The following paper is the fruition of almost two years of thought. I first posted an internet article on Sovereign Grace Preterism entitled, “A Proposal: An End to History”, back in 2008. That met with some comments, for and against, but it was clear that most who responded, including Jason Bradfield and Mike Grace, two of my closest friends and co-founders of Reign of Christ Ministries, more or less disagreed with the notion of an end to history within the Full Preterist (FP) scheme. I myself had previously, but loosely, argued for a never ending world history, usually quoting Is9.7 for support. We will examine that passage in full later along with other prooftexts for the eternality of time and history.

As of the last few months, however, I have revisited this idea again, and posted yet another proposal in the popular FP Yahoo!Group, Preterist Cosmos, founded by friend and co-author of House Divided: Bridging the Gap in Reformed Eschatology – A Preterist Response to When Shall These Things Be?(2009 – with co-authors Edward Hassett, Mike Sullivan, and myself), David Green. This met with even stronger opposition amongst FP.

My arguments were derived, not from eschatology, but from the nature of the knowledge of God and the question of one of the incommunicable attributes of God: His infinite essence. In order, then to test the theory of FP interpretation and its insistence on a never ending history on earth, and, more to the point, a never ending multiplication of human beings (infinite procreation), I applied the standard procedures of any objective attempt to explore whether or not this would run into serious problems with other areas of doctrine; most notably, the doctrine of the knowledge of God (omniscience). It is to my conclusion that it does run into serious problems.

The Challenge
Dr. Kenneth Gentry has long been a thorn in the side of the FP movement. He was a principle author in *When Shall These Things Be? A Reformed Response to Hyper-Preterism* (Ed., Keith Mathison, Presbyterian and Reformed, 2004), which the above mentioned authors and myself responded to in *House Divided.* Gentry notes that any doctrinal system must be coherent (6, *When?*) so that “when serious error arises in one area of doctrine, it can easily and quickly spread to other areas” (6). True. Every system cannot be perfectly free of error, of course, but Gentry highlights “serious” error in a given system. The FP should also agree with this assessment. Of the several grievances, in Gentry’s judgment, that he lists, one of them is “the consummation” (8), in which FP affirms a never ending world (quoting John Noe and Ed Stevens). He does not spend much time on this subject except to note that FP affirms it. Gentry spends the rest of his time writing about the authority of the Creeds, which, as I believe the authors of *House Divided* rightly pointed out, comes dangerously close to a denial of the supreme authority of the Scriptures over all our interpretations, regardless of how ever long they have been held, or how many have held to them. FP affirms the near perfect statements of the Westminster Confession of Faith chapter one on this issue. That chapter is the best summarization of the doctrine of sola scriptura.

Gentry did, however, spend a little more time on the issue of eternal history in FP in his book, *He Shall Have Dominion* (ICE, 1997). There, in Appendix C: “A Critique of Hyper-Preterism”, Gentry wrote that FP “eternalize time, by allowing history to continue forever.” That is, God will deal “with a universe in which sin will dwell forever and ever. There is no final conclusion” (560). Mathison quotes this section in his book, *Postmillennialism* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1999, 240), but does not add to what Gentry wrote, other than FP has not answered this charge.

C. Jonathin Seraiah wrote a little more on this subject in his book against FP, *The End of All Things* (Canon Press, 1999). But, after thoroughly reading his complaints, he concludes that “It is an incredible insult to Christ’s work on the cross to say the curses of the fall will never be completely done away with” (51). He does not explain why, except on the assumption that his interpretation of “the fall” is correct.

I could go on listing the objections against the eternality of history in FP thinking, but they have been, I think, for the most part countered. The “curses” of God upon Adam are not intrinsic to rocks, stones, trees and dirt. God, in the covenant with Moses, stated quite plainly that if Israel obeyed Torah, then he would remove all the curses (Dt 28). Curses are judgements from God, as are blessings, and there is nothing intrinsic in the curses that God cannot remove. As for the curse of all curses, separation from God, that has been effectively removed in Christ. The FP has made, I think, a strong case that physical death was not part of the curse, but that spiritual death was. The concept of “spiritual death” or “separation from a right standing with God” was not intrinsic to physical death – it is what made physical
death a thing to be feared precisely because one died without a right, eternal standing with God (this was the “sting” of death). One died without “eternal life” with God. FP have drawn from several non-FP scholars on this point from Walter Brueggemann, N.T. Wright, J. C. Bekker, Philip S. Johnston, L. R. Bailly and others who have more or less denied that “natural death” was a “curse”. That is, natural death, or transient death, was a part of the creation before Adam “fell”. Adam would have naturally died, but with a right standing with God, having honored the Law of the Garden, and having eaten from the Tree of eternal life. In this sense, Adam would not have “ever died.” Today, it is argued among the FP, believers “shall not ever die, no, not ever” since eternal life has been “restored” to us “in Christ”. Though we still naturally die, there is no “sting” in death.

What is more telling, is that Seraiah, because of his wrong interpretation, in our estimation, of Adam’s “death”, asserts that earth “was supposed to last forever” (51). This would mean that God’s original intention was not to ever “end” history, but that sinless mankind would have been “fruitful and multiplied” forever. Apparently, then, there can be no objection with positing that the earth “remains forever” (Eccl 1.4). FP, thus, have found ways around these objections.

A more consistent approach is found in N.T. Wright (N.T. Wright, Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church, Harper Collins, 2008). Wright acknowledges that “death” was “always part of the natural transience of the good creation” (Wright, 95). Adam’s disobedience brought about a “second dimension” to death, “which the Bible sometimes calls “spiritual death”” (95). In his commentary on Romans (NIB, Volume X, AbingdonPress), Wright states, “One potentially helpful way of understanding the entry of death into the world through the first human sin is to see “death” here as more than simple natural decay and corruption of all created order. The good creation was nevertheless transient: evening and morning, the decay and new life of autumn and spring, pointed on to a future, a purpose, which Genesis implies it was the job of the human race to bring about. All that lived in God’s original world would decay and perish, but “death” in that sense carried no sting. The primal pair were, however, threatened with a different sort of thing altogether: a “death” that would result from sin, and involve expulsion from the garden (Gen 2:17). This death is a darker force, opposed to creation itself, unmaking that which is good, always threatening to drag the world back toward chaos. Thus when humans turned away in sin from the creator as the one whose image they were called to bear, what might have been a natural sleep acquired a sense of shame and threat. The corruption of this darker “death” corresponded all to closely to, and seemed to be occasioned by, that turning away from the source of life, and that turning instead to lifeless objects, which later generations would call idolatry” (Romans, 526).

For Wright, God’s original intention in creation was not the original creation itself before the fall of Adam, since this was “transient” in the first place. His purpose was to bring in the “good creation” into an even “better new creation” in eternity – a uniting of heaven and earth. This is a far more acceptable
consideration, but it does open the door for FP interpretations as well. Seraiah’s interpretation of an original, never ending history runs into the same problem of God’s infinite attributes that I believe FP does as will be shown. That is, is it ever to be supposed that, had not Adam sinned, life on earth would have continued “forever”? Wright answered, “no.” The creation was made already “transient”, which has nothing to do with being “cursed”. Natural decay is a quality of the cosmos that was set from day one. But, in order for the FP to make this move, it becomes hard to see how “decay” is “infinite” – which is a contradiction in terms.

Suffice it to say that despite the typical objections to a never ending history, the FP scheme was able to maneuver around them. As for the notion of “sin and evil” forever being, Jason Bradfield has shown that in some Evangelical conceptions of hell, like that of John Gerstner (Repent or Perish, Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996), sinners forever go on being punished in hell precisely because “the impenitence of the lost also continues throughout eternity” (61). As for earth-matter being eternal, in the modern Evangelical scheme, this present earth is transformed and renewed to become the inhabitable new planet forever for God’s elect (where all elements of natural decay are removed. This is not a restoration to Eden like conditions, but something far more pristine than Eden). Of course, the FP has no such transformation of the current earth, and this is where FP makes its case that transformation, renewal, restoration and like terms are “pneumatikos” (spiritual) in fulfillment, not in “psychikos” (natural). Ultimately, the goal of God’s plan of redemption was to bring man into Heaven itself to rule and reign with him forever – not on earth – but in Heaven. If we happen to reign on earth in terms of political influence, so be it, but this is in no way in “fulfillment” to the “spiritual” reign. It is merely a by-product. Thus, this present earth continues on forever much like in the Amillennialist conception that “[g]ood and evil will exist side by side” (Cox, William E., Amillennialism Today, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1966, 5). There have been some advocates in FP, such as myself, that the world is getting better. It is FP with a Postmillennial “kick.” In other words, for us, it was difficult to imagine that “the nations” would not gradually benefit from the arrival of the New Jerusalem on earth invisibly to replace the visible Old Jerusalem. Since we had all the time in the world, so to speak, the effects of the arrived cause were an “ongoing manifestation” of passages like Is65.17-ff and the like, producing Christianization throughout the world. What distinguished us from Postmillennialism, obviously, is that there was no “end” in terms of history. It just keeps going, and going, and going.

