

Eternity and Everlasting

“Eternity is the complete possession all at once of illimitable life.”

Boethius.¹

“Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born, or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.” (Ps. 90:1-2).

God (ontologically or in Himself) is eternal (outside of time) and yet once He began to create He is everlasting in time in relationship to this creation. God’s eternity is defended philosophically and hinted at Biblically. While the main Biblical pattern develops a God, Who at least in relationship to creation interacts and reacts with this creation in time forever and always will. This is not a contradiction, since eternity describes God ontologically; everlasting in time describes God’s relationship to the creation. In this paper I will define time, everlasting, and eternity. Then I will explore how these work out for God ontologically and relationally.

Time is the relationship of sequence for any one thing. Time is not merely an absolute Newtonian framework (in which everything experiences the same sequence simultaneously) or a Kantian phenomenological grid for perception (in which sequence merely becomes a mental category not descriptive of reality) but an Einsteinian metaphysical relationship of anything’s experience in relationship

expressed though the equation: an object's relativistic time equals observed time divided by the square root of $[1-(\text{velocity squared divided by speed of light squared})]$. This makes time a fourth dimension along with the three spatial dimensions and all four of these are effected by the velocity of the object in relationship to another to which they are referenced, as expressed by the dilation equations. This theoretical time dilation was experimentally verified by the MIT physicists Frisch and Smith in 1961 who showed that for the mu-mesons (small particles found in both the atmosphere and outer space) that were being stopped at sea level, their time had been slowed down by their longer experience at a velocity near the speed of light as compared to the time of the earth observers or the time of the mu-mesons which were stopped and held relatively stationary in the cloud chamber on the top of Mt. Washington. The mu-mesons which traveled faster for longer then lived longer verifying the Einsteinian expectation that time is in fact a metaphysical reality for anything in relationship to another. In this way, time can be thought of as a metaphysical sequence. Anything that has the experience of sequence is then in its own time. Likewise, anything that is related to the experience of sequence is then also in its own time as well. It is in reference to God's creation of the universe and the experience of the sequence of this creation that God is drawn into time as an everlasting being. For example, one implication of our previous defense of God being everywhere (from the nature of necessity or Psalm 139 chapters)³ is that God would be everywhen as well. This means that the fact of creation draws the everywhere and everywhen God into everlasting experience of all things and all times. God in relation to creation experiences the creation's sequence. These metaphysical expressions of

¹ Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* 9-11

² In contrast to Hume's occasionalism.

³ Cf. This book pp. 11-39. 113-18.

an Eagle,” that “Time keeps on slipping, slipping, slipping into the future.”

Everlasting means persistence through time. Everlasting would be any temporal experience that does not end, or a being which is perpetually in relationship to time. For example, *aionion* is used in the Bible in this sense of perpetual temporal experience. An instance of this is the everlasting life that the believer in Christ experiences already in contrast to the judgment that the nonbeliever is already under (Jn. 3:15-16). The fact that everlasting life is already being experienced as a temporal experience shows that everlasting life will always be experienced within time but that this time just does not come to an end.

Eternal would mean atemporality, or outside of time and sequence. This concept of eternity is understood by Boethius as an eternal duration of providentially sourcing life.

Eternity ... is the complete possession all at once of illimitable life. This becomes clearer by comparison with temporal things. For whatever lives in time proceeds as something present from the past into the future, and there is nothing placed in time that can embrace the whole extent of its life equally. Indeed, on the contrary, it does not yet grasp tomorrow but yesterday it has already lost, and even in the life of today you live no more fully than in a mobile, transitory moment ... [A temporal thing's] life may be infinitely long, but it does not embrace its whole extent simultaneously ... Therefore, whatever includes and possesses the whole fullness of illimitable life at once and is such that nothing future is absent from it and nothing past has flowed away, this is rightly judged to be eternal, and of this it is necessary both that being in full possession of it self it be always present to itself and that it have the infinity of mobile time present to it.⁴

Such a duration view of eternity may be helpful in showing the oddity of eternity but technically such expressions as “present to itself” and “simultaneous” are not appropriate of eternity for there would be no expression of sequence of any kind

⁴ Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book V, ii, 9-18, 22-31.

