

This is our sixth study of the “Attributes of God.”

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Attributes of God

by A. W. Pink

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About the Author

Arthur W. Pink was born in Nottingham, England in 1886, and born again of the Spirit of God in 1908. He studied at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, USA for only six weeks before beginning his pastoral work in Colorado. From there he pastored churches in California, Kentucky and South Carolina before moving on to Sidney, Australia for a brief period, preaching and teaching. In 1934, He returned to his native land, England, and in 1940 took up permanent residence on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, remaining there until his death twelve years later in 1952. Most of his works, including *The Attributes Of God*, first appeared as articles in the monthly *Studies In The Scriptures* published from 1922 to 1953.

Chapter 6

The Sovereignty of God*God's sovereignty defined*

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD MAY BE DEFINED AS THE exercise of His supremacy—see preceding chapter. Being infinitely elevated above the highest creature, He is the Most High, Lord of heaven and earth. Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent; God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him. So His own Word expressly declares: “My counsel shall stand, and *I will do* all My pleasure” (Isa 46:10); “He doeth according to *His* will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand” (Dan 4:35). divine sovereignty means that God is God in fact, as well as in name, that He is on the Throne of the universe, directing all things, working all things “after the counsel of His own will” (Eph 1:11).

Rightly did the late Charles Haddon Spurgeon say in his sermon on Matthew 20:15—

There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God's sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that sovereignty overrules them, and that sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their Master over all creation—the kingship of God over all the works of His own hands—the throne of God and His right to sit upon that throne.

On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldlings, no truth of which they have made such a football, as the great, stupendous, but yet most certain doctrine of the sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion worlds and make stars. They will allow Him to be in His almonry to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties. They will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean; but when God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash their teeth.

And we proclaim an enthroned God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as He thinks well, without consulting them in the matter; then it is that we are hissed and execrated, and then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us, for God on His throne is not the God they love. But it is God upon the throne that we love to preach. It is God upon His throne whom we trust.

“Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places” (Psa 135:6). Yes, dear reader, such is the imperial Potentate revealed in Holy Writ. Unrivaled in majesty, unlimited in power, unaffected by anything outside Himself. But we are living in a day when even the most “orthodox” seem afraid to admit the proper Godhood of God. They say that to press the sovereignty of God excludes human responsibility; whereas human responsibility is based upon divine sovereignty, and is the product of it.

Human responsibility and divine sovereignty

“But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever *He* hath pleased” (Psa 115:3). He *sovereignly* chose to place each of His creatures on that particular footing which seemed good in His sight. He created angels: some He placed on a conditional footing, others He gave an immutable standing before Him (1Ti 5:21), making Christ their head (Col 2:10). Let it not be overlooked that the angels which sinned (2Pe 2:4), were as much His creatures as the angels that sinned not. Yet God foresaw they *would* fall, nevertheless He placed them on a mutable, creature, conditional footing, and suffered them to fall, though He was not the Author of their sin.

So too, God *sovereignly* placed Adam in the garden of Eden upon a *conditional* footing. Had He so pleased, He could have placed him upon an unconditional footing. He could have placed him on a footing as firm as that occupied by the unfallen angels. He could have placed him upon a footing as sure and as immutable as that which His saints have in Christ. But, instead, He chose to set him in Eden on the basis of creature responsibility, so that he stood or fell according as he measured up or failed to measure up to his responsibility—obedience to his Maker. Adam stood accountable to God by the law which his Creator had given him. Here was responsibility, unimpaired responsibility, tested out under the most favorable conditions.

Now God did not place Adam upon a footing of conditional, creature responsibility, because it was right He *should* so place him. No, it was right because God did it. God did not even give creatures being because it was right for Him to do so, i.e., because He was under any obligations *to* create; but it was right because He did so. God is sovereign. His will is supreme. So far from God being under any law of “right,” He is a law unto Himself, so that whatsoever *He* does *is* right. And woe be to the rebel that calls His sovereignty into question: “Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?” (Isa 45:9).

Again; the Lord God *sovereignly* placed Israel upon a *conditional* footing. The 19th, 20th and 24th chapters of Exodus afford a clear and full proof of this. They were placed under a covenant of works. God gave to them certain laws, and made national blessing for them depend upon their observance of His statutes. But Israel was stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart. They rebelled against Jehovah, forsook His Law, turned unto false gods, and apostatized. In consequence, divine judgment fell upon them, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies, dispersed abroad throughout the earth, and remain under the heavy frown of God’s displeasure to this day.

It was God in the exercise of His high sovereignty that placed Satan and his angels, Adam, and Israel in their respective *responsible* positions. But so far from His sovereignty taking away responsibility from the creature, it was by the exercise thereof that He placed them on this conditional footing, under such responsibilities as He thought proper; by virtue of which sovereignty, He is seen to be God over all. Thus, there is perfect harmony between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of the creature. Many have most foolishly said that it is quite impossible to show where divine sovereignty ends and creature accountability begins. *Here* is where creature responsibility begins: in the sovereign ordination of the Creator. As to His sovereignty, there is not and never will be any “end” to it!