The Infinity of God

“Infinity” is not an easy term to define. The Presocratics from Anaximander to Zeno the Eleatic, to later from Aristotle to Augustine, have wrestled with it in relation to God and his attributes. For the Greek term, apeiron, it appears to be originally understood as “without boundary, limit, definition” (The Presocratics, Kirk, Raven, and Shodei, Cambridge, 1990, 110). “In classical Greek thought, including Plato and Aristotle, perfection was habitually identified with the finished, the well-defined or
determinate – i.e., the finite or limited. The infinite was identified with the indeterminate, the unfinished, the chaotic, the unintelligible, typified by unformed matter.” The term for “perfect” is telos, teleios – “end” or “limit” (W. Norris Clarke, S.J., Process Theology, Baker Books, 1989, 231). As Kirk, Raven and Shofield lay out all the texts of the Presocratics, it becomes clear that Zeno most utilized the contradictory notions of “infinity” in his famous Paradoxes (“Achilles and the Tortoise”, “The Flying Arrow”, etc.). Infinity by nature is undefined. It has no “telos” – no “teleology” or design, purpose or meaning.

So, how did the term come to be used of God? Certainly God is “Perfect”. Why would we not use the term “finite” to define Him? “The infinite is standardly conceived as that which is endless, unlimited, immeasurable. It also has theological connotations of absoluteness and perfection” (Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Infinity”, A.W. Moore). We have two definitions.

In mapping the intellectual territory on which the revaluation of infinity started to emerge in the first centuries of the Christian era, we have to take account, on the one side, of the internal monotheistic tendencies of the Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy that were in fact at loggerheads with the overall polytheistic ambience of the Greek world. On the other side we have to consider the ever more powerful Christianity that soon acquired rational ambitions leading it to base its religious truths on intellectual grounds, and, quite understandably, in doing so Christianity stretched out its arm for the rich sources of ancient thought. The junction accomplished in Christian theology between its monotheistic religion and Platonism is of primary importance for the explication of the new attitude towards infinity in the history of Western thought. As tangential phenomena of this major trend, we must view the reconsiderations of infinity induced by the mysteriosophic climate of Hellenism in the areas of Gnosticism and Hermetism” (“Infinity on the Threshold of Christianity: The Emergence of a Positive Concept out of Negativity”, Rein Undusk, 11).

Note the words “revaluation of infinity”, “new attitude towards infinity”, and “reconsiderations of infinity”. Christians redefined the Greek connotation. Undusk, like W. Norris Clarke, credit the Greek philosopher Plotinus for the influence on Christianity (by influence, I mean in a negative way that caused a sharpened positive assertion about the God of the Bible, see C. Van Til, A Christian Theology of Knowledge, Baker Books, 1969, 143-ff). This paper cannot be concerned with the rich theological and philosophical aspects of the development of “infinity” as it came to be positively asserted of God’s “essence” itself. In ancient Greek physics and philosophy, “infinity” was a pain. It was abhorred because of the negative problems, riddles, contradictions and paradoxes it contaminated progress with. Thus, it had a negative connotation to it. Plotinus makes a move towards a positive infinity. Christianity, and I am being way too painfully brief here, by the fourth century, began to wrestle with the concept. In the
monotheistic conception of God who “is above all” and “knows beginning from end”, the great Jewish philosopher, Philo, was already combining the Hebrew God with Greek terms in the first century (The Works of Philo, Trans. C. D. Yonge, Hendriksen Publishers, 1995, “On the Eternality of the World”). With the spread of the Gospel to “the Greeks”, it was inevitable that the Hebrew God would meet the Greek schools.

Suffice it to say, “God is infinite” has become a Christian staple for theology. It is important for our purposes to note the two definitions it employs, negatively, and positively. When we use it of God, we are speaking positively. Jumping ahead, into the Protestant period and the systematic theologies it would produce over the next several centuries, the term “infinity” was now regularly employed. Turretin, who succeeded Calvin, writing in the 17th century, defines the eternal attribute “infinity” as only belonging to God. Since all things were “created” (had a beginning), they cannot, by definition, be “infinite.” Turretin also distinguished between the two definitions mentioned above, namely that of “quantity” that was understood as being “infinitely divisible” and “quality” which is limited, but has no restrictions (Institutes of Enlenctic Theology, I. 3rd Topic, Q. 8.). Infinity, for God, is “absolute”. “The perfections in created things are included within certain limits beyond which they are not extended and all their activity has a certain sphere beyond which it cannot go.” God, on the other hand, “embraces every degree of every perfection without any limitation.” It is within this definition that “infinity” is applied to God. It is not applied in the sense of infinite divisible quantity – which, if that were the case, God’s knowledge must “learn” and he could not know the “end” of any knowledge, for there would always “be one more” fact to learn next to the last one. It is quite plain that we cannot apply the Greek, Presocratic definition to God, or to creatures.

Further, “God cannot produce an infinite effect (because there is none producible).” Note the quantitative use of “infinity” here. Since infinity has no quantity, by definition, Turretin objects on the basis of logic that no infinite effect can be produced, for then it would have no end to it. If God created in the beginning, then the Greek definition of infinity cannot apply to God, for, then, infinity would have had a beginning, which it cannot have, by definition. As to humans who reside in heaven, the “finite is not capable of the infinite” – meaning, creatures can only “know” to a limited degree, and if limited, then there is a “end” (telos) to learning for the creature. “Limitless” (the Christian definition for “infinity”) for God is that there is no “cause” to his knowledge. There is no barrier. It is eternal and entirely pure. We are “limited” because we are finite and subject to various causes. God is subject to none. It is here that Turretin rails against the “Socinians” who “ploughs with their oxen, interfere with this infinity” by applying quantity and divisibility ad infinitum to God. This is rejected on the basis that it would logically and necessarily mean God is not omniscient. We must not confuse, then, these two definitions. It is the same problem W. Norris Clarke pointed out with the Process theologians.
As for the eternality of God (Q. X), Turretin notes, “God cannot have succession because of his essence.” That is, there is only one eternal, complete, perfect thought that grasps all things. It is not ever filling up. There is no divisibility in it. As for “time”, it “neither always was nor always will be, but will cease with the world.” This hits home to our problem. If time never ends, as the FP insists, then some aspect of “eternality” is attributed to it. It then becomes an divisible that never ends, and thus, cannot ever be known by God without involving a serious contradiction to all that Turretin has said so far. The case for “classic theism” is rendered contradictory. God knows all things eternally (remember, eternity is not “time forever” but “timelessness”), precisely because all things, except for Him and His essence, are finite – limited. They have a beginning and an end. That’s what makes them finite. God is “not limited” by anything that inables Him to know all things because all things are made by him and have been known by him eternally. Therefore, they must have an “end” if the classic definition of God be retained.

The great theologian W.G.T. Shedd carried on this idea in his three volume work, Dogmatic Theology. “The imperfection of limitation of the finite relates not to quality, but to quantity” (ital. his, volume 1, 339). Also, “eternity” is not “endlessness” (342). That would be committing the mistake of applying definition 1 (infinity of divisibility) with definition 2 (absolute perfection); that is, eternity (definition 2) is not infinite time or endlessness (definition 1). This, of course, is equivocation. Shedd continues to note the distinctions for “eternity” in the “quality” and not “quantity.” Eternity is “successionlessness”.

“Eternity with succession is like immensity with extension, and omniscience with contingency” (339). Still further, on page 346, Shedd wrote, “Should we define God’s external causation as an endless succession of creative volitions, then God’s consciousness of his future creative volitions is in the future, like that of a man or angels. This is fatal to omniscience, when the consciousness relates to cognition; and fatal to immutability, when the consciousness relates to action.” I must note that not a word of eschatology has been spoken here. That is, Shedd and Turretin were not speaking from a presupposition of an end of history (which they held), but purely from the perspective of the attributes of God as described in the Bible and applying systematic logical analysis in order to properly issue doctrinal propositions that would be free from contradiction, apparent or real.

