

Don't Limit God

God's time is not the same as our time

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." – **Rev 1:8**

"God never began to exist and he never will go out of existence." – **Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy**

God exists through unending time and an everlasting duration. Scripture tells us that God is - and was - and is to come - His goings forth are from of old, from everlasting to everlasting - forever and ever - the Ancient of Days - from before the ages of the ages - from ancient times - He continues/remains/lives/endures forever – He's immortal - the Everlasting Father - alive forevermore - continually - God's years never end - and of His kingdom there will be no end.

The common belief that God created time and therefore exists outside of time (the "classic view") also implies that everything in time has already been decided from His perspective. It is based on the theory of Greek philosophers that time is transitory (not lasting, enduring, permanent, or eternal i.e. created and therefore destroyable) but God is not, meaning God cannot exist within time, so God has to exist outside of time, therefore "time" is a separate creation of which God simultaneously knows all past, present and future events in one eternal moment.

I can understand how and why this classic view comes about. The Bible is full of prophecies that God has revealed to humans, which point to a fixed timeline. It causes people to try to work out exactly when events will happen, especially Jesus' return. Acts 17 v 30b and 31 says that "[God] commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has **set a day** when He will judge the inhabited world in righteousness by a Man whom He has appointed and destined for that task, and He has provided credible proof to everyone by raising Him from the dead." Psalm 139 v 16 says "Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be", which makes it sound like our personal timeline is predestined. Again Revelation 13 v 8: "Everyone living on earth would worship the beast. These are all the people since the beginning of the world whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life" suggests predestination.

I love (pretty much) all things Sci-Fi and one such programme is based on two timelines, twenty years apart, running concurrently where two of the characters can communicate with each other via a ham radio. This is explained (away) by "quantum physics" which in simple terms "allows for particles to be in two states at the same time". The person in the future timeline tells the person in the past timeline what they need to do to alter events, supposedly for the better but at the end of the series, the key accomplishments are still the same; the way in which they happened has changed.

My friend Neil (among others) encourages us to pray for things that have already happened that we don't know the outcome of. The classic view tells us that at the very same moment, God knows we are praying and can also affect something that's already happened. With an "out of time" perspective that relies on predestination, I struggled to make sense of this (but was happy to do it anyway!).

But what if this concept is embraced with an "in time" perspective? God created matter and space, light and life but **not** time. He is just not constrained by "time" as we think of it.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light and God separated the light [distinguishing it] from the darkness. And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. Then God said, 'Let there be light-bearers (sun, moon, stars) in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be useful for signs and for marking seasons, days, and years.'" – **Genesis 1:1-19 (paraphrased)**

- 1) "In the beginning": this does not necessarily mean "when time began" – it's the beginning of creation and our story, like saying "once upon a time".
- 2) "one day": God is big, powerful, amazing and more than capable enough to do whatever he chooses in one day, so it is perfectly acceptable to take this literally. Some people look at it in conjunction with Psalm 90 v 4, which says "To you, a thousand years is like yesterday, like a few hours in the night." It means that the theory of evolution complements the creation story in Genesis, rather than contradicting it.
- 3) "let [the light-bearers] be useful for signs and for marking seasons, days, and years": again this does not mean that time itself was created. God was thinking ahead to the animals and people He would make, and gave physical symbols to enable them to mark time; He didn't need to use such things!

Within the Hebraic (Biblical) understanding of time, we must think of the past as what God and people have completed, and the future as what God and people have not yet done (incomplete). In this view, there's no need for God to exist outside of time because there are obviously things that God has not yet completed. Also, if there isn't a pre-settled timeline, we can more easily understand how God can interact with His creation in the present moment without one predetermined future. The God of the Bible is not a being frozen in a timeless moment. He's a God who moves with us, and interacts with us, as we move from a completed past into a future that is open to a realm of possibilities. - See more at: <http://reknew.org/2016/09/god-exist-outside-time>

So, going back to Neil's reassurance that it's worth praying for things that have already taken place, from an "in time" perspective, we can agree because it is possible for God to work in a situation, knowing that within the realm of possibilities, we were going to pray retrospectively! Ironically then, the classic view of not containing God within time is actually limiting Him to only work within the boundaries of a fixed timeline.

In (probably my favourite film series) "Back to the Future" there is one date in time that is pivotal to lead character's life and the first time he travels through time (in a time machine built into a DeLorean car at 88mph using 1.21GW of flux capacitor power) to 12th November 1955, he has to ensure his parents fall in love with each other so that he can be born! The second time he visits this date is to recover a record book that he bought in the future that has been stolen by the future version of the villain who has "borrowed" the time machine to give the book to his past self so that he knows all the results of every sporting event that will happen until 2015 and can use it to become the richest man alive! There's timelines spewing off all over the place with disastrous consequences for the lead character – what a mess!!