In such a model Aquinas defends that God's eternity is like an event through which God sees all events as present.

Were someone to see many travelers along a road successively, over a certain period of time, in each part of that time he would see some passersby as present, so that over the whole time of his vision he would see every traveler as present. He would not see all as present at once because the time of his seeing is not all-at-once. If his seeing were able to exist all at once, he would see at once all as present, although they do not all pass by as present at once. Whence because the vision of God's knowledge is measured by eternity, which is all at once and yet includes all of time ... God sees what happens in time not as future but as present.⁸

While this view has influenced eternity development significantly, it still maintains analogies of time, such as "all at once," to communicate what is essentially beyond time and sequence. So as a model, the temporal analogies still fall short of God's eternal essence.

The classical Christian theologian who most captures the essence of eternity is Anselm, with his view that eternity is like a super-temporal dimension

Everything that is in any way bounded by place and time is less than that which no law of place or time limits. Since, then, nothing is greater than thou, no place or time contains thee; but thou art everywhere and always. And since this can be said of thee alone, thou alone art uncircumscribed and eternal.⁹

Such a Maximally Great Being would be imminently omnipresent and thus immaterial or spiritual as well. That is, there could be no sequence or variation temporally or spatially for this God. Likewise, this God would be available and

⁷ Augustine, *The Trinity*, Book V, ii, 3.

⁸ Aquinas, *Of the Truth*, 2.12.

⁹ Anselm, *Proslogium*, chapter 13.

would have no body (i.e. spiritual) and be immutable (i.e. eternal even though such a being might be glimpsed within creation as everlasting). So the spiritual and eternal omnipresence which the Maximally Great Being would instantiate would be exhibited in a non-spatial and non-temporal manner similar to another dimension beyond space and time. Perhaps Tillich's dimensional model for spirit as an imminent causal ground which creates and sustains the whole of creation serves as a paradigm for making sense of the omnipresence of this eternal spiritual Being. That is, a person would not expect each location of the universe to contain an instance of the fullness of God but that God's fullness is present to each location in a continuous causal manner creating, determining, sustaining, protecting, relating, knowing from that perspective, and recreating the whole of the universe into His kingdom.

Brian Leftow describes the level of absolute immutability that ensues with such an eternal necessary Being as ontologically unreactive.¹⁰

A timeless God does not remember, forget, regret, feel relief, or cease to do anything. For a timeless God has no past, and one can remember, forget, etc., only what is past. A timeless God does not wait, anticipate, hope, foreknow, predict, or deliberate. For a timeless God has no future, and one can anticipate, etc., only what is in one's future. A timeless God does not begin to do anything; if one can begin to do only what one then continues to do. If timeless, God does not change: what changes first has, then lacks, some property, and so must exist at least two times. Thus a timeless God never learns or changes His attitudes or plans. All His knowledge and intentions are occurrent, not dispositional. Further, if God is timeless, there is no temporal gap between His forming a plan and executing it, or executing it and seeing all its consequences. If timeless, God's life lasts forever in the sense that at every time, it is true to say that, timelessly, God exists. Yet in

¹⁰ This concept can be seen to be essentially the Aristotelian concept of full actualization in God's ontological nature.

Anselm's solution to this unreactive eternity has God, Who does not exist in time or place having all things existing in Him.¹² "This thought is a kind of expression of the objects created, like the expression which an artisan forms in his mind for what he intends to make."¹³ Brian Leftow follows him in this idea. God's knowledge would then be the storehouse of all actualities of all time.¹⁴ Furthermore, the knowledge He knows He has always known without variance. God would know all there is to be known for the whole of time without sequence and without change. However, this does not cause God to be opposed to the knowledge of His creation, for He would always know what every feature of the creation knows from that creature's perspective in space and time while also knowing simultaneously from His unique vantage point. That is, spatially or temporally referenced knowledge claims will be referenced from the vantage of a knower or as an avenue through God's everlasting omnipresence which would know what would be known from that time and space if any other knower would have been there. For example, He would eternally know my knowing of the past and my fears of the future from my vantage point and the perspective of every created thing in addition to His unique additional perspectives. So that in our Einsteinian relativistic universe we may have problems defending simultaneity of

¹¹ Brian Leftow, 'Eternity,' in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* [ed. Philip Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1997)], p. 257.

