we learn that God is merciful, i.e. God is mercy; God is gracious; God is longsuffering; God is good; and God is truth. These are not some trait or quality in God, **but what God is**.

We could not know God unless God had revealed Himself to us in His Word. The Word of God is God's revelation of Himself to man. No other "god" has revealed himself to man for no other god is alive. "But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation" (Jeremiah 10:10).

Mankind in seeking to find out God has looked in all the wrong places. Then he comes to the conclusion that there is no God, or the "god" he discovers is like unto himself. He does not look for God by faith. When God is brought down to man's level He is really no God at all. Job asked a question, "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" (Job 11:7). The same thought is seen in this verse, "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding" (Isaiah 40:28). In other words no man can search out God's understanding, i.e. so as to defeat His intentions, or none can say, "thus far God's wisdom can go, and no further." Why not? "Forever O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89). "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isaiah 46:9,10).

Though we cannot comprehend eternity, yet we may comprehend that there is

one. Just as we cannot comprehend the essence of God, we can comprehend that He is. Before the beginning of time, there could be nothing but eternity, nothing except what was uncreated, nothing except what was without beginning. If God had given beginning to Himself, then He was once nothing, and if nothing, how could He be the cause of Himself? If we would look back, we can reach no further than the beginning of the creation, and account for the years from the first foundation of the world, but after that we must lose ourselves in the abyss of eternity, we have no cue to guide our thoughts, and we can see no bounds in thy eternity.

The foundation of our comfort is God's eternality. If He had a beginning, He might have an end, and so all our happiness, hope, and being would expire with Him. What hope could we have if we knew God did not live longer than ourselves?

God's attribute of eternality is beautifully woven throughout the Scriptures. We will consider some of the passages which reveal this attribute to us.

A. Genesis 1:1; John 1:1.

The first four words of the Bible say, "In the beginning God." He that was "in the beginning," never began, therefore He ever was. God was in being before the world; the cause must be before the effect, and that which gives being, must be before that which receives being. The founder before the foundation. If God did not have being from eternity, there could not now be any being in time. That Word which gives being, must be before that which receives being.

In John's Gospel we read, "In the beginning was the Word." The Word was not only in existence before His incarnation, but before all time. God is without beginning or ending, therefore there is no change. Christ could say to the unbelieving Jews, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58). It is the reality of His being, and only He is by, from, and of Himself. All other beings once were not. Their being was derived from God.

Creation began, it was not from eternity, and creation begins action and time. Time marked the beginning of created existence, and because God never began to exist, time can have no application to God. Began is a time word and has no personal meaning to the High and Lofty One who inhabiteth eternity (Isaiah 57:15).

Because God is eternal, He has no past or future. We say "in eternity past," or in eternity future," but in reality this is not true because **eternity is**, it is not past or future. That God appears at times beginning is not to difficult to comprehend, but that God appears at the beginning and the end of time **simultaneously** is not so easy to grasp, yet it is true. Time is known to us by a succession of events. It is the way we account for consecutive changes in the universe. Changes take place not all at once but in succession, one after the other, and it is the relation of "after" to "before" that gives us our idea of time. We wait for the sun to move from east to west or for the hour hand to move around the face of the clock, but God is not compelled so to wait. For Him everything that will happen has already happened.

Nothing occurs to His thought for all things stand present to Him. God has already lived our tomorrows as He has already lived our yesterdays. "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night" (Psalm 90:4). God dwells where later is one with earlier, the end is one with the beginning, and where Alpha and Omega are the same. With God now and then are the same. God is absolute and eternal which is beyond the present, the past, and the future. Without beginning or end denote the perfection of the being of God in regard to its essence.

When we see time words in Scripture they refer to man's time, not God's. "I am

the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8). The four living creatures are identifying God with the flow of creature-life with its familiar three tenses, and this right and good, for God has sovereignly willed so to identify Himself. But since God is uncreated, He is not Himself affected by that succession of consecutive changes we call time. God dwells in eternity but time dwells in God.

B. The words eternal and everlasting.

Eternal is defined as without beginning or end of existence, endless, immortal, perpetual, ceaseless, continual without intermission, existing at all times without change, and infinite immutable duration. One has also defined eternal as "from the vanishing point to the vanishing point." A. W. Tozer states, "The mind looks backward in time until the dim past vanishes, then turns and looks into the future till thought and imagination collapse from exhaustion; and God is at both points, unaffected by either."

Everlasting is defined as permanence, perpetual, endless, immortal, and existing or continuing without end. There is virtually no difference in the meaning of these words.

The first mention of everlasting is found after Abraham had made a covenant with Abimelech. "And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God" (Genesis 21:33).