God's plan to save the lost was "preordained before the foundation of the world." We read in 1 Peter 1 vv 19-20 that "You were bought with the precious blood of Christ's death. He was a pure and perfect sacrificial Lamb. Christ was chosen before the world was made, but he was shown to the world in these last times for you." In other words, the fall of mankind did not destroy God's purpose in creating mankind. God is omniscient (all knowing) and nothing takes Him unaware nor is He unprepared for any event. God does not go running after Satan trying to sort out the mess he creates. Rather, the blood of Jesus has already taken care of it. God didn't want Adam and Eve to sin and cause Him to throw them out of the Garden of Eden but equally, He expected it would happen because they had free will. Jesus was **not** plan B! God effectively took out an insurance policy before creating mankind. That insurance is the blood of Jesus and it covers everything. Jesus' death on the cross was not an afterthought, rushed through after the event (of mankind falling into sin). It had been settled before.

God was there in the past; He knows what's happened. He's here in the present; He knows exactly what's happening now, and He'll be there in the future. He is able to [carry out His purpose and] do superabundantly more than all that we dare ask or think [infinitely beyond our greatest prayers, hopes, or dreams], according to His power that is at work within us. So in the grand scheme of things, it is not vital to our salvation if we view God as being "in time" or "outside time" as long as we appreciate his endlessness, power and knowledge. And that doesn't mean we have to understand it either!

God isn't restrained by boundaries

Neither men nor angels can be omnipresent (present everywhere at the same time), even in heaven, for that means they would have to be divine. We have to be in one place at one time.

In front of the throne and on each side of it there were four living beings. They had eyes all over them, in front and in back. The first living being was like a lion. The second was like a bull. The third had a face like a man. The fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of these four living beings had six wings. They were covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day and night they never stopped saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God All-Powerful. He always was, he is, and he is coming."

These living beings were giving glory and honour and thanks to the one who sits on the throne, the one who lives forever and ever. And every time they did this, the 24 elders bowed down before the one who sits on the throne. They worshiped him who lives forever and ever.

Revelation 4:6b-10a

The same limitation applies with timelessness. If God and heaven existed outside of time the angels before His throne and the men ministering to Him forever would also have to be timeless, and therefore divine. God however *is* omnipresent – not limited by flesh and blood – all places at all times; He doesn't need a break.

Isaiah 40:28 – “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become tired or grow weary; there is no searching of His understanding.”

God does not have limited brain power or attention. In fact, He has infinite (unlimited) brain power and attention. God can listen to each and every one of a billion people talking to him as though EACH ONE were the ONLY one. He doesn't have to spread his attention out to cover each individual person. So, when you talk to God you rest assured that ALL his attention is on you, as though you were the only person he created. And the same is true for each and every one of the other billion people talking to him at that very same moment!

There is a character in the film **Men in Black 3** called Griffin, who is the last member of the Archanan race with the unique ability to foresee the infinite potential outcomes that are dependent on the actions taken in any given scenario. In one scene, he fails to predict the villain's arrival and then gets taken away on the villain's motorcycle. In the closing scene, Griffin tells the audience that everything turned out alright that this is his new favourite moment in human history, then quickly predicts an impending asteroid collision with the Earth because the lead character forgot to leave a tip for the waiter. The crisis is averted when our hero returns and leaves some money on the bench and Griffin lets out a sign of relief, remarking "That was a close one."

God is infinitely intelligent (omniscient); he does not need to focus his attention on a limited set of possibilities as we do. He is infinitely attentive to each and every possibility, so whichever one occurs, it is true to say that God has been preparing for it. Our limited intelligence and wisdom only allows us to consider a few possibilities at a time and we can only say something is certain when we feel we have control of it.

God is not bound by budgets, deadlines and laws as we are. If He wants it to happen, He'll make a way despite our perceived limitations of money, time and red-tape. Hence the sayings “all in God's timing” and “God moves in mysterious ways”.

God's will is not the same as our wants

Jesus taught us to pray that his Father's will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). This teaching only makes sense if God's will is not already being accomplished on the earth. Furthermore, it is only a necessary teaching if our prayers actually help bring about God's will on earth.

God (having complete or unlimited knowledge, awareness, or understanding; perceiving all things) knows the future partly as a realm of possibilities - unsettled until it becomes resolved with our free choices. This means that He is not all-controlling but neither is He out of control. God is omnipotent – almighty and infinite in power, however, we must acknowledge that He sometimes changes His mind and what He originally intended to happen.

"Then the LORD said, 'I have heard many times that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are very evil. I will go and see if they are as bad as I have heard. Then I will know for sure.'

