

Great God, How Infinite Art Thou!

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Great God, how infinite art thou!
How poor and weak are we!
Let the whole race of creatures bow,
and pay their praise to thee.

Thy throne eternal ages stood,
ere seas or stars were made:
thou art the ever-living God,
were all the nations dead.

Eternity, with all its years,
stands present in thy view;
to thee there's nothing old appears;
to thee there's nothing new.

Our lives through various scenes are drawn,
and vexed with trifling cares;
while thine eternal thought moves on
thine undisturbed affairs.

Great God, how infinite art thou!
How poor and weak are we!
Let the whole race of creatures bow,
and pay their praise to thee.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

God's Self-Existence: Part Two

Kevin T. Bauder

The book of Job includes a conversation, spread over several chapters, about what God needs from humans. Job speaks, then Eliphaz replies. Job speaks again, then Elihu answers. Job never replies to Elihu because God interrupts. God challenges Job with these words at Job 41:11.

“Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.

These words are only another way of stating what Eliphaz and Elihu have already said. God owes nothing to anyone; people can never place God in their debt. Our righteous deeds never give us a claim upon God.

Why not? Because they add nothing to God that He did not already enjoy: “Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.” By the same token, our evil deeds cannot take anything from God that is rightfully His: “Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.” God already is all that He is and He already has all that He needs to be Who He is. God is all that He is *in Himself*.

This truth is probably what undergirds, the divine Name, “I AM THAT I AM,” together with its shortened form, YHWH. God's life is entirely in Himself; He owes His being to nothing outside Himself. By the same token, every one of God's attributes is in Himself. None of them are given to Him. They are simply who He is. Furthermore, God's joy is in Himself. It is not given to Him, it is in Him. For God to *be* is for Him to rejoice.

Nothing that we do can reduce God. Nothing that we do can enhance God. Nothing that we do can either diminish or improve the quality of God's life. God is all that He is. He would still be all that He is if He had never created. He would still be all that He is if He had never redeemed. God never does anything out of a sense of need. God lacks nothing.

Here ends the conversation *within* the book of Job. Faced with this truth of God's self-existence, and realizing his own insignificance, Job repented in dust and ashes. Yet the conversation does not stop here. The apostle Paul continues it, using this very text in explaining God's self-sufficiency in his great doxology in Romans 11:33–36.



In the Nick of Time is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Permission is granted to duplicate for personal and church use.

www.centalseminary.edu | info@centralseminary.edu
900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

³⁴For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?

³⁵Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?

³⁶For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Here Paul quotes God's words to Job. He applies them to the fullness of God's wisdom and knowledge, and he links them with a citation from Isaiah 10:13–14. Wisdom and knowledge are among the things that no one has ever added to God. For God to be is for God to be infinitely wise. God's omniscience and wisdom are in and from Himself. His knowledge is immediate and complete. No one ever taught God anything. He never learns anything, never reasons anything to a conclusion, never discovers anything. No one ever gives counsel to God. No one ever can.

God's attributes are all linked, all interconnected. In fact, the connections are far closer than we imagine. They are inseparable. When we study theology we usually split God's attributes up and parcel them out so that we can talk about them, but God is not that way. God simply is His attributes, and they are Him. He never asks Himself whether He should act out of His love or out of His holiness, out of His justice or out of His grace. He simply acts as He is. God is all that God is all the time.

Consequently, we must never pit God's attributes against each other, and we must never think that He has one, controlling attribute. They are all controlling attributes. He is all of them, all the time, to an infinite degree, seamlessly, harmoniously, transparently, without division or contradiction.

But Scripture actually goes one step further. When speaking to the philosophers on Mars Hill (Acts 17:24 – 25), Paul said,

²⁴"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;

²⁵nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

God does not even need our worship. While we ought to worship God, our worship does not add anything to Him that He does not already possess. He does not need temples or praise or anything else that human agency can present to Him.

Then why would a God who is self-existent, whose being is eternal, whose wisdom is immeasurable, whose joy is unquenchable, whose simplicity is unimaginable—why would such a God create us or redeem us? Paul answers this question best with his thrice-repeated phrase in Ephesians 1: God does it "according to the good pleasure of His will." God chose to cre-

ate and to redeem, not because He needed to, and not because He needed us, but simply because it pleased Him to do these mighty deeds. God made us and saved us, not as an afterthought, and not because He discovered some deficiency, but as part of a plan that is coeternal with His wisdom and knowledge.

We do not worship God because He needs us. We worship Him because we need Him. He is the One who gives us life and breath and all things. He is the Lord of heaven and earth. All goodness is found in Him. Without Him we would never have been, and without Him we could not so much as maintain our own being.

Why do we worship Him? Simply because He is. We admire Him for what He is—all His attributes at once, without division or contradiction. We worship Him because He is worthy.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