Moses, knowing that he was to go to the people of Israel to be their deliverer, asks God what he should reply to their question, "What is his name?" "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM; . . . I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exodus 3:13,14). This name signifies the divine eternity, as well as immutability, and was given for the comfort of the oppressed Israelites in Egypt. This name is as durable as the God whose name it is, and it hath not, nor ever shall, lose any of its meaning. God is still "I AM," for it is not a temporary name, but a name forever, His memorial to all generations (Exodus 3:15). "I AM" in present tense shows that His essence knows no past or future. "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26). He who is "I AM" could never be made to exist.

When Moses is giving the blessing to the twelve tribes of Israel he states, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: . . ." (Deut. 33:27). The eternal God, boundless eternity. He is before all worlds, and will be when all time and days shall be no more. "Art not thou from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? . . ." (Habakkuk 1:12).

"LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God" (Psalm 90:1,2). Because God lives in an everlasting now, He has no past and no future. "Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last: I AM he" (Isaiah 41:4).

Daniel gives the title "the Ancient of days." "I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire . . . I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him" (Daniel 7:9,11). Whatsoever number of millions and millions of years we can imagine before the creation of the world, yet God was infinitely before those, He is therefore called the "Ancient of Days," as being before all days and time, and eminently containing in Himself all times and ages. He is not ancient in the way we think of the usage of the word, because that suggests decay, and it is not said to say He can be young either, because that suggest beginning. Though years are ascribed to God it is

the same as using bodily expressions to help our conception of His glorious being, nature, and operations.

There are many more references which shew us the eternity of God and they can be looked up in your concordance.

C. Practical remarks of this attribute.

There is always the need for practical application of the truth. Consider these applications of this truth.

No tenet of the Christian creed can retain its significance without eternity. Eternity is essential and necessary to give meaning to any Christian doctrine. Without this doctrine what meaning can be attached to salvation, justification, sanctification, reconciliation, redemption, etc. Could our sins be perfectly expiated had Christ not an eternal divinity to answer for the offences committed against an eternal God? If not there is really no meaning to them for man simply lives his time on earth and dies to the end of it all.

Many deny the eternity of God to do away with eternal punishment. This is why the perverted Bibles omit Mark 9:44,46,48, all which say, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

For God to give the gift of eternal life to anyone, He must first possess that which He would give, for He could not give what He is not. God gives of what He is, and He is the eternal God. "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:2,3). "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son . . . And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life" (1 John 5:11,20). "And I give unto them eternal life: . . ." (John 10:28). "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Man is made for eternity as certainly as he was made for time, and as responsible moral beings we must deal with both. Living in this chaotic age we would be wise to meditate on our lives and our days long and often before the face of God and on the brink of eternity. "He hath made everything beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world (the word world is the same word as eternity Strong's 5679) in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end" (Eccl.3:11). The Preacher is probably setting forth here both the glory and misery of man. To be made for eternity and forced to dwell in time is for mankind a tragedy of huge proportions. All within us cries for life and permanence, and everything around us reminds us of mortality and change. That God has made us of the stuff of eternity is both a glory to be realized and a prophecy yet to be fulfilled. Man made in the image of God has an insatiable craving for immortality. The ancient image of God in man whispers within every man of everlasting hope that somewhere he will continue to exist. Still he cannot rejoice, for the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world troubles his conscience, frightening him with proofs of guilt and evidences of coming death.

Only faith in the Word of God can calm, satisfy, and comfort the troubled conscience. "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). "But now is made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). God's eternity and man's mortality join to persuade us that faith in Christ is not optional. For

every man it is Christ or eternal tragedy. It is out of eternity that the Lord Jesus Christ came into time to rescue His people whose moral folly had made them slaves of sin and death.

Because God is eternal and Christ came out of eternity into time we can be assured of eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:9), eternal redemption, through the eternal Spirit, and eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:12,14,15).

When Moses was a very old man he penned the words of Psalm 90. He reveals the eternity of God. To Moses this truth was a theological fact as firm as that which he received on Mt. Sinai with which he was so familiar. It had two practical meanings for him. (1) Since God is eternal, He can be and continue forever to be the safe home for His time-driven children, "LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations." (2) This thought is less comforting because it reveals that God's eternity is so long and our years so few, how shall we establish the work of our hands? How shall we escape the action of events which would wear us out and destroy us? "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." May the knowledge of God's eternity not be wasted, but may we redeem the time because the days are evil.

Moses wrote of God's care. "The eternal God is thy refuge." Paul writes, "For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). "Underneath are the everlasting arms," strong and able to carry and deliver thee. "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles: they shall run, and not be weary: and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

Only God is eternal, only God has immortality, and whatsoever is not God is temporary, but whatsoever is God is eternal. As nothing eternal is created, so nothing created is eternal. Therefore if we are to have eternal life, it must be through His Son. This magnifies the importance of being in Christ. Christ not only gives eternal life (John 17:2,3), but in Christ who is eternal life Himself (1 John 5:11,20).