In other words, If God was forever bound to endless time when it comes to creation, thus causing ever-increasing things and people, then he cannot be omniscient, nor could he be immutable. The Process theologians understand this all too well. What should be coming into focus is that whether we quote from Augustine, Shedd, or Turretin, the “classic theism” understanding does not define infinity in the way typically defined by mathematicians, Process theologians, or physicists. Christianity supplied the revelation of the Scriptures that solved the riddles created by this definition of infinity. The kosmos have a beginning (creation ex nihilo), which solved the problem of infinity in the past. By understanding God as knowing all things, as the Bible unquestionably declares, then all things are finite by the fact that they are created. They were known from eternity. By positing an end (exhaustive knowledge of God of all things), there was no infinite future of cyclical repetitions. It is well known that Christian philosophy, based on the revelation of God’s word, replaced the Greek notion of cyclical time with linear time.
History was going somewhere (teleology) precisely because God has planned it to go somewhere according to his purpose. But, an endless duration of time and history would be taking the Greek notion of infinity and trying to apply it to classic theism. It cannot work. If one starts with the classic theism of God’s eternity, then one must end with that definition as well to avoid ambiguity (equivocation). The two definitions are incompatible and contradictory. The early Christians knew this, and thus rejected the meaning of infinity as it had come to them.

This theological move was not intended to make God limited, for this would be the problem if an endless duration to physical history were true. Positing the Greek notion of infinity to God reduces God and limits his knowledge, which, again, Process theology makes all too clear, purposely so. Rather, the eternality of God and the application of “infinity” in the classic theistic sense retains the unlimited nature of his essence and knowledge precisely because there is an end to all he knows – he knows it all. It is in this sense, Van Til argued, that Parminides posited that “only that which I can think without contradiction, exists” (Van Til, op. cit., 146). For Parminides, and his disciple, Zeno, infinity as endlessness was a contradiction. There was only the One Proposition. The problem is that the finite, by sheer logic, cannot reach the infinite, and if the infinite is posited (as in Plotinus), it cannot be known. Augustine, wrestling with all of this as he did, answered: “Augustine saw clearly the fact that God is what the Scriptures says he is….he saw clearly that the world is what the Bible says it is” (Van Til, 151). The Greek notion of infinity necessarily reduces God as completely unknowable (since he cannot even know himself if he himself is an endless succession of idea and thought). The Bible, then, nowhere reveals God as “infinite” in this sense. The revelation of God – the Bible – supplied the necessary ingredients for logic to operate successfully. Without it, logic cannot operate at all. Logic, in and of itself, apart from revelation, cannot give any truth. The Greeks struggled with logic and infinity. The Christians solved the problem by positing the Creator God, who knows all things from beginning to end. Logical syllogisms were supplied with revealed propositions so that an entire system could now be attempted, from beginning to end. Christians took Greek capital and spent it on Christian theology on the basis of the Bible. The wealth of the wicked in intellectual capital was taken over, redefined, and deposited to the Church.

Again, by using equivocation (two different senses of a single term), someone may ask if God can know (omniscience, definition 2) an infinite (definition 1) series of events? The question is ambiguous, like, if God is so powerful (omnipotent 1), can he create a stone he cannot lift (omnipotent 2)? These types of paradoxical questions equivocate the terms, and thus are nonsense questions (Nash calls them “pseudo-tasks” – “God’s inability to perform a pseudotask cannot count against his omnipotence” – or in our case, his omniscience – Ronald H. Nash, Faith & Reason, Zondervan, 1988,185). If the “series of events” are truly infinite (Greek definition) in number, neither God nor man could know them. Same for mathematics: “[I]f the theorems are infinite in number, neither God nor man could know them all, for with respect to infinity there is no “all” to be known. Infinity has no last term, and God’s knowledge would be as incomplete as man’s” (Clark, Gordon H., The Incarnation, Trinity Foundation, 1988, 62 –
thanks to Jason Bradfield for locating this for me). The considerable confusion found in much theology as it relates to this term is due to the fact that there are two definitions that usually get tangled up in the arguments. One must stick to one definition in a syllogism. It is, also, to be lamented that the term “infinite” came to be associated with God at all, because, as we have seen, the word itself creates the problem because the most common meaning of it is what was imagined by the Greeks. Aquinas spent a great deal of material defining the term, but he got it from recovering the Physics of Aristotle. It is only by introducing the idea of infinity in the Greek notion that creates the problem. And this idea I deny is an attribute of God.

We have seen, then, that with the two definitions, theologians do not apply the Greek connotation to God. Carl F. H. Henry, “In Christian theology God is infinite in an objectively perfect and not a privative or indefinite sense. When applied to the God of the Bible infinity means that the attributes comprising the divine character are unlimited by external restriction and are limited only by God’s own nature...God is incapable of increase or diminuation” (God, Revelation, and Authority, Vol. 5, Crossway Books, 1999, 222). Clearly, then, in classic theism, the Greek connotation of an ever-increasing infinite series cannot be applied to the mind of God as an actual infinity. Through Aquinas, some Protestant theologians have opted for “paradox” by “declaring that divine infinity is an incomprehensible perfection that can be predicated only analogically but not univocally. This view leads to epistemological skepticism” (Henry, 223). Here, the Greek connotation is applied to God, but since it does not make “sense” to our minds, it cannot be univocally stated, and thus, we simply throw our hands up and confess, “paradox” under the pious notion of incomprehensibility. But, this wrecks other aspects about the knowledge of God as well. I will cover these aspects later.

To echo Henry (225), William Lane Craig, arguing against the Process notion, demonstrates that “an actually infinite number of things cannot exist...God’s infinity is not a collection of an infinite number of definite and discrete finite particulars...God’s infinity is a catch all term for His necessary existence, omnipotence, omniscience, eternity, and so forth.” He demonstrated that the Process view of the “eternity of the universe” is unsound. And he never appeals to eschatology (Process Theology, op. cit., 161). Since two definitions are used, and one clearly rejected, then some theologians have argued that the word “infinity” is perhaps not the best term to use. “Perfect”, or “Absolute” should be used. Remember, at the beginning of this section, infinity for the Greeks meant “chaos, undetermined, unlimited” whereas “finite” meant “complete, perfect.” Infinity, by the Greek connotation, was redefined by the Christians. Somehow, the word that meant “chaos and imperfect” came to mean “complete and perfect”! Hence, the confusion. Wouldn’t it be best the chuck the word altogether? In the section I will come to on the Scriptures, we will find that “infinity” is not meant at all, and the KJV (1611, well after Aquinas and the Reformation) used it only three times. FP should be aware of the error of anachronism: reading into Scripture later developed meanings of words. A great deal of FP exegesis is
built on rejecting anachronisms, rightly so. Since “infinity” is a Greek concept, was that concept utilized by the biblical authors?

Infinite Procreation

I first approached this problem as a Calvinist. For us, “the elect” were “all” those whom God has chosen from before the foundation of the world. Some FP have tried to opt out of this, limiting “the elect” only to Israel, and more so, only to the first century. But, Is 65.22 speaks of “my elect” in the new heavens and the new earth as well. There are, I believe, shades of truth in strict exegesis that “the elect” and also “the remnant” are applied to Israel “according to the flesh.” But, the error is in solely limiting the term “elect” to Israel “according to the flesh”. Keep in mind, that the salvation to come to “the nations” would be an inclusion of the “Gentiles” so they, too, would be called “Israel” (Ps 87, Is 19.23-25; 44.3-5). Irrespective, in the Reformed view, the Westminster Confession of Faith is all too clear: “These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished”(3.4). This section does not come from a consideration of eschatology. It is in the chapter “On God’s Eternal Decree”. Here, we can see the theological definition of “infinity” at work in terms of classic theism, for positing an endless number would directly contradict this statement, for God cannot “decree” election for an infinite number. If the number were infinite in the Greek sense, then there could be no “all” to know for, by definition, infinity cannot be known. That is precisely what the Greeks had in mind and why their definition wreaked havoc on philosophy and physics (and still does, as the wonderful book by Joseph Mazur describes, Zeno’s Paradox: Unraveling the Ancient Mystery behind the Science of Space and Time, Plume Book, 2007).

