

THEOLOGY PROPER

The Incommunicable Attributes of God – Pt. 2

Jonathan Anderson

March 10, 2026



Institutes of
Theology

SEMESTER 4

2026

A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us... For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.



The Attributes/Perfections of God

J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*

Our aim in studying the Godhead must be to know God Himself better. Our concern must be to enlarge our acquaintance, not simply with the doctrine of God's attributes, but with the living God whose attributes they are."



The Attributes/Perfections of God

MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*

A general definition of perfections is as follows: God's perfections are the essential characteristics of His nature. Because these characteristics are necessary to His nature, all His attributes are absolutely perfect and thus rightly called perfections. Further, since these perfections are essential to God's nature, if any one of them were denied, God would no longer be God.



The Attributes/Perfections of God

MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*

God's essence is one indivisible whole, so that each and all of His perfections actively characterize God's entire being. God's perfections must be thought of as always actively present together and mutually influencing each other without any hierarchy, even when they are not all mentioned in a given passage of Scripture. God in His essential nature is truly beyond human understanding, and the only appropriate responses to studying even the fringes of His ways (cf. Job 26:14) are awe-filled reverence, worship, adoration, trust, and service.



The Attributes/Perfections of God

Kevin Zuber

What Scripture actually reveals is the interrelatedness of God's attributes or perfections. Perhaps an illustration will help... If we look at a diamond, what do we see? ...we see one thing, made up of one substance, with a number of facets. Each facet is identifiable on its own, but each facet is still the diamond..



The Attributes/Perfections of God

Kevin Zuber

Actually, we can never really see one facet because to “see” one facet is to see it in relation to the facets next to it, and we see those facets in relation to the facets next to those facets; indeed, to see any facet we really see it only in relation to all the facets, even if we can only concentrate on one facet at a time.



The Attributes/Perfections of God

Kevin Zuber

Furthermore, the several facets are visible as such only because of the light that comes into the diamond through all the other facets... As with the facets on the diamond, so each attribute of God is what it is only in relation to other attributes related to it, and in relation to all the attributes, and in relation to God as He is in Himself.



The Attributes/Perfections of God

- 1) Incommunicable or Less Communicable - Having little analogy in human beings
- 2) Communicable or More Communicable – Having more analogy in human beings



The Attributes/Perfections of God

MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*

The incommunicable perfections are those characteristics unique to God (e.g., self-existence, simplicity, immensity), whereas the communicable perfections are those characteristics transferable in part to humans (e.g., goodness, righteousness, love).



Incommunicable Attributes of God

The Westminster Catechism

- *Q. 7. What is God?*
- A. God is a Spirit in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection...



Incommunicable Attributes of God

- Holiness (Transcendence/Otherness)
- Independence (Aseity)
- Immutability
- Eternality
- Sovereignty
- Omnipotence
- Omnipresence
- Omniscience



Incommunicable Attributes of God

- Holiness (Transcendence/Otherness)
- Independence (Aseity)
- Immutability
- Eternality
- Sovereignty
- Omnipotence
- Omnipresence
- Omniscience



God's Independence



The Westminster Confession of Faith

God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory, in, by, unto, and upon them: he is the alone fountain of all beings, of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth.



I. The Self-Existence of God

- Aseity
 - Latin “a” *from*; “se” *self*
 - “From Himself”
- **WCF** “God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself.”



I. The Self-Existence of God

Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*

Aseity means that God has no cause, needs none, and is the first cause of all. As Scripture teaches, God is the first and the last, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end, the source from which all creatures exist and for whom they all exist.



I. The Self-Existence of God

- **Exodus 3:14** God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"
- **John 5:26** For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;
- **Isaiah 45:22** Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.



II. The Self-Sufficiency of God

Westminster Confession of Faith

God... is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory, in, by, unto, and upon them: he is the alone fountain of all beings, of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever himself pleaseth.



II. The Self-Sufficiency of God

- *Acts 17:24-25, 28* The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things... for in Him we live and move and exist...



II. The Self-Sufficiency of God

- **1 Chronicles 29:10-12** So David blessed the LORD in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, “Blessed are You, O LORD God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone.



