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EHYEH · I AM

The Eternity of God

Knowing the One Who Was, Is, and Is to Come

JQ Botes

The Eternity of God: Knowing the One Who Was, Is, and Is to Come

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ISBN (paperback): 9798191711027

ISBN (hardcover): 9798191720272

Published by JP Botes Publishing

First edition

Cover photograph by Razone GN via Pexels.

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Chapter 1

A Prayer from the Edge of Time

The eternity of God is the foundation of the stability of the covenant, the great comfort of a Christian.

— Stephen Charnock

Moses wrote one psalm in his life.

It is the only psalm bearing his name. The title says only this: *A prayer of Moses the man of God*. No instructions for the choir, no notes for the musicians, no setting for festival use. Just a prayer. From an old man who had spent forty years leading a people through a wilderness, watching the generation that came out of Egypt die in the desert, one funeral at a time, until almost none of them were left. By the time Moses sat down to write Psalm 90, he had buried more friends than most of us will ever meet. He had seen what a human life looks like from start to finish, again and again, and he had something he wanted to say about it.

What he wrote is a prayer about time.

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, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Psalm 90:1-2

That is the opening. Two verses. And in those two verses Moses says everything this book is going to spend the next eight chapters

unpacking. He looks back over generations of people, his own among them, and he says: there is only one thing that has held us. Not a place. Not a king. Not the strength of our own arms. A God. A God who was here before the mountains, who will be here after them, who has no beginning behind Him and no end ahead of Him. That God has been our dwelling place. Through every generation. Without exception.

This is where I want to start. Not with a definition of eternity. Not with arguments about the nature of time. With a prayer. With Moses, near the end of his life, telling us what he had learned by watching everyone he loved grow old and die. He had learned that the only thing strong enough to hold a person through the brevity of life is a God who is not bound by it.

That is what God's eternity does for us.

A Man Who Knew About Time

Moses had outlived almost everyone he started with. The men and women who walked out of Egypt as adults, who saw the Red Sea split open, who ate manna in the wilderness for forty years, every one of them, except Caleb and Joshua, was buried in the desert. Numbers 14 tells us why. They had refused to trust God at the border of the promised land, and the consequence was a generation of funerals. Moses watched it happen. He did not just hear about it. He led it. He officiated, day after day, year after year, as the people he had personally led out of slavery grew old and died without entering the land they had been promised.

By the time he picks up his pen for Psalm 90, he has seen what time does to a person. He has measured it. And he says this:

The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.

Psalm 90:10

That is not bitterness. That is observation. The surrounding verses make it sharper still. Moses is writing inside a lament about a generation whose life was being shortened under God's discipline, *consumed by your anger* in verse 7. The seventy or eighty years he names was the shortened span of the wilderness adults dying out, and it stands as a sober picture of how brief any human life can become. Moses had stood at enough graves to know what a human lifetime actually looks like from the outside. It is short. It is full of struggle. And then it ends.

But notice what he does not do. He does not despair. He does not write the prayer of a man who has concluded that nothing matters. He writes the prayer of a man who has concluded that one thing matters, because only one thing is left standing when everything else has been buried.

That one thing is God.

Lord, You Have Been Our Dwelling Place

Moses opens with a metaphor.

He does not say God has been our captain, or our king, or our shield, although all of those are true and all of them appear elsewhere in Scripture. He says God has been our *dwelling place*. The word picture is a house. A home. The walls that stand around you when the storm hits. The roof that keeps the weather off your head. The structure that does not move when everything outside it is moving. Moses says:

when our generation looked for something to live inside, God was that thing. And when the generation before us looked, God was that thing too. And when the generation before them looked, God was already there, waiting, the same God He had always been, ready to take them in.

Charnock saw the same thing when he read this verse. He wrote about Psalm 90 hundreds of years ago:

Thou hast kept open house for us, sheltered us against storms, and preserved us from mischief, as a house doth an inhabitant from wind and weather; and that not in one or two, but in all generations.

— Stephen Charnock

Kept open house. That is the picture. A door that has not been closed. A shelter that has not been withdrawn. From Abraham through Isaac through Jacob through Joseph through the slave-quarters of Egypt through forty years of wilderness, the door has never closed. The shelter has never moved.

Charnock makes one more distinction here that is worth catching. Israel had visible things they could have leaned on through the years Moses is remembering. The pillar of cloud. The pillar of fire. The manna on the ground. The ark of the covenant when it was built. The temple, when it eventually came. Every generation had something it could point to as the source of its safety. But none of those visible things was the actual shelter. The actual shelter was the God behind them.

Our refuge and defence hath not been from created things; not from the ark, but from the God of the ark.

— *Stephen Charnock*

Not from the ark. From the God of the ark. The shelter is not a thing. The shelter is a Person. The visible things God uses to help us are not the source of the help; they are the marks of a God who is the help.

And the reason that Person has never moved is the reason we are starting this book where we are starting it. The shelter is the Eternal God.

What We Remember When We Pray

There is one more thing happening in Psalm 90:1 that is easy to miss.

When Moses prays *Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations*, he is not just stating a theological fact. He is reaching back into the history of his people and using it as ground for the present prayer he is about to make. He is reminding God, and reminding himself, of the long record of God's faithfulness. He has come asking for something. Before he asks, he remembers.

Charnock saw this and wrote about it as a principle for our own prayers:

How worthy is it to remember former benefits, when we come to beg for new. Never were the records of God's mercies so exactly

revised, as when his people have stood in need of new editions of his power.

— Stephen Charnock

That is one of those lines that lodges in the mind. *Never were the records of God's mercies so exactly revised, as when his people have stood in need of new editions of his power.* When we are most desperate is exactly when we should be most careful to remember. Not because God needs the reminder. Because we do. Nothing strengthens our trust in what God will do like rehearsing what God has already done.

Moses does this. We should too. The greater the need, the more carefully we should remember.

From Everlasting to Everlasting

Verse 2 is where Moses goes for the foundation under that shelter.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Psalm 90:2

Read it slowly. *Before the mountains were brought forth.* Before the things in the world that seem most permanent to us, before the things that have been there as long as we can remember, before the things that will outlast us by every measure we can imagine, *From everlasting to everlasting you are God.*

That is the verse this whole book is built on.

Notice what Moses is doing. He has just told us that human life is short and full of trouble and ends quickly. And he is anchoring that whole truth, not in optimism, not in resilience, not in some idea that the shortness does not really matter, but in the fact that the God who holds us through it is on a completely different scale of being. We have seventy years, eighty if our strength endures. He has from everlasting to everlasting. We come and go like grass that springs up in the morning and is dry by evening. He was there before any grass. He will be there when no grass remains.

This is what makes Moses's prayer a prayer of hope and not a prayer of despair.

A man who has watched a generation die in the wilderness has two ways to look at the world. He can look at the brevity and conclude that life is meaningless. Or he can look at the brevity and look beyond it, to the One who is not bound by it, and ground his hope there. Moses takes the second path. And he tells us that we are meant to take it too.

Why We Start Here

This book is about the eternity of God. We are going to spend the next eight chapters working through what that means. What it means that God has no beginning. What it means that He has no end. What it means that He does not experience time the way we do, in a sequence of moments, one passing into the next. What it means that the name He gave Himself, the name He told Moses to use, was not a name about His power or His wisdom or His mercy. It was *I AM*. A name that is, in its deepest sense, a name about eternity.

But before we go there, I want to be sure we have the right starting point.

It would be possible to write a book about God's eternity that read like a textbook. A book that defined eternity, walked through the philosophical arguments for it, distinguished it from time, distinguished it from immortality, gave you a clean intellectual grip on the doctrine, and left you exactly where it found you. I am not interested in writing that book. Charnock did not write that book either, which is part of why his work has lasted as long as it has. What he wrote, and what I want this book to be, is something else.

We are not starting with the doctrine. We are starting with the prayer.

Because the doctrine of God's eternity does not exist in the abstract. It exists for people who live short, full, painful, beautiful lives, and who need to know that there is something bigger than the shortness, something steadier than the pain, something more enduring than the beauty. The doctrine of God's eternity exists for Moses, at the end of his life, looking back at a wilderness full of graves and forward at a promised land he himself will not enter. It exists for the believers Charnock pastored in seventeenth-century London, who buried their children before they buried their parents and needed something they could stand on. It exists for you, today, reading this in a world that moves too fast and feels too thin and ends too soon for anyone you love.

The book on God's eternity exists, in the end, for one reason. So that you can pray Moses's prayer and mean it. So that when you say *Lord, you have been my dwelling place*, you know who you are talking to.

That is why we start here.

Where We Are

Four things from this chapter to remember.

1. Moses opens Psalm 90 with the only thing that can hold a short, painful life: a God who has been a dwelling place across every generation, never withdrawn, always open.
2. The shelter is the God behind every visible help, not the visible help itself. Not the ark, but the God of the ark. We trust the One the gifts come from, not the gifts.
3. He grounds that shelter not in God's power or wisdom but in God's eternity. *From everlasting to everlasting you are God.* The shelter holds because the shelter has no beginning and no end.
4. We feel what our own shortness costs us before we can understand what God's eternity offers us. Moses prays from the edge of his life, looking back over a long record of faithfulness, because remembering what God has done is a help and a confidence when we come to Him for what we need now.

Next, we look at what *from everlasting to everlasting* actually means. There are three things eternity is, and one of them will be unfamiliar.