¹² Anselm, *Proslogium* 19, *Monologium* 9-14.

¹³ Anselm, *Monologium* 10.

¹⁴ This would be a Grand Mind idealism, which by His commitment to creation perpetually supplies the creation with its reality. We humans will know of this creation through critical realism [Cf. Douglas Kennard, *The Relationship between Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Biblical Theology and Contextualization*. (Lewiston, The Mellon Press, 1999), chapters 2 and 3]. This omniscient Sovereign superintends the actualities of the creation. This would contrast with the process primordial nature of God in that far more than possibilities would reside in God's mind and these thoughts of God would then be determinate for whatever happens. For more on this see the chapter, "God's Sovereignty and Human Free Will," in this book.

possession all at once of illimitable life.¹⁵ The complete possession is an atemporal sourcing that does not change and is not limited but brings about all that has changed in its expressions of finiteness. This means that eternity is the source for all power and life, as previously described under omnipotence above.¹⁶ So eternity is not primarily to be known for its static comprehensive determining knowledge but for the life revealed to have come from God in His revelational creation. Anything that knows and enlivens others should be thought to be alive. Because God initiates the whole of the creation including all of its details His knowledge is essentially also determining choice. God's choices are eternal and essential to His nature without variance. To have God as an actually necessary being means His sovereign choice is set. This means that the level of necessity for God includes all of God's thoughts and sovereign choices eternally and immutably. This means that God is not open in growing and gaining more knowledge and choosing in response to this knowledge. God's knowledge and choice would in fact be set within God's essential nature as determinative for the existence, essence, and choices the whole of creation makes.¹⁷ With God's knowledge and choice as essential to His nature, then there is no logical order in God either. This means that all the reformation options expressing the order of the decree would in fact be contradictory to God's essential nature. There would not be a logical sequence within God Who simultaneously knows and chooses without sequence (i.e. eternally). This should not surprise us, for there are no Biblical texts that talk about any logical or chronological sequence within God of

¹⁵ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book V, Prose 6; and *De trinitate*, chapter 4 (in E. K. Harvard, 1973).

¹⁶ Cf. pp. 13-14.

¹⁷ For a further discussion of how the determining sovereignty of God and freedom of man fit in a non contradictory manner that consistently reflect the Biblical text see the chapter "God's Sovereignty and Human Free Will," in this book. In that paper a compatibilism of Anselmic/ Thomistic determinism with Edwardsian free will is defended.

example, there is a clear logical and chronological sequence in applying the divine election (*ekletois*) as foreknown, preparatively sanctifying the person so that the outcome (*eis*) of this sanctification ushers in obedience and atonement (1 Pet. 1:1-2). At other instances of sequence of the application of salvation there is encouragement for the Christian who has experienced some of the salvation benefits, such as justification, who can be reassured that the other benefits, like glorification, will also be his in time (e.g. Rom. 8:29-30). So the whole post-reformation discussion of the order of the decree and the order of salvation within God was an unfortunate exploration that does not apply to this necessary, immutable, and eternal God. Any linkage of logical order or chronological sequence in such works of God is an expression of application order or revelation purpose. Any attempt to communicate eternal truths into a constantly changing environment like the creation will reflect them in sequential ways partly because of the sequential nature of the environment and partly to accommodate to our human understanding, which is sequential in its learning and contemplation process. For example, the textual sequences above convey that God graciously applies and guarantees the fullness of salvation to each Christian personally, which is a revelation purpose consistent with God's immutable nature. So that any apparent change in God is actually the refraction of a changeless God through the lens of the changing environment for purposes of applying some benefit to the creation, such as salvation or the communication of certain select truths to a certain group in time. The fact that the truths of God are accommodated to the means of communication does not limit the truths of God, but the context indicates the primary hermeneutic purpose and how the descriptions of God are merely supportive of this purpose.