Let me repeat this again. For the Greeks, infinity was not an unknown number because we just can’t count that high, but is unknowable because there is no “counting that high” in the first place. There is no “high” or “low” by the nature of what the infinite is. It is not because it reaches beyond what we can comprehend. It is that there is nothing there to comprehend. So, when we see this as the proper definition, we can see that this cannot be applied to God because he just happens to see more than we do, or knows more – there is no “more” to “see” (“more” would imply quantity – there is no “more”, only “more plus more plus more plus more ad infinitum”). It is crucial to understand the Greek conception here and why it was rejected and modified. Let me restate it again this way: If God comprehended what the Greeks posited for the definition of “infinity”, then it would no longer be infinity. We would be talking about an end (teleios – perfection) at that point. Similarly, if God fully knew those who are his, his people, then we would no longer be talking about infinite procreation. It would be finite at the point in which God knew every one of his people. For the Greeks, infinity cannot be known precisely because it cannot be known. If it were known, it is not infinite – we would no longer
Clark, in his section on infinity, applies the problem to “the elect” as well (op. cit., 63). For the Reformed view, the elect number is known from eternity and thus, cannot be an endless, unknowable number (Loraine Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980, 83-149). But, in FP there are a great deal of adherents that are decidedly not Calvinists. Indeed, some are straightforwardly against Calvinism. As I stated, I approached this problem as a Calvinist at first, but quickly saw that Arminianists within the FP movement run into the same problem (as do the futurists like Seraiah, mentioned above). Talbot and Crampton supplied this point, “The elect and the non-elect have been predetermined from all eternity. There is an absolute fixity to the number. It should be carefully noted that this is true in both Calvinism and Arminianism. Now, as in the Arminianist schema, if God foresees all who will choose Him and ratifies their choice by writing down their names in the book of life, can any more be saved than those that He foresees?...Thus, there is no difference in the number....in either Arminianism or Calvinism. The number is set from all eternity. No one can change it” (Kenneth G. Talbot, Gary Crampton, Calvinism, Hyper-Calvinism and Arminianism: A Theological Primer, Christian Resources Inc., 1990, 51). Neither the Arminianist nor the Calvinist rejects classic theism. Those differences have to do more with how God saves, not the fact that He does save, and certainly not the fact that God knows all things. Again, classic Arminianism asserts the “absolute omniscience” of God for all future events. Laurence M. Vance, who argues that Calvinism is a heresy (!), asserts absolute omniscience, and quotes Arminius to that effect (The Other Side of Calvinism, Vance Publications, 1999, 391 – where, he also quotes from the Talbot and Crampton book above. His book is a 785 page tour de force against Calvinism).

Positing, then, endless time and infinite procreation runs counter to classic theism and the attributes of God. It logically brings about the notion that God’s people are forever in “process” and thus, forever “imperfect”. If one is going to stick with the Greek concept of infinity, then one must carry through with that same definition. Greek infinity means Greek infinity, and Greek infinity meant “imperfection, indetermination”. How does God “fully know” the “all” as in “all his people” from eternity (not infinity), if, in fact, for the Greek meaning, to stay consistent, there is no “all”? Infinity has no “all” by definition. Again, this is why, as has been shown above, Christians changed the meaning of infinity in order to avoid the contradictions Greek philosophy encountered between the one and the many. Christian theology solved the problem by an appeal to revelation knowledge in the Bible that teaches “beginning and end” to “all” that God knows and does. The Bible nowhere teaches a notion of “endless time” or “infinity of series” in the Greek sense. The FP, of course, can simply reject classic theism and opt for Process theology, Open Theism, or some other form of theology that limits God’s knowing. This, of course, would bring about a whole other series of problems, most notably, its continued movement from classical theological categories as it progresses its dogmatism through out the canons of theology. But, this is not a movement that I am prepared to accept. I draw the line here. It is an equivocation to assert
that God “knows” (infinite knowledge, definition 1) all those whose number never ends (definition 2, infinity). That is contradictory. And, if a contradiction, then it cannot apply to God – at least, God so classically defined.

I am not through, yet, with the issue involved here, but the main point of the theses stated at the beginning, is that FP runs smack dab into Judeo-Christian theism as classically defined. They (and I, for a time) unbeknowingly carried in a Greek position of endlessness as it related to the universe, world and things. There was, it appeared, a scriptural warrant for doing so, as I will outline below later. However, having plunged into the material presented here, the problem came into sharp focus for me. We may be forgiven for originally not being aware of a particular blind side. As I presented, no one from the opposition was presenting this argument, and so I didn’t think of it, either. But, once made aware through my studies, I can no longer claim ignorance. When I did bring it up to others, some of them immediately saw it, too. I will reflect on some conclusions and reactions from FP at the end of this paper. Suffice it to say, though, I am decidedly, at this point, no longer an advocate of the Greek notion of an endless universe – an ever-increasing expansion of the world and things. I am firmly committed to the Christian definition of “eternity” which I believe is the biblical definition that hardly has any resemblance to the ambiguous and contradictory Greek notion of “endless time.”

Comprehensibility and Incomprehensibility

Some of the reactions I have received against what has been presented here is that “human logic” cannot comprehend “God”. We have seen that this is not a new response, in that classic theism defended itself against this view. It is a typical response when a seeming paradox is presented before those who do not truly understand the issues involved. It is an easy response and answer to any “problem” we claim we cannot solve. Yet, because we claim that we cannot solve it does not mean it has not been solved by others. Our claim may just be our not liking the answer because that would mean we would have to reevaluate our current state of affairs on the matter.

Van Til stated plainly enough (and that is a rare thing with that philosopher!), that men cannot know God “exhaustively. God is not fully comprehensible to them” (Van Til, 151). This does not in any way mean, “God is wholly unknown” (ibid.). The two adjectival terms “wholly” and “fully” is what is meant by “incomprehensible”. To an extent, we can know him. To the fullest extent, we cannot. Gordon Clark agreed, “The present writer [Clark] holds to incomprehensibility...that man does not and cannot know everything God knows” (The Trinity, Trinity Foundation, 1985, 73). It does not mean that man cannot know “anything” about God because man is finite, and it certainly does not mean that we must believe what is a contradiction in our minds is not a contradiction in God’s mind. It must be remarked, that since
some FP have utilized this last understanding as an objection, that is, that an infinite series in the Greek sense certainly presents a contradiction to our minds, but that does not mean it is so with God, is folly. With this we may posit that a square circle is a contradiction to our minds, but God understands a square circle fully. The problem is that a square circle does not exist for us any more than it does for God because it is nonsense for both. This gets back to the “pseudo tasks” Ronald Nash brought up. If God is so omnipotent, can he create a rock he cannot lift? In the response of certain FP, the answer would be, “yes, he can! It seems like a contradiction to us, but to God, it is all worked out!” The damage this brings to all theological endeavors is obvious.

That Van Til and Clark were, more or less, agreed on this point has been, I think, demonstrated by John Frame, a student of Van Til. After a thorough analysis of the “Clark-Van Til” controversy, Frame concludes that both agreed that “If knowledge of any sort is to be possible, there must be some sense(s) in which man’s thought can “agree” with God’s, in which we can think God’s thoughts after him” (The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987, 26). I say this because FP have attempted to utilize, wrongly, Van Til’s argument about incomprehensible on this matter. Van Til would never agree that God’s knowledge subsumes an infinite series in the Greek sense. Van Til repudiated the Greek sense. This is where the philosophical sophistries of the Platonists, and the vain reasonings would be applied to “God” in order to demonstrate contradiction in what we think about God, and thus, concluding it has successfully destroyed “our knowledge” of God. By stating, as I have done, that an “infinite procreation” cannot be “known” by God has violated no orthodox, theological description of classic theism. What has violated it, on the other hand, is the insistence that, 1: the universe, the world, men and things goes on ad infinitum, and 2: since this admittedly involves a contradiction to our minds, this should not at all forbid us to believe it nonetheless, because, after all, “my thoughts are not your thoughts” (which is a most abused text). I am hardly positing a “sophistry” as I have been charged, or some “philosophical trickery”. Philosophical trickery is insisting that we believe in contradictions, whether apparent or real!

There is, in the doctrine of incomprehensibility, common misunderstanding. Incomprehensible does not mean that the truths of God ultimately lead to “paradox” which are “incompatible with human reason.” Classic theologians often use the phrase, “though we cannot fully conceive of x, the does not prevent us from issuing a proposition about x.” We can propose, “God knows all of His being.” There is no profound contradiction or paradox in this proposition. We can say it, and we can, to a degree understand it. We cannot exhaust it, nor conceive, nor imagine it fully. It is ultimately incomprehensible. This does not mean that it is ultimately contradictory to us, or must remain a paradox. The “finite cannot grasp the infinite” does not mean that the finite must forever remain believing in paradox because we are unable to square propositions about God. We can speak logically about the oneness of God in one sense, and the persons of the Godhead in another sense, entirely avoiding contradiction (which the Chalcedonian expression accomplished). However, we cannot exhaust or image these propositions in our minds. We can only go so far (finite). However, when propositions about the truths of God are so brought together
that a contradiction appears, then something is terribly wrong. We cannot settle for the explanation that this “apparent contradiction for us” simply means God is incomprehensible. That’s not profundity. That’s not exemplifying how “deep” God is. It is not attractive in some pious sense of how puny we humans and our “man made logic” are. It is ultimately positing an easy out, that we are exhausted in trying to understand something, so we just quit and say, “it’s just a paradox.” If it is a paradox, in the classic definition of that term (only an apparent contradiction, like “the two shall become one flesh”), then we are urged to “figure it out” so as to remove the “problem” of apparentness. “Two” and “one flesh” have different senses – paradox solved. Now, can we exhaustively know to the fullest and perfect way in which God knows how the two shall become one flesh? No. Can we resolve the paradox and understand at least to some degree? Yes. Or, should we just be pious and simply say, “the two shall become one flesh is an insoluble paradox before the bar of human reason, although to God is not a paradox. If you attempt to solve it, you are placing mere human logic before God.” That is the furthest thing away from incomprehensibility. That sentiment is entirely unbiblical and unbecoming to man and the revelation of God.