Chapter 2

Without Beginning, Without End, Without Succession

Eternity is a perpetual duration, which hath neither beginning nor end; time hath both.

— Stephen Charnock

When the Bible calls God eternal, it says three things about Him.

It says He has no beginning. It says He has no end. And it says something stranger than either, something most of us have never had to think about. It says He has no succession.

This is what Moses confessed when he wrote *from everlasting to everlasting you are God*. He was not saying God has been around a very long time and will be around a very long time more. He was saying God belongs to a different category of being altogether. He is not on the timeline. He is not even a very long line on the timeline. He is outside it.

That is what we have to look at in this chapter.

Without Beginning

Start where Genesis starts.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

Read that slowly. *In the beginning, God created.* The verse starts with God already present, before there was a beginning to mention. The beginning is the beginning of creation, not the beginning of God. He is the One the beginning starts from. Scripture as a whole goes further and treats Him as a Being who simply is, all the way back, with no edge to find when we look for one. He is not a being who once was not and then suddenly was.

This is harder to picture than it sounds. Our minds want to ask, "But what came before God?" and we have to learn to recognize that the question itself is malformed. There is no "before God." On the witness of the Bible as a whole, time itself is one of the things He brought into being. To ask what was before God is to ask what was before "before" existed.

Charnock puts the alternative this way. If God had a beginning, He had it either from someone else or from Himself. If from someone else, then that someone is greater than God, and is therefore the real God. If from Himself, then He had to exist before He gave Himself existence, which is a contradiction. The only coherent answer is that God did not begin at all. He was. He has always been. There is no point we can place at His back and call it the start.

The same logic runs the other way. He has no end.

Without End

The end is easier for us. We see things end every day. We have stood at gravesides. We have watched friendships fade, careers close, bodies fail. We know what ending looks like. And we have learned to expect that everything we love will eventually be subject to it.

But God is not subject to it.

Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end.

Psalm 102:25-27

This is one of the most direct statements in Scripture of God's endlessness. The mountains will wear out. The heavens will wear out. The most permanent things our eyes know will, in the end, be folded up like a worn-out coat and put away. But God, who folds them up, will not be folded up Himself. He remains. He is the same. His years have no end.

Charnock makes a simple observation about why this has to be so. What ends, ends because something causes it to end. Either it weakens from the inside, the way a body weakens with age, or it is overpowered from the outside, the way a building is leveled by a storm. God can do neither. There is no inner weakness in Him, no part of His being that decays or thins out over time. And there is nothing outside Him strong enough to overpower Him, because everything outside Him was made by Him and is held in being by Him. He cannot decay. He cannot be overpowered. He cannot end.

Without Succession

Here is the part we have to think about carefully.

When we say a person is alive across time, we mean their life is spread out in pieces. The person they were yesterday is gone, in a sense. The person they will be tomorrow has not arrived. Right now they have only this moment, which is already passing as they think about it. We live in succession. One moment follows another, gives way to the next, becomes the past. Our lives are a line of moments, laid end to end.

God is not like that.

He does not have a yesterday that is gone or a tomorrow that has not arrived. He does not experience His own being in pieces. He has all of Himself, all at once, always. Not a stream of moments, but a single, full, undivided life. What He was, He is. What He will be, He is. There is no part of Him in the past that He has left behind. There is no part of Him in the future He has not yet caught up to. He is, in every moment of our time, the same complete God.

This is the hardest part of the doctrine.

Charnock saw the difficulty and reached for an image to help. He compared eternity and time to the sea and the rivers:

Eternity and time differ as the sea and rivers; the sea never changes place, and is always one water; but the rivers glide along, and are swallowed up in the sea.

— Stephen Charnock

Picture it. A river is always moving. The water that was in this stretch of riverbed a minute ago is downstream now. The water that will be

here in a minute has not arrived yet. A river is always becoming and always passing. It is succession in liquid form. But the sea is not like that. The sea is one body of water, vast and still in its place, with rivers running into it from every direction and being swallowed up. The rivers add nothing to the sea. The sea was full before they got there. The sea does not glide. It simply is.

That is the picture Charnock gives us. Our lives are rivers, gliding along. God's life is the sea, full and still and always one. We come and go in succession. He does not come or go at all. He is.

The prophet Malachi puts the same truth in a single line.

For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

Malachi 3:6

He does not say God changes slowly, or less than other beings. He says God does not change at all. And then he gives the pastoral consequence in the same breath. Because God does not change, His covenant people are not consumed. The reason we are still here is not that we have held on. It is that He has not become a different God since He made the promise.

There is one more thing this means, and it is worth catching. Because there is no succession in God, all His perfections are His all at once. He does not grow into His mercy or learn into His wisdom. He does not work up to His power. Every perfection He has, He has fully, eternally, with no part of it in the past and no part of it still ahead. When Scripture says He is faithful, it is not saying He has been faithful for a long time and is likely to keep being so. It is saying faithfulness is part of His unchanging being, present in every moment, never increasing and never wearing thin.

The same is true of His love. His patience. His holiness. His knowledge. None of them are growing. None of them are running down. He has them, all the way, all the time, because He is.

Why This Matters

A lot of what we believe about God assumes He is like us, only bigger. Bigger life. Longer memory. More patience. More power. But still on the same scale, still moving through time the way we do, just with more of everything.

Eternity says no.

God is not a bigger version of us. He is a different kind of being. He does not move through time. Time moves through Him. He does not age, accumulate experience, or grow into Himself. He simply is, fully Himself, in every moment of our days, without any part of Him behind or ahead. The God you pray to this morning is not catching up to today. He is already here, already complete, already everything He will be tomorrow, already everything He was before you were born.

When Moses said *from everlasting to everlasting you are God*, this is what he was saying.

Where We Are

Four things from this chapter to remember.

1. God has no beginning. He did not come into being from anything or anyone. He is the One the beginning starts from, not a Being who once was not.
2. God has no end. He cannot weaken from within and cannot be overpowered from without, so He cannot decay or stop being. Everything else will wear out like a garment; He remains.

3. God has no succession. He does not experience His own life in pieces, moment after moment. He has all of Himself at once, always. The rivers glide along; the sea is one water.

4. All of God's perfections are eternal with Him. His love, His mercy, His wisdom, His power, His faithfulness are not growing or thinning. He has them, fully, always, because that is the kind of being He is.

Next, we look at the name God gave Himself when He was asked who He was. It is one of the strangest names anyone has ever given, and once you see it, you will not look at the rest of Scripture the same way.

Chapter 3

I AM, the Name That Holds Eternity

I Am is his proper name. This description being in the present tense, shows that his essence knows no past, nor future.

— Stephen Charnock

There is a moment in Exodus when Moses asks God for His name.

It is one of the strangest exchanges in the whole Bible. Moses is standing in front of a bush that is on fire but is not burning up. A voice has just come out of it and told him to go back to Egypt, the country he ran from forty years ago, and lead the slaves out. Moses, understandably, has questions. The biggest one is this: if I go to my people and tell them God sent me, they are going to ask me which God. They have been in slavery for four hundred years. They have lived among the gods of Egypt for generations. There are a lot of names available. Which name do I give them?

And God answers.

Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'

Exodus 3:14

That is the name. The whole name. Not Almighty One. Not King of Kings. Not Lord of Hosts. All of those will come later, and all of them are true. But the name God gave Himself, when asked directly, was simpler and stranger than any of them. *I AM*. A verb in the present tense, used as a name.

This is where eternity becomes personal. This is the moment God puts a name on what we have been looking at.

The Bush, the Question, the Answer

Slow down with Moses for a moment.

He is at Horeb, the mountain of God, tending sheep for his father-in-law. He is eighty years old. He has spent forty years in Pharaoh's house and forty years in the desert, and as far as he knows, he is going to die in the desert. Then a bush catches fire and does not burn up, and the God of his fathers speaks to him out of it.

The conversation that follows is not what you would expect. Moses does not fall on his face and worship. He argues. He raises objections. He tells God he is not the right person for this job, that he does not speak well, that the people will not listen. And in the middle of all that arguing, he asks one specific question that is different from the others.

If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?

Exodus 3:13

This is not just curiosity. In the ancient world, knowing someone's name meant something more than it does to us. A name carried the character of the one who bore it. To name God was to claim some understanding of who He was. Moses is asking: when I stand in front of these slaves and tell them their God is coming for them, who do I tell them their God is?

And God's answer is this verb. *I AM WHO I AM. Tell them I AM has sent you.*

In Hebrew, the name is אֶהְיֶה (*ehyeh*), the first-person imperfect of the verb "to be." The Hebrew imperfect does not map cleanly onto English tense; it can be rendered *I am* or *I will be*, depending on context. The four-letter name יהוה (*YHWH*, often pronounced *Yahweh*) is most naturally connected to the same verb in its third-person form. *Ehyeh* and *YHWH* are best heard as two angles on the same name, both rooted in the fact of God's being. The immediate context is covenantal. God has just said *I will be with you* in verse 12. The name He gives in verse 14 picks up that promise and roots it in His own being. The God who will be with His people is the God who simply is.

Charnock noted that the French Reformed translators were so struck by this that they would not translate the name as *Lord*, the way most English Bibles do. They translated it as *the Eternal*. Whenever they came to YHWH in the text, they rendered it *l'Éternel*. That rendering is interpretive rather than strictly lexical, but they heard in the name what the rest of Scripture confirms about the God who bears it: a God whose entire identity is bound up in the fact that He is.

Why "I AM" and Not Some Other Name

Think about what is being said here, and what is not being said.