A. Implications of God's Self-Sufficiency

- 1) God is perfectly satisfied within Himself (John 17:5)



Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

Among the persons of the Trinity there has been perfect love and fellowship and communication for all eternity. The fact that God is three persons yet one God means that there was no loneliness or lack of personal fellowship on God's part before creation. In fact, the love and interpersonal fellowship, and the sharing of glory, have always been and will always be far more perfect than any communion we as finite human beings will ever have with God.



A. Implications of God's Self-Sufficiency

- 1) God is perfectly satisfied within Himself (John 17:5)
- 2) God does not need His creation (Job 41:11; Ps 50:10-12; Acts 17:24-25)
- 3) God alone is the giver of good gifts (James 1:17)
- 4) Our existence is entirely dependent on God (Is. 44:24; Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6)
- 5) The gospel is all of God's grace (Eph 1:3-14.2:1-10)
- 6) Our sufficiency comes from Him (2 Cor. 3:5; 9:8)



B. Clarifications about God's Self-Sufficiency

- 1) God does relate to His creation
- 2) God delights in His creation
- 3) "[God's] creation can glorify Him and bring Him joy."
Wayne Grudem



Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*

God always operates from a position of wealth, not need. Yet God freely chooses to live in covenant relationship with finite, sinful people. Thus, his sufficiency does not negate his love for us, but magnifies it... God's love is fulfilled without us, for God enjoys his eternal beloved in the uncreated, triune relationships of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (John 17:24). All his love for his creatures is freely given. However, God uses his absolute freedom to serve the needy and to save sinners. He bears patiently with us. He walks with us through our sorrows and dwells with us in time and space.



C. Responses to God's Self-Sufficiency

- 1) Repentance (Acts 17:30)
- 2) Humility (Isaiah 66:1-2; James 4:6; Luke 18:9-14)
- 3) Gratitude (Psalm 50:7-15)
- 4) Dependence (Psalm 50:7-15)
- 5) Delight (Psalm 73:25-26)



Brakel, *The Christians Reasonable Service*

God “with His all-sufficiency can fill and saturate the soul to such an overflowing measure that it has need of nothing else but to have God as its portion.”



John Piper, *Desiring God*

God is a mountain spring, not a watering trough. A mountain spring is self-replenishing. It constantly overflows and supplies others. But a watering trough needs to be filled with a pump or bucket brigade. So if you want to glorify the worth of a watering trough you work hard to keep it full and useful. But if you want to glorify the worth of a spring you do it by getting down on your hands and knees and drinking to your heart's satisfaction, until you have the refreshment and strength to go back down in the valley and tell people what you've found. ...therefore the way to please God is to come to him to get and not to give, to drink and not to water...God is the kind of God who will be pleased with the one thing I have to offer – my thirst.



God's Immutability



Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*

The doctrine of God's immutability is of the highest significance for religion. The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between the Creator and the creature. Every creature is continually becoming. It is changeable, constantly striving, seeks rest and satisfaction, and finds this rest in God, in him alone, for only he is pure being and no becoming.



I. God's Immutability Defined

- **Psalm 102:25-27** Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.
- **Malachi 3:6** For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.
- **Deut 32:4** The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He.



I. God's Immutability Defined

- **Hebrews 13:8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.
- **James 1:17** Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.



Hodge, *Systematic Theology*

As an infinite and absolute Being, self-existent and absolutely independent, God is exalted above all the causes of and even above the possibility of change. ...God is absolutely immutable in his essence and attributes. He can neither increase nor decrease. He is subject to no process of development, or of self-evolution. His knowledge and power can never be greater or less. He can never be wiser or holier, or more righteous or more merciful than He ever has been and ever must be. He is no less immutable in his plans and purposes. Infinite in wisdom, there can be no error in their conception; infinite in power, there can be no failure in their accomplishment.



Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*

In virtue of this attribute He is exalted above all becoming, and is free from all accession or diminution and from all growth or decay in His Being or perfections. His knowledge and plans, His moral principles and volitions remain forever the same. Even reason teaches us that no change is possible in God, since a change is either for better or for worse. But in God, as the absolute Perfection, improvement and deterioration are both equally impossible.



A. W. Pink, The Attributes of God

Immutability... is one of the excellencies of the Creator which distinguishes Him from all His creatures. God is perpetually the same: subject to no change in His being, attributes, or determinations.