Further, dealing with apparent contradictions (paradox) is one thing, and it is usually easy in the Bible to spot them and reconcile them logically. There is another way, though, paradox has been lazily thrown around. That is when we know that statement A cannot possibly be reconciled with statement B. This is not a mere puzzle with words. It is a strict contradiction between two statements. Sometimes, the word paradox is used even for these situations with the same insistence that both statements are true. God’s people will in fact procreate forever, infinitely adding to the “People of God”, so that their number is not ever fixed or determined. Their number is increasing ad infinitum in the sense of what the Greeks had in mind – endless divisibility. This is statement A. Statement B says, “God knows all things, from beginning to end” and “knows all of his people, each and every one from the beginning. He has known them from eternity, and there has never been a time in his thought that his people, each and every one of them, have not been known.” Statement B, of course, is classic theism. Statement A is not classic theism. It is a proposition of FP based upon its interpretation of certain eschatological passages. For the FP, at least the ones who call themselves “conservatives” (which, from my estimation, are most them, whether they be Arminianistor Calvinist), both of these statements are true. However, only an indolent person would deny that they are contradictory statements.

In fact, FP have admitted that they are irreconciliable to “human logic.” But, that does not mean, to them, that one or both are false. Both, it is insisted, are true. Just because human logic cannot figure it out (reconcile them), does not mean both are not true. We can see here, clearly, that we are no longer dealing with the literary device of “paradox.” We are dealing with two incompatible statements that cannot be squared at all by human reason. It is here that FP invoke that God is “incomprehensible”, but, as we have seen, that is not the meaning of that doctrine at all. Incomprehensible means that we can understand through reconciling propositions together, even though we cannot exhaust their meanings fully or, to use Van Til, “wholly”. Even the expression “finite cannot comprehend the infinite” in the
Christian context is not an appeal to Greek philosophical chaos. Finite means we are creatures, created by God as his image, limited in knowledge and thought. God is unlimited and knows all propositions because all truth is derived solely from His essence. Being finite does not mean that we cannot grasp anything God reveals – that whatever he reveals ultimately is irreconcilable to our minds. It simply means “we don’t know everything.” But, we can spot two irreconciliable statements when we see them for what they are, and we are entirely within our God given minds to logically concludethat both, or one, is false – that both cannot be true. That is honoring to both God and the God created “honor and glory” given to man by God (not autonomously, but given by God). For the FP to insist that these two statements are true, and then to use “incomprehensible” as a result, would also destroy FP.

As one who has been (and, for the most part, is) a FP for most of their theological career, and who has published several works, along with being invited by his peers to deliver dozens of lectures to FP conferences, the objections raised by certain FP on this matter has revealed a tenacious and dogmatic clinging to a matter that is proven to be untenable. To believe that mere “human logic” cannot “comprehend” God at all, or, if it does, it leads to “contradiction” in our minds, completely and entirely destroys the exegetical and hermeneutical grounds FP has built for itself. Of all the leaders, those accepted and recognized by the majority of the FP audience, I have yet to read or hear in their lectures any such appeal when it comes to the issues raised on an exegetical level. Rather, FP have ruthlessly charged “futurists” with “illogical reasoning”, “faulty premises”, “informal fallacies”, “uninformed exegesis”, “begging the question”, “logical inconsistencies” and so on. In fact, in the earliest get go, FP was calling itself consistent eschatology because of its insistence on the canons of logic. Such objections like “God’s ways are not our ways” and “you FP are too logical” has been heard from our opponents again and again in the last 16 years I have been doing this. And, now, when it comes to the issues I have raised, we hear the same arguments coming from the FP! The irony! What certain FP critics have said about my analysis on this point is exactly what FP opponents say to them on their points about A.D. 70.

If, in fact, God reveals to us what are contradictions to our “human logic”, then that same line can most certainly be applied to the problem of the delay of the parousia. One can invoke “contingency”. Another can invoke, “God’s timing is not our timing.” Still another can invoke, “sure, it says, “near” in the NT, and, of course, it appears to be a contradiction to have two-thousand years play out. But, your problem is that you are applying human logic to God’s word.” The objection, in other words, raised by certain FP against the problem of infinity serves to undermine the entire FP programme. I am not out to undermine the entire FP programme. I am trying to understand biblical eschatology. But, if my mere “human understanding” means I must accept “paradox” in order to “keep the FP peace”, then, in my understanding, something is wrong with FP. Something is wrong, too, with traditional futurism (because it does employ the same distaste for logical consistency). What I am seeking after is a FP that does not jettison logic, and can maintain the classic theism as outlined in this paper. If a version of FP crosses the line of the communicable and incommunicable attributes of God as biblically defined, FP must go back
and tinker some more in the lab. This attitude should be a welcome to FP, not a fear. Remember, semper reformanda.

The Final State of the Redeemed

Another objection to God being unable to know an infinite series of events in the Greek sense, is that in heaven, we, supposedly, will continue to have experiences and think thoughts. This argument is more or less met with the same ones above, since it just replaces “infinite procreation” with “endless succession of thoughts and experiences.” Keep in mind, this argument assumes that “eternal life” in the Bible is defined as “endless succession of thoughts and experiences in heaven.” If the reader has been paying attention, one can see the equivocation going on here. The Greek sense of “endless time” is being assumed for the meaning of “eternity”. But, again, as I have shown, in classic theism, there is no “succession of thoughts” in the mind of God. There is only one thought. This notion is what exploded the Greek sense and rescued humanity and God from never-ending mindless purposelessness and chaos. Eternality with God, and the eternality of God is not “succeion of thoughts and experiences in infinity.” One cannot judge by their “experiences here” with their “experience there”. Second, notice the word “succession” – which is a time bound term. Eternity is not “never ending time”, but “timelessness”. Again, what’s going on here is the assumption of the Greek sense of endless succession, then transferring that definition to eternity, then by begging the question, asking “if God cannot know an infinite series of procreation, thoughts or experiences, then how can you say that God is eternal?” Sophistry at its best. I rank this question where I ranked the other: file it under “pseudo task”. The petitio principii (question begging) in this instance is equating “eternity” with “an endless series of infinite additions” what ever they may be. Neither our eternity, or God’s, is defined as such in the Bible or in classic theism.

In classic theism, as outlined in this paper, eternality is not the Greek notion of infinity. If it was, then the whole problem raised by infinity starts over again. That is, God cannot know (definition 2) an infinite (definition 1) succession of things. Therefore, since this is non-sense, it logically follows that our state in heaven is not to be defined by time, succession, endless experiences, infinite new thoughts, and infinite increasing in knowledge. And, it shouldn’t be a surprise to find out that classic theism does not define the state of the exalted in this way at all. Remember, “perfect” for the Greeks was “finite”, and “imperfect” was “infinity” (apeiron). Surely my opponents are not saying that we will not ever be “perfect” in heaven! But, since the number of God’s people never is completed, how can God’s people as a whole ever be perfect? This has ramifications for the “corporate resurrection” view as well in FP (as I advocate at this point). We believe “the Body” of the believers in Christ were “raised” from the dead. One cannot ask, “how many” because infinity has no “how many.” If it did, it wouldn’t be infinity. Can we possibly say that an infinite was “baptized into his death”? If they are being added infinitely, then those infinite additions are being baptized into his death infinitely. His death, then, cannot be “once and
for all.” There is no “all” in infinity. It follows, then, that the atonement itself never covers over all God’s people, because God’s people are ever infinitely increasing. If the atonement does cover “all” God’s people, then they are not infinite. They are finite in number.