God could have given Himself a name that pointed to His strength. He could have called Himself *the Mighty One* or *the Conqueror* or *the Lord of Armies*. He could have given Himself a name that pointed to His wisdom or His justice or His mercy. He could have given Himself a name about what He had done, like *the One who made the world* or *the God who called Abraham*. Any of those would have made sense. Any of those would have been true.

He did not give Himself any of those names. He gave Himself a verb.

And the verb the name is built on is the verb of simple being. Charnock saw what the rendering *I AM* was doing:

If it were 'he was,' it would intimate he were not now what he once was; if it were 'he will be,' it would intimate he were not yet what he will be; but 'I Am;' I am the only being, the root of all beings.

— Stephen Charnock

Read that again. Not *I was*. That would mean what He once was is not now. Not *I will be*. That would mean what He will be has not arrived. *I am*. Present. Complete. With no piece of Himself in the past He has left behind and no piece of Himself in the future He is still becoming. The eternity of God is not strictly encoded in the Hebrew verb form, but it fits the form perfectly, and the rest of Scripture confirms what the name already suggests. It is the same point Moses was making in Psalm 90, distilled into a single name.

This is also a name that no creature can use. We are *I was* and *I will be* before we are *I am*. The person you were ten years ago is not the person you are today. The person you will be in ten years is not yet here. None of us is fully *I am* in any moment, because all of us are partly elsewhere on the line. Only God can stand in the present tense and have all of Himself there.

That is what He named Himself.

Jesus Picks Up the Name

There is one place in the New Testament where Jesus says the name out loud, and the response of the people who heard it tells you everything about what the name carries.

He is in a sharp argument with the religious leaders. They are pressing Him on His authority, asking how He, a man who is not yet fifty years old, can speak as if He has known Abraham. They mean it as a trap. They expect Him to back down. He does not back down. He says this:

Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.

John 8:58

He uses the verb. Not "I was before Abraham." That would have been a strange claim, but a thinkable one. He says *I am*. Present tense. The same construction that God used in Exodus 3. He is not merely saying He existed before Abraham, true as that is. He is claiming to be eternal, He is claiming divine nature, he is claiming to have the same nature as God the Father.

The people listening understood it instantly. They picked up stones to kill Him for blasphemy. They did not need theology lessons to know what He had just claimed. He had taken the divine name on Himself.

We will come back to this in Chapter 6, when we look more carefully at what eternity tells us about Christ. For now, notice just this: the name God gave to Moses in the bush is the same name the Son took on His own lips in His public ministry. *I AM* is the through-line. The name carries through unbroken because the Son who took it on His own lips is of the same substance and essence as his Father is, that is the substance and essence of God, and as his Father is eternal so he is also.

What This Name Asks of Us

A name like *I AM* puts us in a particular position.

It tells us we are speaking to a God who does not need anything from us to complete Himself. He is not *I am because of what you bring to me*. He is just *I am*. He was full before we knew Him. He will be full when we are gone. Our prayers add nothing to His being. Our failures take nothing from it. We come to Him not to fill Him up, but because He is the One who is, and we are the ones who only partly are.

There is a settled freedom in this. We do not have to prop God up. We do not have to perform for Him to remain Himself. We pray, and serve, and worship, not because He needs us to, but because He is, and being known by the One who simply is, is the only thing strong enough to ground a short life.

Where We Are

Four things from this chapter to remember.

1. God gave Himself one personal name when Moses asked: *I AM*. He could have named Himself for His strength, His wisdom, His works. He named Himself by His eternal nature.
2. The name is a present-tense verb. Not *I was*, not *I will be*, just *I am*. The tense itself carries the doctrine of eternity. No piece of God in the past, no piece in the future, all of Him in the present moment.
3. *I AM* is a name no creature can use. We live in succession; we are partly past, partly future, never fully present to ourselves. Only God can stand in the present tense and have all of Himself there.

4. Jesus took this name on Himself. *Before Abraham was, I am.* The people who heard Him understood instantly what He claimed, and reached for stones.

Next, we look at what makes this name possible. There is one reason God can be *I AM* and we cannot.

Chapter 4

He Has Life in Himself

All life is seated in God, as in its proper throne, in its most perfect purity. He hath by his nature that life which others have by his grant.

— Stephen Charnock

Everything that lives, lives because something else gave it life.

Plants live by the sun and the soil. Animals live by what they eat. Children live by their parents. Even the stars, in the strange physics of their burning, live by the laws and the matter that hold them in being. Trace any living thing back far enough and you find it dependent on something else. Take the cause away and the thing fails. This is the rule for every creature in the universe.

There is one exception.

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

John 5:26

The Father has life in Himself. He did not get it from anywhere. He does not maintain it by feeding on anything. He does not need a soil, a sun, a parent, or a cause. His life is His own, in the deepest possible sense. Take everything else away and He still is, fully, because His life is the kind of thing that does not depend on anything outside Him.

This is one of the deepest reasons God is eternal.

What "Life in Himself" Actually Means

The phrase comes from John, in the middle of a long argument between Jesus and the religious leaders. Jesus is explaining why He has the authority He has, and He grounds it in the Father:

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

John 5:26

In its immediate context, Jesus is establishing His authority to give life and to judge. The surrounding verses (John 5:21-27) are about the Son's power to raise the dead and to exercise final judgment. Verse 26 names the deeper ground of that authority: the Father has life in Himself, and has granted the Son the same. The Greek phrase Jesus uses for the Father is ἔχει ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ (*echei zōēn en heautō*). It means *has life in Himself*. The verb is "has," in the sense of *holds, possesses, carries*. Life is something the Father simply has. It is part of what He is. Nothing gave it to Him. He never was without it. He never had to wait for it. He never has to renew it. He just has it, and has it as His own.

Charnock saw this as the heart of the doctrine of God:

He hath life by his essence, not by participation. He is a sun to give light and life to all creatures, but receives not light or life from anything.

— *Stephen Charnock*

Hold that distinction. *By essence, not by participation*. Everything else that has life has it by participation. We share in a life that comes from somewhere else. Our lungs need air we did not make. Our bodies need food we did not grow. Even our being, at the most basic

level, is borrowed from a Creator who lent it to us when He made us. We participate in life. We do not own it. God owns it. He has life in Himself.

Notice what Jesus says about the Son in that same verse. *So he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.* The Son has the same kind of life the Father has, in Himself, not borrowed. But notice the source: the Father has granted it. John 1:1-2 and John 17:5 make plain that the Son's life from the Father is eternal, not an act in time. The grant of John 5:26, read with those verses, names the eternal relation between Father and Son, not a moment when life was handed across. John makes the same point more directly in chapter 1, calling the Son the one who is *in the bosom of the Father* (John 1:18), the eternal Word who *was with God* from the beginning (John 1:1-2). The Son does not have life in Himself the way creatures have life from God, by being made and given existence from nothing. He has the same life as the Father, the very life of God, eternally from the Father. This is the procession of the Son from the Father. We will look at it more carefully in Chapter 6. For now, hold the key point: the Father has life in Himself; the Son shares that same life; neither of them depends on anything outside the Godhead for being.

Why This Means God Is Eternal

Once you see that God has life in Himself, eternity follows necessarily. Charnock works this out carefully.

If you have something in yourself, by your own essence, then nothing outside you can stop you from having it. The only way to lose something you possess by essence is to lose your essence, which is to stop being yourself. But God cannot stop being Himself. There is no one stronger to take His being away. There is no inner contradiction in

His being to make Him collapse from within. He has life as His own, and there is nothing in heaven or earth strong enough to take it from Him.

That is why He has no end.

The same logic runs backward. If God has life in Himself, He did not come into being from anything. There is no cause behind Him. He did not start at some point and slowly accumulate His own existence. The very idea is incoherent. To start existing, you have to first not exist, and then become caused. But God's life is His essence. He cannot have begun to be Himself.

That is why He has no beginning.

Charnock states it sharply:

He that hath life in himself, and is from himself, cannot but be. He always was, because he received his being from no other, and none can take away that being which was not given by another.

— *Stephen Charnock*

None can take away that being which was not given by another. Because no one gave God His life, no one can take it from Him. He is not on loan. He is the One the loans come from. His eternity is not a quality added to His being; it is what His being is. He simply is, and being, for Him, means being always, because there is nothing that could make Him not be.

The Sun and Its Beam

Charnock reached for an image to help with this.

He is a sun to give light and life to all creatures, but receives not light or life from anything.

— Stephen Charnock

A beam of light is not the sun. A beam exists because of the sun. Cut the sun off and the beam goes out. A beam has light, but it has it as a gift, moment by moment, from a source it cannot control. The sun is different. The sun does not borrow its light from anywhere. The sun is the source. Other things are lit by the sun; the sun is lit by itself, by its own burning, by what it is.

That is the picture of God and creation.

Every life in the universe is a beam. Your life is a beam. The life of your children, your friends, your church, the strangers you pass on the road, the animals in the fields, the stars in the sky, every one of them is a beam, sustained moment by moment by the One who is the source. Cut the source off and the beams go out. None of them generates its own light. None of them owns its own life.

Only God owns His. And because He owns it, He cannot lose it. And because He cannot lose it, He cannot end.

What This Says About Us

This is also where we have to be honest about what we are, by contrast.

We do not have life in ourselves. We never have. From the moment we were knitted together in our mothers' wombs to the moment we

close our eyes for the last time, our being is borrowed. We are kept in existence by the same God who first called us out of nothing. If He stopped speaking us into being, we would simply stop.