I. God's Immutability Defined

- A. The Unchangeable Persons of God (Ex 3:14; Ps 102:25-27; Mal 3:6)



Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*

God's immutability entered our mutable world when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). The incarnate Lord Jesus has an unchangeable divine nature and a changeable human nature. As to his humanity, in his youth he "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52). He modeled change for us in a positive direction, developing his human capacities to love God and to love his neighbor. He never sinned (Heb. 4:15), but through all the changes of his horrible sufferings and profound temptations, he matured in sonlike obedience to God (Heb. 5:8-9). In this manner, he became our forerunner and captain of our faith, who blazed the trail ahead of us.



Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*

However, God's incarnate Son was and continues to be eternal God (John 1:1). Though a relatively young man, he astonished his fellow Jews by declaring, "Before Abraham was, I am" (8:58). He claimed continuity with God through the ages, both in his person and his work: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (5:17). When he died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, he returned to the glory that he had with the Father "before the world was" (17:5). In his eternal divine nature, Christ never changes.



Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*

Christ's incarnation also did not change God, for his divine nature and human nature were joined without mixture or confusion. Christ is not a demigod, but fully God and fully human. Watson said, "If the divine nature had been converted into the human, or the human into the divine, there had been a change, but they were not so."⁵⁶ This is not an essential union, but a personal (hypostatic) union. Christ is one person with two distinct natures, divine and human... the union between God and man in Christ's unique person is everlasting.



I. God's Immutability Defined

- A. The Unchangeable Persons of God (Ex 3:14; Mal 3:6)
- B. The Unchangeable Perfections of God (Ex 34:6-7; Lam 3:23-24; James 1:17)
- C. The Unchangeable Purposes/Plans of God (Ps 33:11; Rom 11:29; Heb 6:17)



William Plumer

Many causes make human plans and purposes feeble and uncertain; infinite perfections make God's plans and counsels immovable and infallible.

A. W. Pink

One of two things causes a man to change his mind and reverse His plans: want of foresight to anticipate everything, or lack of power to execute them. But as God is both omniscient and omnipotent there is never any need for Him to revise His decrees.



Beeke and Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology*

God's immutable plans display his absolute consistency and unity in himself. For God to change his decree would not reflect divine liberty, but wavering due to divine limitation, for he could not do what he planned to do.



I. God's Immutability Defined

- A. The Unchangeable Persons of God (Ex 3:14; Mal 3:6)
- B. The Unchangeable Perfections of God (Ex 34:6-7; Lam 3:23-24; James 1:17)
- C. The Unchangeable Purposes/Plans of God (Ps 33:11; Rom 11:29; Heb 6:17)
- D. The Unchangeable Promises of God (Num 23:19; Ps 89:34-37; Is 54:10; Micah 7:19-20; Mal 3:6)



John Dick

The Divine immutability, like the cloud which interposed between the Israelites and the Egyptian army, has a dark as well as a light side. It insures the execution of His threatenings, as well as the performance of His promises; and destroys the hope which the guilty fondly cherish, that He will be all lenity to his frail and erring creatures, and that they will be much more lightly dealt with than the declaration of His own Word would lead us to expect. We oppose to these deceitful and presumptuous speculations the solemn truth, that God is unchanging in veracity and purpose, in faithfulness and justice.



II. God's Immutability Questioned

- Process Theology
- Open Theism



II. God's Immutability Questioned

- What about God "repenting" or "changing His mind"?
- What about God's "emotional" responses to His creation?



Does God repent or change His mind?

- **Exodus 32:9-14** ...So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.
- **Isaiah 38:1-6** ...I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life....
- **Jonah 3:4, 10** ...When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.
- **Numbers 23:19** God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?



Does God repent or change His mind?

- God Himself does not change. Therefore, the manner in which He relates to His creation is utterly consistent.
 - Unrepentant sinners face judgment
 - Repentant sinners find mercy and compassion
- The manner in which He relates to His creation in specific instances may and does appropriately change given the changes in His creation.
 - A sinner repents and thereby God's disposition "changes" from judgement to mercy and compassion



Does God respond “emotionally”?

- **Genesis 6:6** The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.
- **1 Samuel 15:10-11** Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands.” And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the LORD all night.



Does God respond “emotionally”?