In Augustine, Aquinas, and more or less Reformed scholastics, the eternal life (vita aeterna) of the people of God is the visio Dei – the vision of God. This is also called the visio beatifica. Here the saints will have cognitio Dei clara et intuitiva - a clear and intuitive knowledge of God in a single actus intellectus et voluntas (Richard Muller, Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology, Baker, 1985, in loc.). The Blessed in heaven (beati) enjoy pure perfection of thought and mind. Beatitudo consistit in perfecta Dei visione et fruitione. This perfect vision and perfect enjoyment of God is no longer subject to the limitations, be they experiences or thoughts, that so hinder us here. We do not “learn” more information in heaven (this would imply time and succession). We are perfect in every way, immediately, in a single act of thought, will and enjoyment. For Augustine (Confessions, XII.XIII), the intellegence of the blessed “know all at once...not this thing now, and that thing anon; but (as I said) know all at once, without any succession of times.” For classic theism, and even for the FP, there is no time in heaven. Time is temporal and earthly. Time was created. When Augustine was asked what God was doing before he created, his answer was essentially, “being God.”

This is not to say that we cease to have cognition, however. The quality of experience will be perfect. Human thoughts are bound limitations, not an infinite increment of ever new thoughts. Here, again, the same problem would apply: God knows all human thoughts (“I know your thoughts, every one of them”). As finite creatures we cannot think infinite thoughts. Nor shall we in heaven. Science is based on repetition (prediction), and indeed all of our inductivity in every day affairs is based on prediction: assuming the uniformity of nature; that tomorrow we will not go flying off the globe, or that this key will start my car. Such prediction-ness, though, will not be in heaven. There will be no limitation of the thought of “I hope”, or “I believe such and such will happen” because that would bring time into the picture. We will know all that we can know – all that we were created to know – instantly, perfectly, wholly without increase or decrease. There will be no more potentiality of what we can know, but knowing fully all that we can know, or was created to know. Our knowing will always be finite, but complete, entire, not subject at all to any potentiality for error, forgetfulness, or confusion. There will be no “paradox” in heaven. We will communicate with God with perfect clarity, and we will not have to consult any dead theologians and dusty books.

Gordon Clark somewhat takes exception to the Augustianian view. In an article “Time and Eternity” (available at ), Clark certainly acknowledges that, “This Augustinian view has in the main been normative for Protestant theology.” And, “However, although Augustinianism has been the rule, there have nonetheless been exceptions.” For Calvin, Clark wrote, “Calvin unfortunately pays little attention to
questions of time and eternity. He considers them useless.” However, Muller affirms that for classic
Reformed and Protestant scholastics, “Eternity...transcends not only limited time but also infinite
temporal succession, namely, time itself” (Muller, op. cit., “Aeternitas”). This is certainly applied to God.
But, is it to be applied to man? Charles Hodge, according to Clark, deviates from Augustine and posits
succession in God’s mind. Of course, this contradicts God’s omniscience, and Hodge never worked this
out: “When an author proposes an unusual and puzzling combination of discordant elements, he ought
to give some hint as to how a harmonization is possible” (Clark, “Time”). Nonetheless, Clark presses on
and concludes, our life in heaven “is endless temporal succession. Created beings, angels, and men,
because of their created nature, will always have a succession of ideas. But it by no means follows that
there is no “eternity” other than this. God has no succession of ideas. He is omniscient. He never
receives from some other source or from his own inventive genius an idea he never previously had. Nor
does he forget. His mind is completely immutable, for otherwise he would sometimes be ignorant. This
then is eternity. Time came into operation with created minds. Eternity does not change.” Man will learn
in heaven. Strangely, Clark posited that if man no longer has succession, then he would be “omniscient”.
I rarely puzzle over what Clark means in his writings, having read them for so long, but here he does not
give a clear meaning (his paper is actually a forty five minute lecture, so that’s understandable). If we
have no succession, in the Augustinian sense, then this implies that we would be omniscient as God is
omniscient? That hardly follows. In the Augustinian view, which I accept, we will know all that we can
know as finite beings. If Clark is wanted to say that our “learning” in heaven is perfectly learning all that
God knows (omniscience), which will take eternity, then we still retain the limitation of man’s mind. He
will not be learning anything new. He will be forever learning all that God knows. This is not “infinity.”

I post this because some FP know that I am fond of Gordon Clark, and thus have tried to use this against
the view presented here. However, this ploy will not work precisely because I am fond of Clark, and have
read him for over twenty years. First, I quoted the issue Clark has with infinity, which completely
supported the case I am raising here. The argument now is that since Clark posits that man has a
succession of ideas in eternity, then this means man has an infinite succession of brand new thoughts.
That’s hardly what Clark would affirm, for “infinity” for Clark is not “eternity.” Clark has already been
quoted to say that God cannot know “infinity” since there is no “all” to know. The whole point, as
shown, for Clark is that “man is always finite.” To introduce, then, to a finite, an infinite addition of new
thoughts is something Clark would have logically annihilated. For God to “know all” the thoughts of man
is precisely because all mens thoughts are finite – limited, bounded. The example of a Rubric’s Cube has
been used to show that though one may act upon the Cube as many times as he likes, he can only
perform a limited number of combinations. The Cube does not contain an infinite amount of
combinations. The Cube is finite. “Succession of ideas” for Clark cannot mean “infinite succession of new
additional ideas”, nor does he state that this was what he meant. If we are ever learning, we are ever
learning what God has always, perfectly, and completely known – and that’s not infinity. One might also
attach to this the imperfection that is involved in “learning.” If God “learns”, that means he does not
know perfectly. Ignorance (not knowing) is imperfection. Are we, then, imperfect in knowledge in
heaven? Clark did not address these things, so we cannot tell what he would think about them.
As if this was not enough to show the falsity of the attempted circumvention of our argument (and that Clark is not at all pitted against it), my FP opponent plows on to state that if, in fact, man does not have an infinite amount of thoughts and experiences in heaven, then heaven must be a “repetition” forever and ever, in a “cyclical” fashion. As I have already noted, “eternity” is not to be defined by “time”, for God is “eternal”. Is, then, God, who thinks one thought, cyclical and repetitive? Is there any “repetition” in his thought? That would mean “succession.” We are right back to square one. Finally, “time”, for Augustine, is in the mind or soul of man, so Clark would affirm. God has no “time” (sequence of events) in how he knows (though he certainly knows what “sequence” means, and how time relates to us – he has an idea of time, but is not limited by time). Time is an attribute of man, and perhaps here is why Clark would want to keep that attribute in heaven as well, since man is “always finite”. Of course, as Clark stressed, we have to have a definition of “time” – and he offers several. His point is that if someone is going to talk about time, then they should know what they are talking about, if not, then they cannot raise objections against what they do not know. Regardless, “time” for Clark was not an “infinite” reality outside of the mind, or soul of man. Why? Time is not an element for God. God existed before creation. With creation, time began in the soul of man as he was limited by the sun, moon, and stars (sequence). Take man, however, from the equation, and what Ding an sich meaning would time have? Time is the perception of motion, sequence, succession. We think of time in terms of some external reality that can be measured by a clock. Not so. If time can be “measured”, then, is it a solid? Augustine had a ball with this. Carrying over our relative view of time into our state in heaven, then, cannot be done. Both Clark and Augustine have a different meaning of time than my opponent.

It seems as if my opponent, rather than admitting the clear fallacy of his reasoning, and the clear logical implications for his insistence that we behold a “paradox”, will seek to use anything he can instead of admitting the obvious. “When an author proposes an unusual and puzzling combination of discordant elements, he ought to give some hint as to how a harmonization is possible.” Paradox is not one of them. Although I somewhat disagree with Clark on this matter (which is hard to say, since he did not explain all that he meant), and side with Augustine, even Clark’s suggestion of succession of thoughts is not what my opponent thinks Clark meant. Clark wanted to get rid of the word “infinity” altogether (Clark, Incarnation, op. cit., 55-ff)!

This also affords to us an example of comprehensibility and incomprehensibility. We can understand by formulating a definition of heaven and eternality, as the Latin has done above. This, when we think on it, appears to us as a contradiction (a true paradox) because we, in our current state of affairs on earth, cannot think of such a state in heaven. We cannot comprehend it. This does not mean that we cannot state it, though. It is only a paradox when we compare that we are dealing with two states: one time bound, the other non-time bound. Logically, the paradox has been removed. We can make a clear statement without contradiction what heaven will be like, even though we cannot possibly imagine or
comprehend fully what heaven will be like. The same is true of all the magnificent statements about God knowing all things in a single thought. I can write, affirm, and believe, and to a certain extent, understand the statement: “God knows all things in a single thought” because I know what the revealed definition of “God” is. I know what “single” means. And, I know what a “thought” is to some degree. If, then, I turned around and said, “God is also ever learning”, or “God does not know all contingencies”, then I have contradicted myself. If, when seeing the contradiction for what it is, my only response is “incomprehensible to human logic”, then I have not presented biblical Christianity. Some Christians are able (or at least claim they are able) to live with such contradiction. But, do not claim that this is a rational defense to your neighbor! You cannot “give an answer” for the contradiction other than what you have given. Classic theism does not advocate such a mystical view (existentialism). Classic theism seeks to “smooth out” what appears to us as a contradiction, which is the reason for its success and constant innovations. Human beings do not like contradictions. My wife cannot stand for, “I will always be there for you” today, and “Sorry, can’t be there for you” tomorrow. The courtroom abhors contradictory testimony. Why, then, do we settle for it in the courtroom of ideas and theology? How can we settle for it when it comes to the Truth of God?