This is not a depressing fact. It is a clarifying one. It tells us where the security of our lives actually sits. It is not in our own strength. It is not in the longevity of our bodies. It is not in the things we have built up around us to make ourselves feel substantial. It is in the God who has life in Himself, and who, by sheer kindness, has given us a share in it.

Paul, drawing on language familiar to his Athenian hearers, said we *live and move and have our being* in God (Acts 17:28). Even outside the people of Israel, the truth had been glimpsed. Paul made the point more directly to the Colossians, describing Christ's relationship to His creation:

And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Colossians 1:17

In Him all things hold together. Not alongside Him. Not by some independent life of their own that He decided to bless. *In Him*. Our whole existence is held inside His. He is the air our being breathes. And the only reason the air does not run out is that He is the One who never runs out.

Where We Are

Four things from this chapter to remember.

1. Every creature lives by something else. God lives by Himself. The Father has life in Himself, by essence and not by participation. It is the kind of thing He is.

2. The Son shares that same life. *As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. John 5:26* This is procession, not creation. The Son is not borrowed life given from outside; He is the same divine life, eternally from the Father.

3. Because God has life in Himself, He cannot end and could not have begun. His eternity is not a quality added to His being. It is what His being is.

4. We live in Him, not alongside Him. Our being is borrowed; His is His own. The security of our lives is not in our own strength but in the God whose life cannot run out.

Next, we look at the gap this opens up between the Creator and everything He has made. Eternity belongs to one Being only, and that has consequences for how we think of ourselves.

Chapter 5

A Gap That Cannot Be Crossed

Whatsoever is not God, is temporary; whatsoever is eternal, is God.

— *Stephen Charnock*

We have seen what eternity is. We have seen the name God gave Himself. We have seen that He has life in Himself, and we do not.

Now we have to be honest about what that means for the rest of us.

There is a gap between God and everything He has made. The gap is not the kind we can cross with effort, or training, or growth, or any spiritual project. It is the gap between the Being who has life in Himself and every other being that has life as a gift. It is the gap between the One who is and the things He has called out of nothing.

That is the line. Everything in the universe falls on one side of it or the other. God is on one side, alone. Everything else, everything else, is on the other.

This chapter is about that gap. About why it exists. About what it means that eternity is not a property that anything other than God can have by its own nature. And about why this is, surprisingly, good news.

One Eternal, Many Lasting

The Bible does speak of other things lasting. Angels are not said to die. Human souls are not snuffed out at the grave; Jesus said the lost go

into eternal punishment and the righteous *into eternal life* (Matthew 25:46). Scripture uses the word *eternal* for these things.

But the use is loose. Strictly, *eternal* means no beginning, no end, no succession, and only God is eternal in that sense. When the same word is applied to angels, to souls, to the life Jesus gives His people, it means something simpler. Endless going forward. Not eternity in God's sense.

Charnock makes the distinction carefully. There are two kinds of duration in Scripture. The first is the kind God has. He is eternal by nature, by essence, by being the kind of thing that cannot start or stop. He is not held in being by anyone else. He has life in Himself.

The second is the kind angels and souls have. They will not end. They will continue to exist forever. But their endlessness is not their own. It is a gift, kept up moment by moment by the God who first gave it to them. If He stopped sustaining them, they would simply stop. They are not eternal by what they are. They are endless because God wills it.

Angels and souls have an immortality, but by donation from God, not by their own essence; dependent upon their Creator, not necessary in their own nature.

— Stephen Charnock

By donation. That word is precise. A donation is something received from another. The recipient does not generate the gift; he holds what was placed in his hand. An angel has endless life the way a child has dinner: real, given, sustaining, but never self-produced.

Paul touches the same point in his first letter to Timothy. In the middle of a doxology contrasting the eternal King with the perishing wealth and life of the rich, he says God

alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.

1 Timothy 6:16

Paul's immediate contrast is between God and the perishable human life that ends in the grave. But the phrase carries the wider truth Charnock pressed: God alone has the kind of immortality that belongs to Him by His own nature, not by gift. There is one Being in the universe who is eternal in the deepest sense, and only one.

Why No Creature Can Be Eternal

Charnock spelled out the reasons no created thing can ever share God's kind of eternity, and they are simple enough to follow.

A creature, by definition, is something that was once nothing. There was a time before it was made. Whatever was nothing cannot then be eternal, because eternity has no time when it was not. The very fact that something is a creature, that there was a "before it existed," shuts the door on it being eternal in the way God is. It started. It can have endless life going forward, by gift, but it cannot have an eternity that runs both directions.

A creature is also changeable. We grow up. We grow tired. We grow old. Angels do not age the way we do, but Scripture even speaks of them in terms of change, of obedience and disobedience, of action and response. Mutability is the mark of every made thing. And God's kind of eternity, the kind we have been looking at, is the eternity of a

being that cannot change. To be eternal, in His sense, you have to be the same, fully, in every moment. No creature can do that.

A creature is also finite. We have edges. Our knowledge has limits, our presence has limits, our power has limits. God's eternity is bound up with His infiniteness, His being without bounds in any direction. No creature is without bounds. So no creature can have His kind of eternity.

The point is not that creatures are diminished things. The point is that creatures are creatures, not God. And only God can be God.

It is as great a madness to ascribe eternity to the creature, as to deprive the Lord of the creature of eternity.

— Stephen Charnock

What This Means for "Eternal Life"

When the Bible promises us eternal life, we have to read the phrase carefully, because the eternal life God gives us is not the kind of eternal life He has.

He has eternal life by essence. He cannot lose it. He cannot stop being. His life is His own.

We are given eternal life by Him, in Christ. We will not stop being, once Christ has saved us. We will live forever in the presence of the God who saved us. But we will live there by gift, kept by the same power that called us out of nothing in the first place. Our endless life is not the same as His endless life. He has His; we are given ours.

This is not a downgrade of the promise. It is the truth of what the promise actually is. Jesus said it plainly:

And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

John 17:3

Jesus defines the substance of eternal life as knowing the only true God. It is a life lived in relationship with the One who is the source, not a life held independently of Him. Not crossing the gap and becoming a second eternal being beside Him. Knowing Him. Being held by Him forever. Living in His presence, sustained by His life, sharing in what He has the way a beam shares in the sun. That is the gift.

It is, in the end, a richer thing than independence would be. If our eternal life were our own, we would be small gods, alone with ourselves forever. Because our eternal life is His gift, we are creatures forever, held by Him, knowing Him, never running out because He never runs out. The dependence is the joy.

A Right Sense of Our Own Smallness

There is an instinct in us that resists this. We want to be substantial. We want to matter on our own terms. We do not like the picture of ourselves as beams, dependent on a sun we did not make, lit moment by moment by a source we cannot control.

Charnock saw the instinct. He wrote that part of what eternity should do in us is humble the false sense of our own bigness, and remind us how much of nothing we have in us compared to the One who has only being.

*How unworthy is it for dust and ashes, kneaded together in time,
to strut against the Father of eternity!*

— Stephen Charnock

We are dust kneaded together in time. We did not make ourselves. We cannot keep ourselves. We will not last unless He holds us. And the strange thing is, once we accept this, it stops being a wound. It becomes a relief.

We do not have to carry our own being. We never did. The Father of eternity carries it for us. Our part is to receive what we have been given, to be honest about where it comes from, and to walk in the gap as creatures who know they are creatures, loved by the One Eternal.

Where We Are

Four things from this chapter to remember.

1. There is a gap between God and everything else, and the gap is the difference between Being-in-Himself and being-by-gift. God is on one side. Every other thing is on the other.
2. Angels and souls last forever, but they do not have eternity in the way God does. They have endless life by donation, sustained moment by moment. He has it by essence.
3. The eternal life God promises us is real eternal life, but it is the gifted kind, not the in-Himself kind. We will know Him forever, held by Him forever, never running out because He never runs out. Our endlessness is His holding, not our owning.
4. This is good news, not bad. Our dependence is the joy. We do not have to carry our own being. The Father of eternity carries it for us.

Next, we look at the implication of all this for one specific Person. If eternity belongs only to God, what do we make of the One who came among us and said *Before Abraham was, I am*?

Chapter 6

The Eternal Christ

Everything in this book so far has been about God's eternity.

We have looked at what it is. We have looked at the name He gave Himself. We have looked at His having life in Himself and the gap that opens between Him and every creature. We have looked at how every other living thing depends on Him, and He depends on nothing.

Now we have to look at a single Person, and ask one question about Him.

The Person is Jesus of Nazareth. The question is whether eternity, the kind we have been describing, the kind that belongs to God alone, can be truthfully ascribed to Him. Because if it can, then we are not looking at a teacher, a prophet, a wise rabbi, or even an angel. We are looking at the Eternal God, in flesh.

That is the argument of this chapter. And it is not new. The New Testament writers make it everywhere, with a steady confidence that we sometimes miss because the language has become familiar to us. Charnock saw it plainly:

If God be of an eternal duration, then Christ is God. Eternity is the property of God, but it is ascribed to Christ.

— Stephen Charnock

Eternity is the property of God. Scripture ascribes eternity to Christ. Therefore Christ is God. The logic is short, the implication is

enormous, and it is what Christians have confessed from the beginning because Scripture teaches it.

Eternity Ascribed to Christ

Open the New Testament and the pattern is hard to miss.