Then Abraham approached him and asked, 'Will you destroy the good people while you are destroying those who are evil? What if there are fifty good people in that city? Will you still destroy it? Surely you will save the city for the fifty good people living there. Surely you would not destroy the city. You would not destroy fifty good people to kill those who are evil. If that happened, those who are good would be the same as those who are evil—both would be punished. As the judge of the whole world, surely you would do the right thing!'

Then the LORD said, 'If I find fifty good people in the city of Sodom, I will save the whole city.'

Then Abraham said, 'Lord, please don't be angry with me, but let me bother you this one last time. If you find ten good people there, what will you do?'

The Lord said, 'If I find ten good people in the city, I will not destroy it.'

That evening the two angels came to the city of Sodom. Lot was sitting near the city gates and saw them. The Lord was kind to Lot and his family.

The angel said to Lot, 'I cannot destroy Sodom until you are safely in [Zoar].'

God destroyed the cities in the valley, but he remembered what Abraham had said.

*So God sent Lot away from those cities before destroying them." – **Genesis 18:17 – 19:29 (paraphrased)***

The Lord said to Moses, "I have seen these people, and I know that they are very stubborn. They will always turn against me. So now let me destroy them in anger. Then I will make a great nation from you."

But Moses begged the Lord his God, "Lord, don't let your anger destroy your people. You brought them out of Egypt with your great power and strength. But if you destroy your people, the Egyptians will say, 'God planned to do bad things to his people. That is why he led them out of Egypt. He wanted to kill them in the mountains. He wanted to wipe them off the earth.' So don't be angry with your people. Please change your mind! Don't destroy them. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. These men served you, and you used your name to make a promise to them. You said, 'I will make your people as many as the stars in the sky. I will give your people all this land as I promised. This land will be theirs forever.'"

So the Lord felt sorry for the people. He did not do what he said he might do—he did not destroy them.

Exodus 32:9-14

God's love is unchanging so to maintain that constant, he allows our prayers to influence which range of possibilities come to pass. Although He alone knows the absolute best outcome and best way of reaching that outcome, He does not force us down one fixed route like robots; He leads us in the paths of righteousness as a Good Shepherd.

Jeremiah 29:11-13 (AMPC)

"For I know the thoughts and plans that I have for you, says the Lord, "thoughts and plans for welfare and peace and not for evil, to give you hope in your final outcome. Then you will call upon Me, and you will come and pray to Me, and I will hear and heed you.

Then you will seek Me, inquire for, and require Me [as a vital necessity] and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart."

Jesus, being fully human, did not *want* to die an horrific, unjustified death but also being fully God, He knew that it had to happen. The *will* of God the Father for the earth had to supersede the current want.

Matthew 26:39b – [Jesus] fell face down and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible [that is, consistent with Your will], let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.”

We may never understand why our prayers for people to be healed or dictators to be overthrown or financial stability are not answered in the way that we want. This does not give us permission to stop praying, or never pray in the first place! As long as those prayers are prayed according to God’s will, they are answered in the way they need to be and we have to accept that.

Then Jesus taught the followers that they should always pray and never lose hope. He used this story to teach them: “Once there was a judge in a town. He did not care about God. He also did not care what people thought about him. In that same town there was a woman whose husband had died. She came many times to this judge and said, ‘There is a man who is doing bad things to me. Give me my rights!’ But the judge did not want to help the woman. After a long time, the judge thought to himself, ‘I don’t care about God. And I don’t care about what people think. But this woman is bothering me. If I give her what she wants, then she will leave me alone. But if I don’t give her what she wants, she will bother me until I am sick.’”
The Lord said, “Listen, there is meaning in what the bad judge said. God’s people shout to him night and day, and he will always give them what is right.”

Luke 18:1-7a

Summary

We cannot and must not confine God to our level of understanding. Our faith has to be based in the trust of our limitless God: unlimited in love, power, wisdom and possibilities.

Job 11:7-9 (AMPC)

Can you find out the deep things of God, or can you by searching find out the limits of the Almighty [explore His depths, ascend to His heights, extend to His breadths, and comprehend His infinite perfection]?

His wisdom is as high as the heights of heaven! What can you do? It is deeper than Sheol (the place of the dead)! What can you know?

Longer in measure [and scope] is it than the earth, and broader than the sea.

God’s timing is different to ours, not because He is disconnected from time but because He views it differently. So our prayers are **not** worthless – they are **necessary**. Often His answer is “wait”, “not yet”, “hold on”, “ask me again at a later date”. When we approach God with a need, it is not our job to work out how God will provide the answer. Sometimes another “thing” has to be put in place before the “thing” we are praying about can be addressed, which is why it’s important to be within God’s will.