We hear of the objections against “philosophical arguments” and “vain philosophy” in Calvin and others. But, in Calvin, he does not mean to avoid smoothing out a paradox by use of classical categories and logic. What he meant is that once the paradox has been solved, the continued speculation about it should cease. To “go any further” as he would say, would be impious. For example, God knows all things. How can He know the future? Because all things unfold as He has known them from eternity. No contradiction. Seeking, then, after this answer, into further speculation where God has not revealed would be “impious vanity” and “ramblings of the philosophers”. It would be the “impiety of man trying to exalt his knowledge over Gods.” That is, over what God has revealed. After working out a logical answer that alleviates the contradiction, and is also square with the Scriptures, Calvin was satisfied to “leave the matter there.”

Thus, when someone objects that God must know an infinite series of events or things (in the Greek sense of infinity), then, on the other hand states that God knows all things (in the classic theist sense), the duty of the Christian is to square these things and “leave the matter there.” We cannot, and are not ever told to in the Bible, to leave the matter irreconciled, and go away happy and content that we have uttered some profundity. But, that is exactly what certain FP are asking us to do. It does not enter into their minds that possibly, on this matter, FP is simply wrong.

What Do the Scripture Say?
“What scriptures do you have to prove what you are saying?” First, I want to start with the word “infinity” as found in the English translations. I emphasize English because it isn’t Hebrew, and it isn’t Greek. If we look at the earliest most respected translation, the King James, we find the word only three times. Job 22.5 reads, “Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite?” Surely no one would contend that Job’s iniquities were (and are) still piling up. The Hebrew phrase here is “without end”. The LXX uses “without number” (anarithmetos). Nah 3.9 has, “Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite; Put and Lubim were thy helpers.” The LXX has “no limit” and the Hebrew has “no limit” as well. But, again surely this is not the Greek apeiron as Zeno understood it. The Hebrew idiom simply means “a lot” or “great” or “not currently countable.” For example, if a person had a five pound bag of sand, and asked, how many grains of sand are in there, the Hebrew idiom would say, “innumerable!” But, in reality, there is a finite number of how many grains. There is an actual number, as there was an actual number of Job’s sins, and Egypt and Ethiopia had a finite number as well. Finally, Ps 147.5: “Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.” LXX has “no number”, and the Hebrew has “without number”.

Now, it would be a great matter if the LXX had apeiron in these verses or in any verse in the OT. But, the translators never used this word. The Hebrew phrase “without end” can be used in a variety of ways that cannot be pressed literally. So, perhaps “without end” is an equivalent phrase for apeiron. Again, the KJV translators understood the Christian meaning of “infinity”, and this can be seen from the fact that they used it in Nah and Job, which can hardly be taken literally. The word, then, does not mean “ever-increasing series”, and it would have been deemed heretical if the KJV meant this in Ps 147.5. The Hebrew simply means greatness, which it is in parallel with “great power” – unlimited understanding, which is entirely in accords with the Christian definition given above. The Scriptures make this clear: in Ps 147.4 we read, “He reckoned the number (mispar) of the stars; to each He gave its name.” The next verse, “Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is without number (mispar).“ We are told in the Bible that the stars cannot be counted “without number”. Here, God not only numbers them, but each have a name. What is innumerable to us, or “without number”, is known to God. But, I must remind the reader again that for the Greeks, “without number” was taken much further, and if that is the meaning here in 147.5, then God’s understanding extends infinitely and has no end to it – he is forever in a state of increasing understanding. But, this is countered by the fact that he knows from “beginning to end.” Clearly, we have two different concepts in mind: the Greek infinite, and God’s exhaustive knowledge of everything. The way the Hebrew expresses God’s omnipotence is to use the phrase, “without number”, but by this they do not mean that God’s knowledge is ever extended without any end. Such a concept of God did not exist in the Greeks. The “all knowing” God comes from revealed religion.

The Bible speaks of “the end of the heavens” (does that mean space ends? or does that mean God contains all things and is in all – omniscience?). Nahum, for example, speaks of “no end” to the store in Ninevah, and “no end” for their corpses (2.9; 3.3). For the Hebrews, God knew all things, from beginning
to end. For the creatures, we do not know beginning to end and all points in between. This, then, is what is meant — unless, of course, the Bible contradicts itself and God knows the beginning, but not the end, for, remember, “infinity” has no end. Even here we can see that there is a difference between the idiom, “no end” in the Hebrew and “no end” with the Greeks. For the Greek, quite literally, there was “no end” to be known (since knowing it would require an “all” to be known, and since there is no “all” to be known, it cannot be known at all). God, however, knows “beginning to end” which is another way of stating his omniscience. Thus, though the Hebrew has an expression for “eternity”, it is not the same meaning as “infinity” — the chaotic, the indeterminate, the unknown, boundless void of nothingness. These shades of differences all hinge on the doctrine of God’s omniscience. And the Hebrew Scriptures loudly proclaim his omniscience. It was this concept that ran into the Greek concept, and redefined it.

The phrase “without end” also occurs in Is 9.7 where we read that the government or rule of Messiah shall “increase” (marbeh) and “shall not end.” Here is classicus locus for the FP. Surely this verse teaches that God’s kingdom shall increase forever on into infinity. Upon sober exegesis, it does not mean that at all. The concept of “infinity” in the way Zeno or Plotinus understood it has to be smuggled in for that interpretation to work. If apeiron was used here, we would have an issue. But, it cannot be sustained that “without end” is an equivalent meaning to the Greek word. As we have seen, “without end” cannot be pressed to mean “infinite” in Job or Nah. But, what of the word, “increase”? The whole verse reads, “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this (ESV).” We note the parallelism between “increase of his government” and “his kingdom, to establish it….from this time forth and forevermore.” Once his kingdom is established, it will be established “forever” (LXX — unto the age; Hebrew — olam). Doesn’t “forever” mean “infinity”? No. Infinity means “never ending divisibility” and “imperfection”. A thing is said to be imperfect because it is never established. Once the “increase” (marbeh — used only 2x — LXX has “greatness”) is “established” it will not ever be unestablished. The Hebrew word is used only two times in the OT and means “greatness” or “abundance”. It is connected with other cognate words that definitely mean “abundance” and many translations follow that. If we allow for the backdrop of this prophecy to say anything, Isaiah was living in a time when the “throne of David” was split in two, and the seat of Judah was to be taken away. Israel’s “increase” (her abundance) was “decreasing”. Yet, there would come one who would establish David’s throne “once and for all” and bring in the “abundant life” that gives “eternal” its spiritual aspect. A FP understands, for example, that Is 65.17-ff is to be taken “spiritually” — that no one, literally, is going to live to be hundreds of years old at some point in the future. This means spiritual abundance. Yet, here, in Is 9.7, “increase” is interpreted literally to mean infinite procreation! When I surveyed this verse amongst the commentaries and in my own lexical work, I saw that I had to abandon this interpretation of the text. It is the “kingdom”, the “throne of David” that is abundant, or given increase, and the increase it is given, once established, shall have no end. The picture is like a man who lives in a small house, but is promised a larger house — an
increase, or more abundant room. When the time comes to establish the promise, his “increase” shall not ever be taken from him. It’s a noun here in Is, too. If there was, for example, a participle, “of the increasing”, we would have a different story, and the FP would then have at least a point. Finally, the prepositional phrase “to the increase” refers to “his rule”, his “power” (mishrah). He shall rule over all things (as opposed to just some things), and this rule over the increase of all things shall have no end. There is nothing here that speaks of infinitely produced things.