Anselm defends the eternity of God he also defends that God creates everything,¹⁸ permeates all and sustains all that exists,¹⁹ and expresses compassion.²⁰ Since God in relationship to the world is the way God reveals Himself in the Bible, it is also true that we should say these revealed statements of God as well. However, Anselm is not contradicting himself in these claims for he acknowledges and expresses the lack of pathos ontologically within God and the clear compassionate results of the salvation, which God provides for us.²¹ God is relationally temporal even though He is ontologically eternal. In fact, since time is the relationship to sequence, the very fact that God is related to the creation as source draws God automatically into relationship to this very sequence of the creation, and thus relationally into time. This temporal relationship is best understood for God as everlasting.

The Biblical authors express that God's life is without beginning and end in ways described as everlasting in time. William Craig suggested that God was eternal until creation in which God became temporal as everlasting.²² However, God cannot first be timeless and then later be temporal, for then God's timeless phase is earlier than His temporal phase, and whatever is earlier than something else is in time.²³ Additionally, such a change from timeless eternity to temporal everlastingness calls into question whether God was in fact eternal at all for this very language contradicts the level of immutability that an eternal God would be. The solution I propose does not have this problem for God remains timeless in eternity, and with regard to creation, God reveals Himself relationally to be in

¹⁸ Anselm, *Proslogium* 5, *Monologium* 8.

¹⁹ Anselm, *Proslogium* 20, *Monologium* 9.

²⁰ Anselm, *Proslogium* 8.

²¹ Anselm, *Proslogium* 8.

²² William Craig, meeting of the Evangelical Philosophical Society, Nov. 20, 1999.

²³ Brian Leftow, "Eternity," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Philip Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), p.259.

God's relationship to the creation in temporal ways that have a beginning in the creation act. In fact, the alliteration of the BRA sound of the first two words of the Hebrew Bible draw the concept of creation together with the beginning of time; time begins with God's creation (Gen. 1:1). So that God is ontologically eternal as a being but relationally everlasting once creation has occurred, as time begins. The Biblical text emphasizes the relational connection of God to the creation because of course the Bible is not trying to tell us everything about God, instead it focuses on God's relationship with His creation. The main point of the creation stories of Genesis 1-2 is to develop the privileged place humankind has within the creation in relation to God as the image of God, God's son and daughter, blessed and obligated for God's purposes.

Isaiah gives a helpful window into how God relates to time. Men, idols and false gods are in time and bound by it, while Yahweh is far superior, being beyond time and everlasting with time. Yahweh is the First and the Last, before Whom no being was formed and after Whom nothing will exist (Isa. 40:28; 41:4 43:10ff.; 44:6; 48:12). God is here contrasted with history in its totality ("and with the last I am still He").²⁴ This contrast includes a strong polemic against all other gods who are temporal. These declarations of Yahweh's transcendence over the world and time provided a basis for comfort within Judah's captivity as well as revealing Yahweh to be the God Who extends beyond the bounds of time. Isaiah uses verb tenses, which may even imply that the past, present and future of time is present to Yahweh. Christopher North explores this concept with passages such as Isaiah 48:4-5, which say, "I *knew* how stubborn you *are*" and "therefore I told you long ago," before the nation existed.²⁵ In these texts there is no clear development of God's eternity but Yahweh may be hinted at as being

²⁴ Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, p. 65.