Berkhof, Systematic Theology

The divine immutability should not be understood as implying *immobility*, as if there were no movement in God. It is even customary in theology to speak of God as *actus purus*, a God who is always in action. The Bible teaches us that God enters into manifold relations with man and, as it were, lives their life with them. There is change round about Him, change in the relations of men to Him, but there is no change in His Being, His attributes, His purpose, His motives of action, or His promises.



The Impassibility of God

- **WCF** “There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions...”
- **Acts 14:15** and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature [passions] as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM.



The Impassibility of God

MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*

Immutability does not mean that God is static or inert, nor does it mean that he does not act distinctly in time or possess true affections. God is impassible—not in the sense that he is devoid of true feeling or has no affections but in the sense that his emotions are active and deliberate expressions of his holy dispositions, not (as is often the case with human emotions) involuntary passions by which he is driven.



III. God's Immutability Applied

Because God does not change, we can have:

- A. Confidence in His Character (Ex 3:14, 34:6-7)
- B. Confidence in His Word (Ps 119:89; 1 Pet 1:25)
- C. Confidence in His Promises (Num 23:19)
- D. Confidence in our Salvation (Isaiah 54:10; Heb 6:17-19)



III. Immutability Applied

Isaiah 54:10

“For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, but My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, and My covenant of peace will not be shaken,” says the Lord who has compassion on you.



God's Eternality



I. God's Eternality Defined

- **Genesis 21:33** Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.
- **Deuteronomy 33:27** The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms...
- **Job 36:26** Behold, God is exalted, and we do not know Him; the number of His years is unsearchable.
- **Psalms 90:2** Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.



I. God's Eternality Defined

- **Psalm 102:12, 27** But You, O LORD, abide forever, And Your name to all generations... "But You are the same, And Your years will not come to an end.
- **Isaiah 41:4** "Who has performed and accomplished it, Calling forth the generations from the beginning? 'I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He.' "
- **Isaiah 43:10** "You are My witnesses," declares the LORD, "And My servant whom I have chosen, So that you may know and believe Me And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me.



I. God's Eternality Defined

- **Isaiah 43:13** "Even from eternity I am He, And there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?"
- **1 Timothy 1:17** Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.



I. God's Eternality Defined

MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*

God perfectly transcends all limitations of time, so that he is without beginning, without ending, and without succession of moments in the experience of his being and in his consciousness of all other reality.



I. God's Eternality Defined

- A. Without Beginning (Gen 1:1; Ps 93:2; Hab 1:12)
- B. Without End (Ps 9:7; 48:14; 102:24-27)
- C. Without Succession of Moments (2 Pet 3:8)



MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*

God is in time, since he interacts with his creation and his creatures from moment to moment. But God must transcend time, or he is limited by another entity: time. In other words, God's eternity means that he is distinct from time. Nevertheless, he is not completely separate from it; rather, he is present (immanent) in every moment, controlling every moment for his purposes and glory