John opens his Gospel with it:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

John 1:1-3

In the beginning was the Word. The Greek verb John uses for "was" here is ἦν (*ēn*), the imperfect form of "to be." It signifies continuous existence. There was no point at which the Word came into being. John is not saying the Word was created in the beginning. He is saying that when the beginning happened, the Word already was. He is using exactly the kind of language Genesis 1:1 uses for God Himself. *In the beginning, God. In the beginning, the Word.* The two openings are deliberately parallel.

And then John says outright what the parallel suggests. *The Word was God.* Not a god. Not like God. God. And *all things were made through him.* The Word is not part of the things that were made; He is the One through whom they were made. He is on the Creator side of the line, not the creature side.

Paul writes the same thing to the Colossians:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible

and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Colossians 1:15-17

The phrase *firstborn of all creation* sometimes confuses readers, because in English it can sound as if Paul is saying Christ was the first created thing. He is not. The Greek word for *firstborn* (πρωτότοκος, *prōtotokos*) carries the sense of preeminence and inheritance, the rank of the firstborn son in the family, not the order of creation. And Paul makes his meaning unmistakable in the very next sentence: *for by him all things were created*. The firstborn of all creation is the One by whom all creation came into being. He stands over creation as its Maker, not in it as its first piece.

And the line that anchors all of it is verse 17. *He is before all things*. The verse places His existence prior to all things and gives Him the rank of the One in whom they hold together. The Son shares the divine nature of the God who named Himself *I AM*, the God before all beginnings.

The author of Hebrews puts it even more directly:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Hebrews 13:8

The verse's immediate purpose is pastoral. Hebrews 13:7-9 is steadying believers against being drawn away by strange teachings, and the unchanging Christ is the anchor under that exhortation. But the pastoral point rests on a metaphysical one. Yesterday, today, forever. The whole sweep of time, and He is the same through every part of it. That sentence could be written about no creature. Every

creature was different yesterday, is different today, will be different forever. Only God is the same.

The First and the Last

The book of Revelation makes the claim most directly.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Revelation 1:8

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

Revelation 22:13

Christ takes for Himself the title of God's whole sweep through time. He is the first. He is the last. He is the beginning and the end of everything that is. There is no time before Him and no time after Him.

But notice. He is not coining new language. He is taking a title God had already used of Himself in Isaiah.

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god."

Isaiah 44:6

The LORD of hosts said *I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god*. There was no room in that claim for a second person to share the title without being God too. And then, in Revelation, Jesus takes it. He calls Himself the first and the last. The title is identical. The claim is identical.

Jesus is not borrowing a divine title. He is taking it because it belongs to Him. Because Jesus comes from God the Father, Jesus shares in the divine essence and substance of His Father and therefor as His Father is God so too Jesus is God.

Micah Saw It Coming

The Old Testament knew this about the coming Messiah, too. Micah prophesied that He would be born in Bethlehem, and then said something about Him that no prophet would say about an ordinary king.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

Micah 5:2

The phrase *from of old, from ancient days* in the Hebrew is מִיָּמֵי עוֹלָם (*mimei olam*). The word *olam* covers a range of meaning from *ancient times* and *long duration* through to *eternity*, and the surrounding context can carry the simpler sense of an ancient royal line going back through Bethlehem to David. But the New Testament's fuller revelation of the Son's eternity gives us warrant to hear in Micah's phrase what Christian readers have heard in it from the beginning. Not just antiquity. Eternity. The One who came forth from Bethlehem in time has been coming forth from the Father from the days that are before all days. The going forth in time is His incarnation. The going forth from eternity is His eternal begetting from the Father. He is the Father's eternal Son, before all time, and was born to Mary in the fullness of time.

This is the Person who would later say to the Jews, in Jerusalem, *before Abraham was, I am*. They were not surprised because they had failed to read Micah. They were surprised because they had failed to recognize the One Micah was talking about.

From the Father, Not From Outside

The Son is eternal. The Son is God. The Son is not, however, a separate God beside the Father. He is the eternal Son of the eternal Father, sharing the same divine being, the same divine life. When we say He has life in Himself, we are saying what Jesus Himself said: *as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself* (John 5:26). The same divine life is in both, and the Son's life is from the Father, not from outside the Father.

This is what Christians have called *begotten*. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father, of the Father's own essence and being. He is not a creature, not made from nothing, not brought into being by an act of the Father's will the way the world was. Begotten, not made. What comes from the Father in this way is not creation; it is of the very essence of God. The world was made from outside the divine being, out of nothing. The Son comes forth from inside the divine being, of the Father Himself.

Jesus said this about Himself in different ways throughout John's Gospel:

I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.

John 16:28

The verb Jesus uses for *I came from* is ἐξῆλθον (*exēlthon*), the aorist of ἐξέρχομαι, meaning *to come out from*. The prefix ἐκ carries the

sense of *out of*, not *away from*. He is not saying He came from somewhere near the Father, as if from beside Him. He is saying He came out of the Father, from within the Father's own being.

He came from the Father. He is returning to the Father. The relationship runs both directions through eternity. And in the opening of his Gospel, John gives us the striking image of where the Son is in relation to the Father:

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

John 1:18

At the Father's side. Eternally near to Him, eternally from Him. The Son does not come from somewhere outside the Father. He comes from the Father's own being.

That is why the Son can be God and the Father can be God and there are not two gods, but one. They share the one divine essence, the one divine life, the one divine eternity. The Father is the source. The Son is begotten of the Father, eternally. The Spirit proceeds from the Father, eternally, given to us through the Son. One God. Three Persons. One eternity, shared.

The argument for the Son's deity from His eternity is one of the most direct biblical proofs of the Trinity we have. Eternity is a property of God alone. Scripture ascribes eternity to the Son. Therefore the Son is God, sharing the one divine being with the Father.

Why It Had to Be Him

There is one more thing to notice.

The reason the eternal Son had to be the One who came to save us is not just a matter of arithmetic in the Trinity. It is a matter of what kind of sacrifice could pay for sin committed against an Eternal God.

If a creature had died for us, even a sinless creature, the sacrifice would have been a creaturely sacrifice. Real, yes; precious, yes; but bounded. It would not have carried the weight of the Eternal God's own life against the eternal weight of human sin against an Eternal God. Charnock saw this and would not let it go:

Could our sins be perfectly expiated had he not an eternal divinity to answer for the offences committed against an Eternal God? Temporary sufferings had been of little validity, without an infiniteness and eternity in his person to add weight to his passion.

— *Stephen Charnock*

This is why the cross is good news in the way it is. The One who hung there was not just a man. He was not just a man in whom God dwelt. He was God the Son, eternal, in flesh, dying for us. The sacrifice had the weight of eternity in it, because the One making it was eternal. There is no other Saviour who could have done what He did.

The eternal Christ is not a theological curiosity. He is the only ground we have for a salvation that lasts.

Where We Are

Four things from this chapter to remember.

1. Eternity is the property of God alone. Scripture ascribes eternity to Christ. Therefore Christ is God. The logic is simple, and the New Testament repeats it everywhere.
2. The Son shares the one divine eternity with the Father. He is not a second God beside the Father. He is eternally begotten of the Father, of the same divine essence and being. Begotten, not made.
3. Micah saw the eternal Son before His incarnation, and the New Testament writers found Him in the Old Testament. *Before Abraham was, I am* was not an innovation. It was a recognition.
4. The cross has the weight it has because the One on it was eternal. Only an eternal Saviour could pay for sin against an Eternal God. The Son's eternity is not an abstract doctrine. It is the ground of our salvation.

Next, we turn the other way. We have looked at what eternity gives us. Now we look at what eternity costs the one who refuses to receive it.

Chapter 7

Sin Against an Endless God

His eternity makes the punishment more dreadful than his power; his power makes it sharp, but his eternity renders it perpetual; ever to endure, is the sting at the end of every lash.

— Stephen Charnock

Up to this point we have been looking at what God's eternity gives us. A dwelling place that never closes. A name that holds steady. A life that cannot run out. A Saviour whose sacrifice has the weight of forever in it. All of those are gifts. All of them are good news to anyone willing to come and receive them.

But God's eternity has another side. It is the same attribute, the same truth about who He is. And to the person who refuses Him, that same eternity is not a comfort. It is a weight.

Charnock saw this and would not look away from it. He wrote:

His eternity is as great a terror to him that hates him, as it is a comfort to him that loves him.

— Stephen Charnock

Same God. Same attribute. Different posture toward Him, different consequence. We have to look at the second side now, because if we do not, we will not feel the weight of the first.

The Weight of an Eternal Offense

Start with the smallest version of the problem.

When you offend a small person, the offense is small. When you wrong a child, the wrong is real, but it is contained, and time will dull it. When you offend a king, the offense is heavier, because the king is more, and the dignity wounded is greater. The weight of an offense is always shaped by the One offended.

Take this to its end. What is the weight of an offense against the God who is from everlasting to everlasting? Charnock states it plainly: all sin is aggravated by God's eternity. Every act of sin is committed against a Being who is not bounded by time, and the weight of the act borrows its size from the size of the One who has been wounded.

This is what Paul means when he writes about the human race in Romans 1. He describes what people do, and then he describes what makes it serious:

They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Romans 1:23

Notice the contrast Paul draws. The God who was exchanged is the *immortal God*. The things He was exchanged for are *mortal*, perishable, made of dust. The wrong is not just preference. The wrong is a trade of categories. Eternal Being for perishing things. The infinite for the small. The Source of all life for the things He gives life to. The offense is sized by what was given up. And what was given up was the Eternal God.