creation as everlasting in time. There are no Biblical texts that clearly develop God's eternity beyond time. The primary word in the O.T. is *olam*, which means everlasting in time. It can mean everlasting in the past or ancient (e.g. Gen. 6:4; Dtr. 32:7; Pr. 22:28; Isa. 44:7). *ʿŌlām* can mean continuing as in a continuing covenant relationship between God and creation through time (e.g. Gen. 9:12, 16; 13:15; 17:7-19; 2 Sam. 7:13-29; 1 Chr. 16:17-41; Ps. 105:10; Isa. 61:8). From this temporal continuing everlastingness, God is said to be everlasting (Gen. 21:33; Pss. 41:13; 90:2; 93:2; 103:17; Isa. 40:28). God's reign is forever in time (Ex. 15:18; Pss. 10:16; 29:10; 45:6). God's mercy endures forever for those who are His (1 Chr. 16:34, 41; 2 Chr. 5:13; 7:3-6; Ezra 3:11; Ps. 100:5; 106:1 107:1; 118:1-29; 136:1-26). Likewise, God's righteousness is everlasting (Ps. 119:142-160; Pr. 10:25; Isa. 51:8). God's commitment to those who are His will be benefited from a salvation that lasts forever as well (Isa. 45:17; 51:6). A few instances of *qedem* also indicate that the mountains, the people of Israel and God as King are all ancient, from of old (Dtr. 33:15, 27; Ps. 74:2, 12). The N.T. words (*aiōn* and *aiōnios*) continue the everlasting in time meaning. They both stand for ancient as with or before the beginning of creation (Lk. 1:70; Jn. 9:32; Acts 3:21; 15:18; 2 Tim. 1:9). In this sense sometimes *aion* even stands for the world as the continuing creation (Mt. 13:22-49; 1 Tim. 6:17). Our God is blessed forever (Rm. 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 1 Tim. 1:17). May God's glory and dominion be forever (1 Tim. 1:17; 2 Tim. 2:10; 4:18; Heb. 1:8, 13, 21; 1 Pet. 5:11; 2 Pet. 1:11; 3:18; Rev. 1:6). Additionally, *aiōn* conveys that God is alive forever (Rev. 1:18; 4:9-10; 5:14; 15:7). There are also two instances in which *aidios* develops everlasting chains of judged angels and God's everlasting power (Rom. 1:20; Jude 6). This is the Biblical evidence that portrays that God is an everlasting God.

²⁵ Christopher North, *The Second Isaiah* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 180-81

and it is also our experience that only the living give life. However the Biblical text develops that God is the living God more in the sense of interacting with the creation in time. That is "God is alive"²⁶ (*hāyâ*, *zāō*) means that He interacts with the creation sequence in time unlike lifeless idols, which do not. The statement that God is alive (*hāyâ*) is synonymous with saying that God is soul (*nephesh*).²⁷ He is vibrant, active and acts in the midst of human situations. Special emphasis on the living (*hāyâ*) quality of God is developed within the former prophets of Samuel and Kings, and the latter prophets of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. *Nephesh* has a special emphasis in Jeremiah as referring to God. *Zāō* has special emphasis in Hebrews warnings and hope. Perhaps the precarious situations and the obvious need to trust God highlights God as alive to meet the need. However, God is developed as alive from nineteen O.T. books and eight N.T. books. That God lives forever is developed as a contextual model to inform the believer that they will live forever with Him (Dan. 12:2, 7 and John 6:51-59).

So the Biblical presentation of God is that He is everlasting. There is no problem with such an everlasting God entering time to create, incarnate, present Himself as theophany, to interact with creatures in time, and to respond to what the creatures are doing as well. This is all part of God's everlasting relationship with creation, which in no way violates or alters His eternity. When issues of tense are raised (like Can God know now, or Did God do something, or Will He

²⁶ Num. 14:21, 28; Dtr. 5:26; 32:40; Josh. 3:10; Judg. 8:19; Ruth 3:13; 1 Sam. 14:39, 45; 17:26, 36; 19:6; 20:3, 21; 25:26, 34; 26:10, 16; 28:10; 29:6; 2 Sam. 2:27; 4:9; 12 5; 14:11; 15:21; 22:47; 1 Ki. 1:29; 2:24; 17:1, 12; 18:10, 15; 22:14; 2 Ki. 3:14; 4:30; 5:16, 20; 19:4, 16; 2 Chr. 18:13; Job 19:25; 27:2; Pss. 18:41; 42:2; 84:2; Isa. 37:4, 17; 49:18; Jer. 4:2; 5:2; 10:10; 12:16; 16:14-15; 22:24; 23:7-8, 36; 38:16; 44:26; 46:18; Ezek. 5:11; 14:16, 18, 20; 16:48; 17:16, 19; 18:3; 20:3, 31,33; 33:11, 27; 34:8; 35:6, 11; Dan. 6:20, 26; 12:7; Hos. 1:10; 4:15; Zeph. 2:9; Mt. 16:16; 26:63; Jn. 6:57, 69; Rm. 9:26; 2 Cor. 3:3; 6:16; 1 Thes. 1:9; 1 Tim. 3:15; 4:14; Heb. 3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22; Rev. 7:2; 15:7.