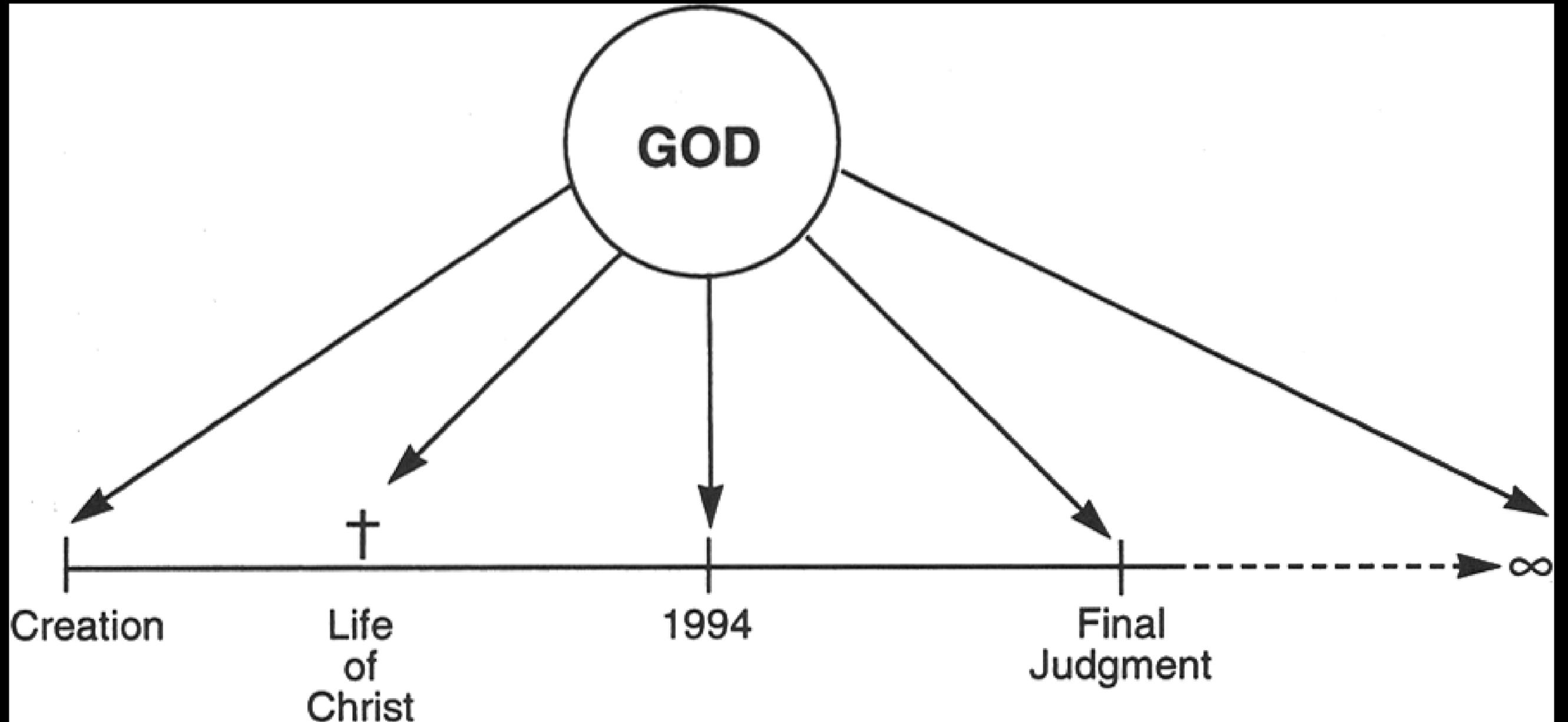


I. God's Eternality Defined

- A. Without Beginning (Gen 1:1; Ps 93:2; Hab 1:12)
- B. Without End (Ps 9:7; 48:14; 102:24-27)
- C. Without Succession of Moments (2 Pet 3:8)



Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*



I. God's Eternality Defined

- A. Without Beginning (Gen 1:1; Ps 93:2; Hab 1:12)
- B. Without End (Ps 9:7; 48:14; 102:24-27)
- C. Without Succession of Moments (2 Pet 3:8)
- D. Yet He Created and Acts in Time (Gen 1:1; Acts 17:30-31; Gal 4:4-5)



Grudem, *Systematic Theology*

We must therefore affirm both that God has no succession of moments in his own being and sees all history equally vividly, and that in his creation he sees the progress of events over time and acts differently at different points in time; in short, he is the Lord who created time and who rules over it and uses it for his own purposes. God can act in time *because* he is Lord of time. He uses it to display his glory. In fact, it is often God's good pleasure to fulfill his promises and carry out his works of redemption over a period of time so that we might more readily see and appreciate his great wisdom, his patience, his faithfulness, his lordship over all events, and even his unchangeableness and eternity.



II. God's Eternality Applied

- A. Live with an eternal perspective (2 Cor 4:16-18)
- B. Turn from the passing pleasures of sin (Heb 11:24-26, 12:1-2)
- C. Strive for that which endures (Matt 6:19-21; Eph 5:15-16)



II. God's Eternality Applied

John Calvin, *Psalms Commentary*

Men are so dull as to think that thirty years, or even a smaller number, are, as it were, an eternity; nor are they impressed with the brevity of their life so long as this world keeps possession of their thoughts. This is the reason why Moses awakens us by elevating our minds to the eternity of God, without the consideration of which we perceive not how speedily our life vanishes away. The imagination that we shall have a long life, resembles a profound sleep in which we are all benumbed, until meditation upon the heavenly life swallow up this foolish fancy respecting the length of our continuance upon earth.