Paul's specific subject in verse 23 is the literal idol-worship of the pagan world, the carving of images out of wood and stone. He widens it in the very next verses: they *exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator* (Romans 1:25). What Paul is describing is the wholesale rebellion of humanity, the worship of the creature in God's place. That is the offense he weighs.

The same instinct, in smaller form, still moves in us. When we trust a temporary thing more than the Eternal God, when we order our lives around what will pass instead of around the One who remains, we are putting our trust and hope in the perishable, momentary, in something that compared to the Eternal God is meaningless. Why would we ever put our hope and trust in something any less, when we already have the Eternal God extending His hand towards us?

A God Who Cannot Be Reduced

There is something subtler happening in sin that Charnock saw.

When we sin, we are usually not standing in front of God and shaking our fist. We are mostly just living as if He were smaller than He is. We treat His commands as advisory. We treat His attention as occasional. We treat His holiness as flexible. In the language of the Old Testament, we lift up our eyes against the One who is high and lifted up, but we do it casually, almost without noticing, because we have quietly downgraded Him in our minds first.

Charnock named this clearly:

There is in the nature of every sin a tendency to reduce God to a not being. He that thinks unworthily of God, or acts unworthily towards him, doth (as much as in him lies) sully and destroy these

two perfections of his, immutability and eternity. It is a carriage, as if he were as contemptible as a creature that were but of yesterday, and shall not remain in being to-morrow.

— *Stephen Charnock*

That is a piercing line. Every act of sin treats God as if He were small, temporary, of yesterday, gone tomorrow. Sin is not just disobedience; it is our sinful nature's attempt to remake God into something easier to live around. Of course we cannot actually shrink Him. He remains who He is whether we treat Him that way or not. But the attempt is the thing. The attempt is the offense.

And the attempt is foolish, not just wrong. Charnock pressed the same point further:

He that would put an end to God's glory by darkening it, would put an end to God's life by destroying it.

— *Stephen Charnock*

If our sinful nature had its way, it would end God's being. The instinct that ignores God's holiness, taken to its end, would destroy Him if it could. We do not have the power. He is the Eternal God. But the disposition lives in our sinful nature, and that disposition is what sin is.

A Judge Who Lives Forever

Scripture is unflinching that sin against the Eternal God has consequences that match the One offended. Jeremiah names it directly:

But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.

Jeremiah 10:10

Read what Jeremiah holds together. *Living God. Everlasting King.* And then *wrath, indignation, nations cannot endure.* The same prophet who comforts Israel with God's eternity warns the nations with that same eternity. Because if the King is everlasting, His judgment is not a passing storm. His indignation does not blow over. It has the same duration as He does.

Jesus said the same thing in His most extended teaching on final judgment. At the end of the parable of the sheep and the goats, He summed up the two destinies of the human race in a single sentence:

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Matthew 25:46

He uses one word for both. *Eternal* punishment. *Eternal* life. The same adjective. The same kind of endlessness. The eternity that holds the saved in joy is the same eternity that holds the unrepentant under judgment. Jesus is being deliberately parallel. There is no escape clause hidden in the grammar.

Charnock saw why this is the deepest part of the warning:

His eternity makes the punishment more dreadful than his power; his power makes it sharp, but his eternity renders it perpetual; ever to endure, is the sting at the end of every lash.

— Stephen Charnock

Ever to endure is the sting at the end of every lash. It is not the severity of God's judgment, taken on its own, that gives it its full weight. It is the duration. It is the fact that there is no end to it, because the One issuing it is endless. A finite punishment, even a great one, eventually exhausts itself. An eternal punishment, by definition, never does.

The eternal weight of God's judgment is real, and the only honest response is the response Scripture itself gives: *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* (Hebrews 10:31). That sentence was written to Christians who were tempted to drift away. It was meant to sober them. It is meant to sober us.

Why This Doctrine Is the Setup for the Gospel

Here is what I want you to see.

Everything we have looked at in this chapter is exactly what makes the cross good news. Without the weight of sin against an Eternal God, the death of Christ would be just one more execution among many in human history. With it, the cross is the only thing that could have saved us. The eternal Son of God, in flesh, dying for sin committed against the Eternal God, paying with a sacrifice that had eternity in it. That is not a metaphor. It is the only way sin against an endless God could be paid for.

If the previous chapter showed why it had to be Him, this chapter shows why it had to be the cross. Because the offense was eternal in its weight, the sacrifice had to be eternal in its worth. Only the eternal

Christ could carry it. He did. And the offer of His finished work is open to anyone willing to come.

The eternity that is a terror to the one who refuses Him is a comfort to the one who has been received by Him. Same God. Same attribute. Different posture. The next chapter is about the posture that turns the eternity of God into the deepest comfort a person can have.

Where We Are

Four things from this chapter to remember.

1. The weight of an offense is shaped by the One offended. Sin against the Eternal God carries the weight of the One it is against. Paul calls it an exchange of the immortal for the perishable, and the cost of the exchange is sized by what was traded.

2. Every sin tries, in some way, to treat God as smaller than He is. As temporary. As manageable. Charnock said sin is a tendency to reduce God to a not-being. He cannot actually be reduced; the attempt is the offense.

3. Judgment on the unrepentant has the same duration as the God it comes from. Jesus used the same word for *eternal* punishment and *eternal* life, on purpose. This is not a doctrine to wield loudly. It is one to receive soberly, with the heart Scripture itself shows.

4. This is precisely why the eternal Christ on the cross is good news. Only an eternal Saviour could carry the weight of sin against an Eternal God. The doctrine of judgment is the setup for the gospel, not the alternative to it.

Next, we turn to the other side. For the one who is in Christ, God's eternity is the deepest comfort there is.

Chapter 8

Our God Forever

He is not a cistern, but a fountain, wherein water is always living, and never putrefies.

— Stephen Charnock

The same eternity that gives weight to judgment gives weight to comfort. For the one who has come to God through Christ, every attribute we have been looking at, every part of who God is, becomes a gift that lasts as long as He does. And He does not run out.

This chapter is about what we have, because of who He is.

An Eternal Covenant

When God promises something, the promise is only as durable as the One who made it. Promises from people fail because people fail. Even the most sincere person, the most determined, the most faithful, eventually runs out of life and cannot keep going. Their promises end with them, whatever their intentions were.

God's promises do not end with Him, because He does not end.

The author of Hebrews makes the connection directly. He is talking about the certainty of God's promise to Abraham, and he explains why we can be so confident in it:

So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he

guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

Hebrews 6:17-18

Notice what God swore by when He swore the promise to Abraham. There was no one greater for Him to swear by, so He swore by Himself. Hebrews names what is on display in such an oath: *the unchangeable character of his purpose*, the promise and the oath together as two unchangeable things. The unchangeableness of God is the immediate point the text presses. But God's unchangeableness is inseparable from His eternity. He is the same yesterday, today, and always, because He simply is, from everlasting to everlasting. The covenant rests on the whole of who He is. If His being holds, the promise holds. And His being does not stop.

This is also why Paul could write to Titus about *the hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began* (Titus 1:2). Before the ages began. Before there was a creation. Before there was a Titus to write to or a Paul to do the writing. The promise of eternal life is rooted in God's eternal purpose, settled before time itself began. It is not something He added later, an afterthought to an emergency. It was His purpose before the world was made, and what He purposed in eternity He executes in time.

A covenant rooted in the eternity of God cannot be undone. Not by us, not by anyone else, not by the wear of time itself. The promises stand because the Promiser stands.

Our God, and His People

The covenant gives us many things. Forgiveness. Adoption. The Spirit. Future glory. But beneath all of those, the covenant gives us one thing that contains the rest. It gives us God Himself.

That this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever.

Psalms 48:14

The psalmist had walked the walls of Jerusalem and looked at her towers and her ramparts, and at the end of his praise he landed somewhere else. He landed on *this is God, our God forever and ever*. The city would not last forever. The walls would fall, the temple would burn, the kingdom would be carried off into exile. But the God whose city it was would still be there, and He would still be *ours*, forever.

This is the deepest thing the covenant holds. Not the gifts, primarily, but the Giver. God binds Himself to us as our God, and takes us to Himself as His own people. He is our God not for an hour, not for a season, but for as long as He is, which is forever.

This is the oldest promise in Scripture, and it runs all the way to the last page:

I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jeremiah 31:33

He gives Himself to us in love. We give ourselves back to Him in worship and obedience. He has made Himself our God, and made us His own. We belong to Him, and He will not let us go.

Isaiah heard the same truth centuries before, and put it in a sentence we should not pass over quickly.

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

Isaiah 57:15

Who inhabits eternity. There is no higher description of God than this. He fills the eternity He inhabits the way a tenant fills a house, completely, without any part of it empty of Him. And then notice the second half. The God who inhabits eternity dwells with the contrite. He has no need of us. He gives Himself to us anyway. The giving is the gift.

This is also what makes heaven heaven. The Bible's picture of the new creation is not, finally, a picture of better landscapes or better bodies, although those are real. It is the picture of God Himself with His people:

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

Revelation 21:3

That is the whole hope, stripped to its core. God Himself. With us. Forever. Every other promise the Bible makes is built on this one, and every joy of the eternal life to come is a joy that flows from it. To have God as our God, and to be His, is to have everything that He is, in the only way a creature can, by gift and presence and unending love.