²⁷ Lev. 26:11, 30; 1 Sam 21:35; Ps. 11:5; Pr. 6:16; Isa. 1:14; 42:1; Jer. 5:9, 29; 6:8; 9:9; 12:7; 13:17; 51:14; Ezek. 25:18; Amos 6:8.

meaningfully describe the everlasting relationship, which God has with creation; such concepts would not be meaningful with regard to eternity since no temporal sequence and tense exists in eternity. The omniscience of God as it relates through God's everlastingness means that sequence would be known in God's relationship with creation and in that relationship tensed statements become meaningful for God. An example of this has to do with the Biblical statement of foreknowledge. That is, foreknowledge is an intimate knowledge which God has in His everlasting relationship with creation which because He knows it, actually determines what will happen long before we humans choose for it to occur (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2, 20). Because of this, the concept of foreknowledge actually raises more complex concerns for the relationship of determinism and free-will, so I will handle it in the chapter, "God's Sovereignty and Human Free Will."²⁸

The Bible (which is primarily develops the everlasting relationship of God to the creation) presents God as a Being interacting in time in tensed ways. Tensed statements would be inappropriate of eternity but are quite appropriate of everlastingness. The primary passage that the openness of God calls us to examine concerning this tensed language is Genesis 18. Proponents of openness would like to call our attention to statements like:

The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know. (Gen. 18:20-21)

It looks like God will in the future of this statement obtain firsthand experiential knowledge that He does not in fact know yet, therefore the future is seen by them as open as to whether a requisite number will be righteous to save Sodom and

²⁸ Cf. Chapter, "God's Sovereignty and Human Free Will" in this book.

his response and not just the openness point that God progressively comes to know the evidence (Gen. 18:17, 20, 23). The traditional sovereign view will also respond that if God is as the openness view claims, then God does not know some present and past knowledge about the conditions of Sodom and Gomorrah. This point catches the openness view in an inconsistency, since openness proponents claim that God is omniscient about the past and present. At this point, we need to break in and point out that both traditions are using the text for their own purposes and ignoring the feature that Moses as the human author is emphasizing in this text. Texts are to be understood with their authorial contextual emphases and not by our biases of models to make sense of God or our existential context.²⁹ Moses (as author) has just underscored that nothing is too difficult for God, so impregnating Abraham's Sarah is no problem for God. Now with the possibility of the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah looming large, the issue of this passage becomes *righteousness*. It is a subject that God raises by describing Abraham as being chosen to "keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice" (Gen. 18:19). Abraham, the would-be righteous one, then responds with a reply which focuses on the righteousness of God: "Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" The textual issue is then that the righteous God shows Himself to be righteous in a satisfying way for His righteous servant Abraham and Moses' readers who have the text, which selectively crops the account of the event to emphasize this righteous theme; "Far be it from Thee to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from Thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal

²⁹ This hermeneutical method and the orientation to the authorial context to inform Biblical theology rather than the tradition of a theological hermeneutic is explained in Douglas Kennard, *The Relationship Between Epistemology, Hermeneutics, Biblical Theology and Contextualization*, pp. 124-48; 181-85.

Abraham responds back whether God would save the city if the fifty righteous would lack five. The response goes back and forth between God and Abraham until God affirms that Sodom would be preserved if ten righteous would be found in her. Chapter nineteen continues the account showing that at best three righteous could be found in that Lot and his two daughters are delivered Gen. 19:15-29; 2 Peter 2:7-9). Even these three fall short of Abraham's pattern of righteousness as chapter eighteen and nineteen are compared for hospitality, obedience, and a focus on the preservation of self or others. Above all God shows Himself to be the righteous One Who preserves the righteous, while destroying the wicked. If we use this text for other than this textual emphasis we show that we are using it for our biases. This means that if we wish to get to know the everlasting God's involvement with the creation then we need to consider texts that develop this theme such as Psalm 139 or Isaiah 40-48. These passages will be developed in other chapters, herein.

