

1 Timothy 6:16
The Immortal God

There is theology in doxology. There is also life and hope and joy and faith, if we will consider the text. We tend to treat texts of doxology much like the lyrics of our favorite songs. They are simply there, no one really listens to them. My desire is not just to know this doxology but to rejoice in it and strengthen faith through it.

Thus far in our examination of Paul's doxology we have seen Paul set forward a description of God's disposition, "**...He who is blessed...**", as well as a statement about God's actions, "**...only Sovereign...**".

"...He who is blessed..."

Could it be that the thing that wipes away our tears in heaven is seeing and enjoying the happiness of God.

God's present happiness should impact our perspectives on the storms in our life. This is a matter of faith, without which we shall indeed be like anxious children. We must not only believe that God is sovereign, but that He is pleased with the outcome of His sovereignty which results in His being blessed and our being in heaven forever.

"...only Sovereign..."

"For this God is a great King to those who reign and a Lord to those who exercise lordship. Again, the very same one lowers his rank and is found, according to Holy Scripture, to be a Father to orphans and a Judge to widows, a King to kings, a Leader to leaders, a Lord to lords."

Chrysostom On Repentance and Alms Giving

Sovereignty actually should encourage our praying for we are making requests of the one who controls everything.

Sovereignty demonstrates love when we consider the fact that God who is the "**...only Sovereign...**" has the ability and right to do anything in the universe that he chooses and chooses to send His Son to purchase our redemption through the cross.

The next phrase describes something about the being of God, "**...who alone possesses immortality...**"

Just as Paul opens and closes his letter to Timothy with a statement of the blessedness of God (1:11, 6:15), he in like manner introduces and concludes the letter with a reference to the immortality of God.

1:17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

6:16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

Immortality is one of the essential qualities that make God, God. It is in a sense part of His "Godness". God is God in part because He is immortal. But what is immortality?

I want to answer that by defining immortality from the words that Paul uses in 1 Timothy and then a passage in 1 Corinthians where Paul repeatedly uses those same words.

6:16 "...who alone possesses immortality..."

ἀθανασία, ας, ἡ immortality, endless existence, opposite τὸ θνητόν (*what is subject to death*)

Immortality is more than just the fact that God will never cease to exist. It also means that God has always been. Immortality includes that truths that God has always been, God presently is and will always be all that He is.

To be immortal is to live forever. It means that its possessor is not subject to death.

Incorporating these two concepts together yields this understanding of immortality. To be immortal is to have always been living, presently alive, and forever living never being subject to death. God is the only one in the universe for whom this is true, he "...**alone possesses immortality**..."

1:17 "...to the King eternal, immortal..."

ἄφθαρτος, ον not subject to decay or death *immortal, incorruptible, imperishable*; substantively *immortal character* (1P 3.4)

The word that Paul uses here is actually the negated form of a word that describes ruin, decay, destruction. Un-negated it is used to describe buildings

which crumble with age. It describes economies that collapse. It indicates change in a negative direction. It can be used to describe moral or physical ruin.

When Paul negates the word what he is telling us about God is that He is not subject to decay or ruin or destruction from either internal or external forces.

He is not like a building that crumbles with age but forever remains sure on its foundation. God is not subject to collapse like an economy deprived of its driving forces. He is not subject to decay in any dimension.

To further enhance our understanding of immortality we now turn our attention to 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 where Paul uses these words repeatedly. As we read through the text you need to create a chart in your mind that will catalog a series of contrasting words, or you can just look in the bulletin.

	Flesh & blood	Kingdom of God
(corruption)	Perishable	Imperishable (incorruptible)
	Sleep	Changed (made alive implied)
	The dead	Raised imperishable (immortal)
	Perishable	Imperishable
(subj. to death)	Mortal	Immortality (subject to live)
	Death	Victory
	Sin	Lord Jesus Christ

To be mortal is to be flesh and blood, subject to corruption, to sleep, to be one of the dead ones, to perish because you are perishing. There is such a thing as mortality because there is such a thing as sin.

To be immortal is to be beyond corruption, it is to be alive, not subject to death, to be beyond perishing, to be victorious never subject to defeat. There is such a thing as victory over mortality because of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Bringing this understanding back to our text then we can see that Paul is telling Timothy that God is the only one who is beyond corruption, who is not subject to death, is never defeated, always victorious, always alive.

Moving toward Application (Individual & Timothy)

The God “...**who alone possesses immortality**...” also grants immortality, this is the promise of the gospel. In other words, there is a fountain of youth, but it is not in St. Augustine, it is right before your eyes in the text that you hold.

2 Timothy 1:8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹ who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, ¹⁰ but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

This text is telling us that there is a grace that has been promised from eternity, "...grace...granted...from all eternity..."

The nature of that promised grace is "...life and immortality..."

This grace is seen (realized) "...brought ...to light through the gospel."

How is the grace of immortality seen (brought to light) through the gospel?

The immortal God in the person of Jesus took on mortal flesh. The mortality of that flesh was seen through the cross. The suffering and death of the cross was necessary because of the mortality (corruption, sin) of those for whom Christ became mortal, i.e. subject to death. The immortality of Jesus is seen through the resurrection, which demonstrated that those who have the grace (promise) of immortality will not remain dead.

The gospel is more than a demonstration. It is the actual means by which the mortal receives immortality. It is the basis for our receiving our immortality. That reception is what Paul is describing in 1 Corinthians 15.

15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. **54** But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory."

The victory is the immortal overcoming the mortal. How is this victory realized? By faith in the gospel.

15:57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why does Paul describe God as the One “...**who alone possesses immortality...**”? How is this, an encouragement to Timothy? How may that relate to 1 Corinthians 15:58?

Timothy is to work in light of immortality.

1 Timothy 3:15 but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

6:14 that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which He will bring about at the proper time-- He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, **16 who alone possesses immortality** and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

Immortality has an effect on our work.

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

How do we know that our toil is not in vain in the Lord? It has something to do with immortality, “...Therefore...”.

Because of immortality keep working, there is something about immortality that makes working in the Lord profitable.

If God is able to bring immortality to mortal bodies then certainly He is able to add an immortal nature to the work which is subject to our mortality.

Through the change from the mortal to the immortal, the mortal will be stripped away revealing the immortal value of our work in the Lord.

Timothy the immortal God is going to bring about the coming of Jesus, which will demonstrate the value of your work at Ephesus. So work on until that day in light of the fact that there is worth in your labor, for it is the immortal God that will turn your mortal efforts into immortal treasure.