An Enjoyment That Stays Fresh

There is a particular joy in this that does not always come through, and Charnock saw it.

He noticed that all the good things we know in this life eventually run thin. A meal you love, eaten every day for a year, stops thrilling you. A song you cherish, played on loop, becomes background noise. Even the things we love most have a way of dulling with use. Our hearts are made to wear out the surfaces of created joys, because created joys are finite, and a finite thing cannot keep up with an unbounded desire.

The enjoyment of God is not like that.

The enjoyment of God will be as fresh and glorious after many ages, as it was at first.

— Stephen Charnock

This is one of those sentences that says something almost impossible to imagine. The new creation will not be a place where the wonder wears off. It will be a place where the wonder is always full, because the One we are enjoying is full, eternally, without flagging. He is not a cistern that empties as we drink from it. He is the fountain Charnock named:

He is not a cistern, but a fountain, wherein water is always living, and never putrefies.

— Stephen Charnock

A cistern is a container. It holds a certain amount of water and no more. The more you draw from it, the closer you get to the bottom. A fountain is different. A fountain has a source upstream that keeps it flowing. You can drink from it for as long as you live, and the water will

still be there tomorrow, and the day after, and the millionth day after that. It does not run down. It does not stagnate. It is alive, because the source is alive.

God is that source. The joy of having Him does not deplete, because He does not deplete. The Christians whose hope is set on Him are not heading toward a finite reward that they will eventually exhaust. They are heading toward a Person who is inexhaustible. The first thousand years of enjoying Him will not be more precious than the millionth, because He will not be less Himself by then. He will be exactly what He always was. And we will be drinking from the same fountain we started from, still fresh.

Comfort Through the Worst Things

This is also where God's eternity becomes the comfort of the suffering, the persecuted, the bereaved.

When the author of Lamentations sat in the ruins of Jerusalem and wrote Lamentations, he was looking at the worst day his people had ever known. The city was destroyed. The temple was burnt. Most of those he loved were dead, exiled, or starving in the rubble. And in the middle of all that loss, after pages of grief, he wrote this:

But you, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations.

Lamentations 5:19

That is not a denial of the pain. Lamentations is one of the most honest books about pain in the entire Bible. It is not a leap into pretending. It is a confession that even in the worst day, the throne of God still stood. The kingdom of God had not fallen with the kingdom

of Judah. The God who reigns forever was still reigning, and that meant the story was not over.

Moses had named the same comfort in his last blessing on Israel.

The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

Deuteronomy 33:27

The Eternal God. Your dwelling place. Underneath you, His everlasting arms. Moses gives the whole picture in one line. The God who is from everlasting to everlasting is the One you live in, and beneath you, holding you up when you have nothing else to stand on, are arms that do not tire and do not let go.

Isaiah said it again, in different words:

Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.

Isaiah 26:4

An everlasting rock. Something that does not shift when the ground shifts. Something to stand on when the things you thought you could stand on turn out to be sand. There are seasons of life when the rocks you trusted give way. There are griefs that take the floor out from under you. In those seasons, the comfort of God's eternity is not abstract. It is the rock that is still there. He has not moved. He cannot move. And He is the One who has promised to hold you.

If you are a Christian, and the worst day of your life is in front of you, then this is the doctrine you will lean on hardest when that day comes. Not God's power, finally, although His power is real. Not God's wisdom, although His wisdom is real. His eternity. The fact that He is,

and is the same, and is yours, and cannot run out. The fact that nothing that breaks in your life can break Him. The fact that your future, however dark it looks from where you sit, ends in His unbroken presence. Forever.

Where We Are

Four things from this chapter to remember.

1. God's covenant is as durable as God is. When He promised eternal life, He swore by Himself, because there was no one greater. The promise stands because the Promiser stands.

2. The covenant gives us many gifts, but beneath them all it gives us God Himself. He is our God, and we are His, forever. *This is God, our God forever and ever.*

3. The enjoyment of God will not wear thin. He is not a cistern that empties. He is a fountain that flows. The joy of having Him in the new creation will be as fresh after a million years as it was on the first day.

4. In the worst seasons of life, His eternity is the rock under our feet. Lamentations did not deny the ruins; it confessed that the throne still stood. That same throne stands today.

Next, we look at what all this asks of us. If God is the kind of God we have been looking at, what does it change about how we live the brief life we have been given?

Chapter 9

Living Today as a Creature of Time

The Ancient of Days is to be served before all that are younger than himself.

— Stephen Charnock

We have looked at God's eternity from a lot of angles. We have looked at the prayer that opened the book, the three faces of eternity, the name He gave Himself, the life He has in Himself, the gap between Him and us, the eternal Son who came among us, the weight of sin against Him, the comfort that He is our God forever. All of those are true together, and all of them matter. But none of them is the point of the book.

The point is what this God does to the short, full, ordinary life you are living right now.

Moses ended Psalm 90 with a request, and it is the request the whole psalm has been building toward. After confessing the brevity of life, after grounding his hope in the eternity of God, he asked God for one thing:

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 90:12

That is the closing prayer of the chapter we started with. Teach us to number our days. Teach us to count, soberly, what we have. And by

counting, give us a wise heart. The whole logic of the psalm runs through that verse. The man who knows he is short, and knows his God is endless, lives differently than the man who knows neither.

This chapter is about how to live like that.

A Sober Heart About Old Sins

For us, sins committed long ago feel past. We have moved on. We barely remember the details. We have lived ten or twenty or forty years since, and time has dulled the sharpness. But Charnock noted that God does not experience time the way we do. There is no succession in Him. There is no "long ago" in His knowing. The sin you committed when you were twenty is as present to Him today as the cup of coffee you drank this morning. Not held against you if you are in Christ, but seen in its full weight. He does not see it through the haze of distance the way you do.

This is not meant to crush you. It is meant to sober you. The God who forgives is the same God who sees. He sees clearly, all the way back, and what He forgives, He forgives completely and then forgets. But the gravity of what He forgives is the gravity of what He actually knew, not the dulled version we hold in our own memory. The cross had to carry the real weight of the real sin, not the softened version we have made our peace with.

And the same God who saw the sin in its full weight is the One who separates us from it forever. Scripture says this plainly:

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our

transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

Psalm 103:10-13

He removes them. As far as the east is from the west. And in the new covenant promise of Jeremiah, He says it even more sharply:

For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Jeremiah 31:34

I will remember their sin no more. The God who sees all things at once, in His eternal present, chooses not to hold our forgiven sin in His view. Not because the information has slipped from Him, but because, having dealt with it at the cross, He no longer treats it as part of who we are. The Eternal God who saw the sin in its full weight is the same Eternal God who removes it from us and remembers it no more.

If you have been a Christian a long time, the old sins are covered by the blood of Christ as fully today as the day you were first brought in. The point is not to drag them back into condemnation. The point is to receive the forgiveness with the seriousness it warrants. You were forgiven of something an Eternal God saw clearly. The mercy is therefore greater than you have probably let yourself feel.

A Humble Heart About Our Shortness

The same psalm that ends with *teach us to number our days* begins with the bleakness of how few they are. David said something similar in another psalm, even more plainly:

Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!

Psalm 39:5

A few handbreadths. Like nothing before You. A mere breath. This is what we are, against the scale of the God who is from everlasting to everlasting. Charnock pressed on this:

How unworthy is it for dust and ashes, kneaded together in time, to strut against the Father of eternity!

— *Stephen Charnock*

Strut is the right word. Most of us, most days, strut a little. We carry ourselves as if we were more than we are. We act offended when we are slighted. We hold grudges as if our small comforts deserved to be defended forever. We complain at God about His timing, His providence, His allowance of difficulty in our lives, as if the dust had the standing to lodge a complaint with the One who shaped it. The eternity of God deflates the strut. Not by humiliating us, but by reminding us of the proportions involved.

You are dust, kneaded together in time. He is the Father of eternity. The right posture toward Him is not crushed silence; the right posture is humility. Honesty about what we are. Honesty about who He is. And then prayer that rises from that honesty, not from the inflated sense of ourselves we usually carry around.

A heart wise about its own shortness is a heart that can pray without strutting.

A Loose Grip on a Passing World

Once you have seen the eternity of God, the world we live in starts to look different.

It is not that the world becomes meaningless. The world is the gift of the Eternal God, and it is genuinely good. But its goods are bounded. They have an expiration. They will pass, and we know it. Charnock said the eternity of God reproaches the kind of pursuit that prefers a temporary pleasure to an everlasting God, *as though a temporal world could be a better supply than a God whose years never fail.*

John wrote almost the same thing into his first letter:

And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

1 John 2:17

Hold those two clauses next to each other. The world is passing away. Whoever does the will of God abides forever. One short. One long. One ending. One enduring. John is not telling us to despise the world. He is telling us to read it accurately. Do not anchor your heart to something that is going under. Anchor your heart to the Eternal God, and do the things that will last with Him.

Paul said it with practical force to the Colossians:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Colossians 3:1-2

Set your minds on things that are above. The phrase is not anti-physical. Paul is not telling Christians to ignore their bodies or their work or their families. He is saying: order your loves. Let the things you love most be the things that will last. Let the temporal things be enjoyed as gifts, held with an open hand, and never asked to do what only the Eternal God can do.

A loose grip on a passing world is the natural posture of someone who has seen what God's eternity offers. The grip does not loosen because we have learned to love less. It loosens because we have started to love rightly. The eternal first. The temporal as gift. The grip on the temporal goes soft because the heart has found something it can hold without fear of loss.