God's relationship with the creation is shown by occasional comments in which He responds and interacts with events of the creation. For example, in Genesis 22 Abraham is tested by God to experientially verify whether God or the promise of God takes precedence in Abraham's life. When Abraham showed his obedience in attempting to offer Isaac, God responded, "Now I know that you fear God" (Gen. 22:12). It is an appropriate comment in responding to the situation but the fact of Abraham's obedience had been apparent for years. Additionally, there is a standard response in which God reacts to the situation of rampant idolatry as in Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5 and 32:35. After pointing out Israel's sin God identifies that such idolatry was not what He had commanded, and because these instances of idolatry and child sacrifice were so horrendous, God admits that these practices had not entered His mind. These comments should not be read as a lack

emphasizing that the disobedience of Israel was way beyond the command of God. Likewise, some comments of God include “perhaps” as an indication that some Jews might get the prophetic point of their rebellion and repent as a remnant while Israel as a whole is heading for captivity in their rebellion (Jer. 26:3; Ezek. 12:3). The contexts around these “perhaps” comments include God’s certain declaration that the captivity is coming quickly and that it would last seventy years (Jer. 25-26; Ezek.12). So God knows the future and interacts with the present in a way that shows that He is relationally committed to His creation.

God’s relationship to creation as everlasting permits God to express change with respect to the changing creation and remain immutable with regard to His righteous character. God is the good and righteous source of all good, with no variation or shifting shadow in His character (James 1:17). We can count on God’s consistent goodness so that we should not blame Him for temptations or sins in which we entangle ourselves. Because He has established creation this way means that our sin results in judgment (James 1:13-16). John Sanders challenges the claim that God knows the future with consistent purposes by his appeal to 1 Samuel 15:11.³⁰ In this verse God relates to Samuel that He regrets that He made Saul king for he has rebelled and been disobedient. This verse sets up the context in which Samuel must tell Saul of His rejection as king. This scene ends with Saul seizing Samuel’s robe and tearing it, which Samuel turns into a metaphor for the situation: “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to your neighbor who is better than you, and also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should

³⁰ This challenge and others like it are developed at some length in John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1998).

of a king in Israel, but God's grief as a response from the everlasting and immutable character of God shows that God does emotionally respond to sin and His divine consistent response is to reject the rebel in his unrepentant sinning condition, and send him away in judgment. God in His everlasting relationship with creation responds to the creation with emotion and consistent character and purpose. However in the narrative this looks like divine blessing upon Saul while he is faithful and divine curse in Saul's rebellion. It is to texts such as this that openness points, which include statements of God's repenting. For example, Genesis 6:5-7 presents an evaluation of humans prior to the Noachic flood that recounts Yahweh seeing man's wickedness to such an extent that He is grieved in heart and repents from His blessing to now destroy the world in judgment. Certainly, Yahweh is consistent with His nature for blessing His creation until in their disobedience they transgressed His standard (e.g. Gen. 2:17; 3:14-20; 4:7-12). The text does not comment on this being a plan of Yahweh for it leaves it as a description from the viewpoint of the changing historical narrative and such phenomenological language is to be expected in a narrative account. Now that man's thoughts were only evil continually, God's destroying judgment is to be expected, and judgment comes with God's consistency in the flood.

Our God is ontologically eternal and immutable as a Necessary Being, while this same God relates to the creation once it begins in time with everlasting

³¹ Other texts also show the consistency of God in carrying out His purposes whether they be blessing grounded in His choice or a consistent response of rejecting into judgment. E.g. Num. 23:19; Ezek. 24:14.

responds to us with blessing or curse, and mercy or wrath. When God enters time such as in creation, theophany, or incarnation, it is through God's everlasting relationship with creation, all the while remaining fully eternal within Himself.

³² As stated earlier, it is in respect to Jesus Christ's everlasting immutable character that Hebrews 13:8 declares that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." This helps us to see that there is real reassurance in the consistent character of Christ. This means that the kenotic view of the divinity of Christ emptying Himself of His divine attributes so that He could become incarnate that Satori proposed in 1831 is excluded as well as the evangelical softened version of a willing non-use of divine attributes which He continued to possess, for both options describe essential change which is impossible for an immutable being. For a further discussion of this see the chapter "A Few Philosophical and Biblical Theology Problems with Statements of the Trinity," in this book.