There are a few other verses that attach the meaning of “forever” to the “earth”, particularly in the Wisdom literature. Eccl 1.4, for example, has “the earth abides forever.” The Pss. have that the “foundations of the earth” is forever, and the sun shall shine “forever.” Yet, we have scores of passages that say that “the earth” will vanish and be no more. That the earth will “waste away” and shall “rise no more.” That the sun “shall not give its light”, etc. FP have distinguished between an “apocalyptic” description and a literal one. Some extreme forms of exegesis read into these passages references only to Israel (Israel = heavens and earth). This, I believe, is going too far. It is readily settled that “heavens and earth” in certain contexts means primarily the Jerusalem temple, and several non-FP scholars amply back this up (N.T. Wright, J.V. Fesko, G. K. Beale, James B. Jordan, Peter Leihart, Crispen-Fletcher, et al). This has lead to a reading of Gn 1 among some who are FP as referring, not to creation, but to the creation of Israel and the old covenant! Some FP have gone so far as to state that Adam was not made in God’s image, and the animals on the ark of Noah were not animals, but the Gentile nations. This is what happens when FP eschatology controls all aspects of interpretation. A sort of “tunnel vision” happens, so that a myopic importance is given to the “apocalyptic” reading of almost every passage, looking for hidden meanings, and importing meanings that were never there to begin with. I don’t experience this with the majority of the thousands of FP I have met and cherish to this day. But, there is a tendency to throw out anything, or at least distrust it, if it smells like “tradition.” From day one, I have come at FP, and am a FP, from the standpoint that it was built upon traditional categories and arose from traditional principles. I argued this in the successfully selling book, Misplaced Hope (Bi-Millennial Publications, 2003). I have let certain things settle in the back of my mind to be filed under “look at it later”. I am looking at them now, having a healthy dose of being involved in all facets of FP theology and thought, watching it develop in the last two decades, and being a part of that development, and continuing to be a part of that development (if they will have me, after this paper!).

I believe that the passages that speak of the earth’s “decay”, with Wright, is transient in creation itself from the beginning. And, I also believe that the “earth” and its “foundations” will be “forever”. The mainstream of church theology has basically taught a renewal of the earth – this present earth (Wright, Hope, op. cit. above). This renewal idea certainly maintains the idea that this earth “remains forever” in renewal, and, also maintains the present form of decay (thought, according to Dt 28, God can renew it). The idea of infinite decay is a contradiction in terms. Needless to say, there are no passages that give us the explicit notion of infinity as the Greeks saw it. There are no passages in the Bible that insists that procreation goes on ad infinitum. The term “forever” is used, as we have seen in just two passages (Job
and Nah), as a hyperbole. How, then, do we decide when it is “eternal” in the sense of “forever” or “without end”, and when it is not? The various phrases that are used (“forever”, “without number”, “without end”, “age to the age”, etc.) are attached to what they modify in a variety of contexts. It is to what they modify that we consider the interpretation. When used of God, because of who He is, these terms apply in their fullest meaning. When used, as we have seen above, of nations, people, or Job’s sins, it is obvious that what is meant for God is not the same as what was meant for Job’s sins, or Egypt’s armies. The thing modified tells us the meaning. This is true for the word “all”, too. “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”. All here means everyone, every man, woman and child, every one without exception. When “all came out to hear John the Baptist”, this does not mean the same because the thing modified could not possibly imply that everyone human being came to hear John. This is not a hard and fast rule, but it generally applies. The point is, when I am honest with my convictions, I know that I cannot show as absolute proof that “of his increase there shall be no end” means infinite procreation.

It is my conviction, first and foremost, that the theology of God is of utmost importance. His being, nature, attributes and unique-ness is of utmost importance. When I read passages that speak of God “changing his mind”, or “regretting”, or, like with Sodom, having to “come down” to see if their evil was as bad as it was, I realize that in order to square these passages with other statements in the Bible that unequivically teach his omnipotence, omniscience and immutability, something has to give. In classic theism, these former representations of God have been classified as “anthropomorphisms” or “anthropopathisms”. If they were given the head status, then the God in the Bible is not really that different from the gods in the Hesiod. He is indifferent, impatient, changes his mind, doesn’t know some things, isn’t aware at times, or stands aloof while his people suffer. There is a rich theological history here in classic theism that has logically worked these seemingly paradoxical statements in the Bible. Once one has introduced the idea of a paradox that cannot be squared, then one has introduced it to all of these expressions in the Bible (and this is, more or less, liberal biblical criticism which insists that it cannot assume a dogmatic approach in reading the Bible, but must let the Bible say what it says without trying to square it with anything). In this approach, it is quite understandable that since no dogmatic theological expressions are to be assumed (as if these were not, too, derived from the Bible!), one ends up with the idea of God in process (Whitehead); God as the Ground of Being (Tillich); God as Wholly Other (Barth); God who known only by existential feeling (Schliermacher); or God who is irrelevant and outdated, and must have new terms to bring him into relevancy in our age (Robinson); or the God who does not know the future contingencies (Boyd). The “historical-critical” approach does not assume any dogmatic theology, and approaches the Scriptures as stated above. This, in turn, denies the “inerrancy” of Scripture since the Bible does indeed contain apparently conflicting details and attributes of God. Hence, various authors of the Bible had different conceptions of God as they gradually worked out their religion. One can see the range of differences from this approach compared to the dogmatic approach. However, the dogmatic approach (which I am a firm advocate of) has derived its doctrines from the Bible as well by using the methodology of logic on the basis that the Bible is inerrant. Thus, any supposed discrepancies were to be squared by logic, staying faithful to the presupposition that the Bible
is God’s word – it is his revelation of himself accommodating the forms of language that man can understand. If, in one place, it says God does not change his mind, like a man, and in another place says, God changed his mind, we square it so as to remove the paradox. And this can, and has, been done.

The FP that I first came into contact with, and have remained in contact with, is the God of the Bible as defined and logically comprehended in classic theism. And if that God is the true God, as we understand him, then the idea of infinity, as Zeno understood it, cannot apply to him, for the world, or for his people.

Postscript

I believe that it can be shown, and has been demonstrated, that the early Christians rejected the Greek, philosophical term apeiron in their seeking to do justice to the God of the Bible as he has revealed himself. Indeed, the term is not even used in the NT, nor in the Greek OT, the LXX. There were logical reasons for this. God is not apeiron. God is teleion ek teleiou (Perfect of Perfect). Neither are God’s people apeiron. They are “known” and “chosen” and have been entirely “given” to Christ by the Father. apeiron does not have the concept of “entire.” “All that the Father has given to me” belongs to Christ, and they are all known by name. apeiron does not have any concept of “all.” Therefore, to suggest that the Bible teaches that God’s people will increase eis to apeiron is false.

We are asked by certain FP, then, to believe that this is indeed a “paradox” before the bar of human reason. That it “cannot be squared” by human logic. But, it ought to be believed regardless. We are told that the Trinity itself is contradictory, or an “apparent contradiction” to human reason. But, this is false as well. Robert Reymond, of Knox Theological Seminary, has impressively shown that it is not a paradox at all in the way meticulously worked out in the Greek and Latin creeds (A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith, Thomas Nelson, 1998, “The Trinity and the Creeds”, 317-ff). It cannot be exhausted, to be sure, but as stated, it is logical as far as we can go.

This move in my direction, knowing the role I have played (and will continue to gladly play) in the FP movement, is not an attempt to prove the FP as entirely wrong. Far from it. But, a problem is a problem, and to just shut our eyes to it, or appeal piously to “paradox” as if we have uttered some new profound truth that “human reason” cannot solve, is not an answer. So far, it is the only answer I have seen in objection. Cannot one have the basic elements of FP exegesis and an “end” to boot? Does FP ipso facto rule out an end, or finality to the universe or world? Where has that dogma ever been propounded? Who has demanded it? On what authority? I think it would be a great stride for the FP to adopt a finality
to “all things”. Let me ask this, what harm does it bring? Does it collapse the entire edifice? If it does, then was the edifice ever that strong to begin with? I believe, with the deep influence FP teachers and friends have had on me, that there is a strong foundation in FP. To assert an “end” or “finality” does not mean we are waiting for the “soon return” of Jesus in a “bodily” decent from heaven. Jesus is with us, Emmanuel, in the here and now and the forever.

I have not given my mind over, yet, to the full weight of what I have written here. I await the criticism to come (and I know it will come). I have been shamelessly accused of almost everything one can think of for breaking ranks on this issue. I follow no ranks. I am not one to insist that “no one can leave the compound!” I go where my studies and my conscience before God leads me, period. I don’t “tow the line” for anyone, any party, or any movement. I find it unacceptable that we must embrace a “paradox” so that we can keep the FP peace. I totally accept the classical theistic definition of God’s omniscience. I totally accept that the Bible teaches that God “knows those who are his.” If he knows them, he knows them all, entirely. We are not dealing with “experiences” here as they may be in heaven, in eternity. We are dealing with people, human beings, and an infinite, never ending, having no end, going on with no stoppage ever quantitative addition. We have been given some choices here. 1. Either God knows all things, including the number of those he knows entirely. Or, 2. God does not know all things. Or, 3. God does know all those who are his infinitely (in the Greek sense), and even though this appears as a contradiction to us, we must accept it anyway. Those are the three choices we have been given. There may be a fourth. I am all ears. The last two choices are, and remain, and will remain, unacceptable to me.