A Love Set on the Eternal

The whole point of the doctrine of God's eternity, in the end, is to give you something worth loving forever.

Charnock said God is worthy of our deepest love simply because He is eternal. He is the only Being who can hold our love without being lost. Every other love we have, no matter how good, will end. The friend will die. The marriage will end at the grave. The child will outgrow our care. The career will close. The home will eventually be taken down. All the loves of this life are loves we will, in the end, hand over.

But the love of the Eternal God is not like that. We will not have to hand it over. It will not be lost in the fire of the new creation. It will not fade as we age. It will not run out as we love it more. Charnock saw that the eternity of God gives us a love we can pour everything into, without any fear of having loved a thing that was about to die.

That is the deepest gift of His eternity. It gives us a love object that matches the size and duration of the longing in us.

And it makes sense, then, that the love rises into service. Psalm 104 ends with a settled resolve:

I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

Psalm 104:33

As long as I live. While I have being. The psalmist's brief life is a life he will spend singing to the Eternal God. Not because his songs add to God. Not because his service completes Him. But because the only fitting response to a God who is forever is a life given over to Him, all of it, every day He gives, until He takes it back.

Charnock put it with characteristic edge:

The Ancient of Days is to be served before all that are younger than himself.

— *Stephen Charnock*

Everything we might serve, every cause, every passion, every project, every relationship, every ambition, is younger than the Ancient of Days. He has priority by His being, not just by His command. The right order of our loves is the order that puts Him first because He is first. Everything else gets its proper place when He is in His.

How to Live Today

So how do you live today, this morning, this afternoon, in the actual life you have?

You receive the forgiveness you have been given with the seriousness it warrants, because it covers what an Eternal God saw clearly. You walk humbly, because dust does not strut before the Father of eternity. You hold your good gifts with an open hand, knowing they are gifts and not the Giver. You love the Eternal God with whatever love you have to give Him, knowing you are loving the only One you will not have to hand back. And you spend the days He has given you, however many they are, singing to Him with the breath He is keeping in you.

That is what it looks like to number your days and get a heart of wisdom.

That is how the eternity of God should move you.

Where We Are

Four things from this chapter, and from the book, to remember.

1. Old sins are not faded by time in God's sight. The forgiveness we have received is bigger than we have probably let ourselves feel, because the sin it covered was real, and the One who covered it saw it clearly.
2. The eternity of God deflates the strut without crushing the soul. Dust kneaded together in time has no standing to lodge complaints with the Father of eternity. Humility is the right posture, and it is a freeing one.

3. The world is passing away along with its desires. A loose grip on temporary things is the natural posture of a heart whose love is set on the Eternal God.

4. The Ancient of Days is to be served before all that are younger than Himself. Love Him with what you have to give Him. Serve Him with the days He keeps in you. He is the one love that will not have to be handed back.

The book of Revelation lets us hear the only response that fits. Around the throne of God, the four living creatures do not stop, day and night, saying:

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come.

Revelation 4:8

Who was. Who is. Who is to come. The whole sweep of eternity, named in three short clauses, and the only fitting response is worship.

That is the whole book. May the eternity of God hold you, today and forever, in the strong, settled, never-ending love of the only true God, who was, and is, and is to come.

Notes

Every Charnock contribution to this book, quote and paraphrase alike, is drawn from his *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (first published in 1682), Discourse V: On the Eternity of God. References below name the section of the Discourse rather than specific page numbers, which vary by edition. Charnock's own outline runs: an opening exposition of Psalm 90:1-2; the doctrine stated; Section I, how God is eternal; Section II, that God is eternal, with six proofs; Section III, that eternity is proper to God alone; and Section IV, the Use, divided into Information, Comfort, and Exhortation.

Chapter 1: A Prayer from the Edge of Time

"The eternity of God is the foundation of the stability of the covenant, the great comfort of a Christian." — Discourse V, opening of the doctrine.

"Thou hast kept open house for us, sheltered us against storms, and preserved us from mischief, as a house doth an inhabitant from wind and weather; and that not in one or two, but in all generations." — Discourse V, opening exposition of Psalm 90:1.

"Our refuge and defence hath not been from created things; not from the ark, but from the God of the ark." — Discourse V, opening exposition of Psalm 90:1.

"How worthy is it to remember former benefits, when we come to beg for new. Never were the records of God's mercies so exactly revised, as when his people have stood in need of new editions of his power." — Discourse V, opening exposition of Psalm 90:1, observation 2.

Chapter 2: Without Beginning, Without End, Without Succession

"Eternity is a perpetual duration, which hath neither beginning nor end; time hath both." — Discourse V, definition within the doctrine section.

The argument that if God had a beginning He had it either from another or from Himself, and both are impossible. — Discourse V, Section II.1, on the name I AM.

"Eternity and time differ as the sea and rivers; the sea never changes place, and is always one water; but the rivers glide along, and are swallowed up in the sea." — Discourse V, definition within the doctrine section.

Chapter 3: I AM, the Name That Holds Eternity

"I Am is his proper name. This description being in the present tense, shows that his essence knows no past, nor future." — Discourse V, Section II.1, on the name I AM (Exodus 3:14).

The observation that the French Reformed translators rendered YHWH as l'Éternel (the Eternal). — Discourse V, Section II.1, on the name I AM.

"If it were 'he was,' it would intimate he were not now what he once was; if it were 'he will be,' it would intimate he were not yet what he will be; but 'I Am;' I am the only being, the root of all beings." — Discourse V, Section II.1, on the name I AM.

Chapter 4: He Has Life in Himself

"All life is seated in God, as in its proper throne, in its most perfect purity. He hath by his nature that life which others have by his grant."
— Discourse V, Section II.2, on God having life in Himself (John 5:26).

Chapter 5: A Gap That Cannot Be Crossed

"Whatsoever is not God, is temporary; whatsoever is eternal, is God."
— Discourse V, Section III, on eternity being proper to God alone.

"Angels and souls have an immortality, but by donation from God, not by their own essence; dependent upon their Creator, not necessary in their own nature." — Discourse V, Section III, on eternity being proper to God alone.

"It is as great a madness to ascribe eternity to the creature, as to deprive the Lord of the creature of eternity." — Discourse V, Section III, opening.

Chapter 6: The Eternal Christ

"If God be of an eternal duration, then Christ is God. Eternity is the property of God, but it is ascribed to Christ." — Discourse V, Use 1 (Information), Point 1: on Christ being God.

"Could our sins be perfectly expiated had he not an eternal divinity to answer for the offences committed against an eternal God? Temporary sufferings had been of little validity, without an infiniteness and eternity in his person to add weight to his passion." — Discourse V, Use 1 (Information), Point 1.

Chapter 7: Sin Against an Endless God

"His eternity is as great a terror to him that hates him, as it is a comfort to him that loves him." — Discourse V, Use 1 (Information), Point 5: on the dread of being under an eternal God's judgment.

The argument that all sin is aggravated by God's eternity. — Discourse V, Use 1 (Information), Point 4: on the folly and boldness of sin.

"There is in the nature of every sin a tendency to reduce God to a not being. He that thinks unworthily of God, or acts unworthily towards him, doth (as much as in him lies) sully and destroy these two perfections of his, immutability and eternity. It is a carriage, as if he were as contemptible as a creature that were but of yesterday, and shall not remain in being to-morrow." — Discourse V, Use 1 (Information), Point 4.

"He that would put an end to God's glory by darkening it, would put an end to God's life by destroying it." — Discourse V, Use 1 (Information), Point 4.

"His eternity makes the punishment more dreadful than his power; his power makes it sharp, but his eternity renders it perpetual; ever to endure, is the sting at the end of every lash." — Discourse V, Use 1 (Information), Point 5.

Chapter 8: Our God Forever

The comfort that God Himself, not only His gifts, is given to His people in covenant and held forever. — Discourse V, Use 2 (Comfort), Point 2: on God as the eternal good of His people.

"The enjoyment of God will be as fresh and glorious after many ages, as it was at first." — Discourse V, Use 2 (Comfort), Point 3: on the freshness of enjoying God forever.

"He is not a cistern, but a fountain, wherein water is always living, and never putrefies." — Discourse V, Use 2 (Comfort), Point 3.

Chapter 9: Living Today as a Creature of Time

The observation that old sins are present to God in His eternity, not faded by the passage of time. — Discourse V, Use 3 (Exhortation), Part 1, Point 1: on being deeply affected with sins long since committed.

"How unworthy is it for dust and ashes, kneaded together in time, to strut against the Father of eternity!" — Discourse V, Use 3 (Exhortation), Part 1, Point 2: on abating our pride.

The phrase "as though a temporal world could be a better supply than a God whose years never fail." — Discourse V, Use 3 (Exhortation), Part 1, Point 3: on weaning love from the world.

The argument that God is worthy of our deepest love because He alone is eternal. — Discourse V, Use 3 (Exhortation), Part 2, Point 1: on God's worthiness of our affection.

"The Ancient of Days is to be served before all that are younger than himself." — Discourse V, Use 3 (Exhortation), Part 2, Point 2: on God's worthiness of our service.

A note on the source: Charnock's *Discourses* exist in many editions, all descending from the posthumous 1682 collection edited by his colleagues. Section divisions follow Charnock's own outline. Quotations have been reproduced in their original wording, with light modernisation of spelling and punctuation in places where seventeenth-century conventions would obstruct a contemporary reader.

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