Let us give further proofs that the responsibility of the creature *is* based upon God's sovereignty. How many things are recorded in Scripture which were right because God *commanded* them, and which would *not* have been right had He not so commanded! What right had Adam to "eat" of the trees of the Garden? The permission of his Maker (Gen 2:16), without which he would have been a thief! What right had Israel to "borrow" of the Egyptians' jewels and raiment (Exo 12:35)? None, unless Jehovah had authorized it (Exo 3:22). What right had Israel to slay so many lambs for sacrifice? None, except that God commanded it. What right had Israel to kill off all the Canaanites? None, save as Jehovah had bidden them. What right has the husband to require submission from his wife? None, unless God had appointed it. And so we might go on. Human responsibility is *based upon* divine sovereignty.

One more example of the exercise of God's absolute sovereignty. God placed His elect upon a *different* footing from Adam or Israel. He placed His elect upon an *UN*-conditional footing. In the Everlasting Covenant Jesus Christ was appointed their Head, took their responsibilities upon Himself, and wrought out a righteousness for them which is perfect, indefeasible, and eternal. Christ was placed upon a conditional footing, for He was "made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law," only with this infinite difference; the others failed; He did not and could not. And *who* placed Christ upon that conditional footing? The Triune God. It was sovereign will that appointed Him, sovereign love that sent Him, sovereign authority that assigned Him His work.

Certain conditions were set before the Mediator. He was to be made in the likeness of sin's flesh; He was to magnify the Law and make it honorable; He was to bear all the sins of all God's people in His own body on the tree; He was to make full atonement for them; He was to endure the outpoured wrath of God; He was to die and be buried. On the fulfillment of those conditions, He was promised a reward: Isaiah 53:10-12. He was to be the Firstborn among many brethren; He was to have a people who should share His glory. Blessed be His name for ever, He fulfilled those conditions, and because He did so, the Father stands pledged, on solemn oath, to preserve through time and bless throughout eternity every one of those for whom His incarnate Son mediated. Because He took their place, they now share His. His righteousness is theirs, His standing before God is theirs, His life is theirs. There is not a single condition for them to meet, not a single responsibility for them to discharge in order to attain their eternal bliss. "By one offering He *hath perfected* for ever them that are sanctified [set apart]" (Heb 10:14).

Here then is the sovereignty of God openly displayed before all, displayed in the *different* ways in which He has dealt with His creatures. Part of the angels, Adam, and Israel, were placed upon a conditional footing, continuance in blessing being made dependent upon *their* obedience and fidelity to God. But in sharp contrast from them, the "little flock" (Luk 12:32), have been given an unconditional, an immutable standing in God's covenant, God's counsels, God's Son; their blessing being made dependent upon what *Christ* did for them. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2Ti 2:19). The foundation on which God's elect stand is a perfect one: nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it (Ecc 3:14). Here, then, is the highest and grandest display of the absolute sovereignty of God. Verily, He *has* "mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth"

(Romans 9:18).

Chapter 7

The Immutability of God

God is distinguished from His creatures.

IMMUTABILITY IS ONE OF THE DIVINE PERFECTIONS WHICH is not sufficiently pondered. It is one of the excellencies of the Creator which distinguishes Him from all His creatures. God is perpetually the same: subject to no change in His being, attributes, or determinations. Therefore God is compared to a “*Rock*” (Deu 32:4, etc.) which remains immovable, when the entire ocean surrounding it is continually in a fluctuating state; even so, though all creatures are subject to change, God is immutable. Because God has no beginning and no ending, He can know no change. He is everlastingly “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam 1:17).

Aspects of God’s immutability

First, God is immutable in His *essence*. His nature and being are infinite, and so, subject to no mutations. There never was a time when He was not; there never will come a time when He shall cease to be. God has neither evolved, grown, nor improved. All that He is today, He has ever been, and ever will be. “I am the LORD, I change not” (Mal 3:6) is His own unqualified affirmation. He cannot change for the better, for He is already perfect; and being perfect, He cannot change for the worse. Altogether unaffected by anything outside Himself, improvement or deterioration is impossible. He is perpetually the same. He only can say, “I AM THAT I AM” (Exo 3:14). He is altogether uninfluenced by the flight of time. There is no wrinkle upon the brow of eternity. Therefore His power can never diminish nor His glory ever fade.

Secondly, God is immutable in His *attributes*. Whatever the attributes of God were before the universe was called into existence, they are precisely the same now, and will remain so for ever. Necessarily so; for they are the very perfections, the essential qualities of His being. *Semper idem* (always the same) is written across every one of them. His power is unabated, His wisdom undiminished, His holiness unsullied. The attributes of God can no more change than Deity can cease to be. His veracity is immutable, for His Word is “for ever...settled in heaven” (Psa 119:89). His love is eternal: “I have loved thee with an everlasting love” (Jer 31:3) and “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (Joh 13:1). His mercy ceases not, for it is “everlasting” (Psa 100:5).

Thirdly, God is immutable in His *counsel*. His will never varies. Perhaps some are ready to object that we ought to read the following: “And it *repented* the LORD that He had made man” (Gen 6:6). Our first reply is, Then do the Scriptures contradict themselves? No, that cannot be. Numbers 23:19 is plain enough: “God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent.” So also in I Samuel 15:29, “The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man, that He should repent.” The explanation is very simple. When speaking of Himself, God frequently accommodates His language to our limited capacities. He describes Himself as clothed with bodily members, as eyes, ears, hands, etc. He speaks of Himself as “waking” (Psa 78:65), as “rising up early” (Jer 7:13); yet He neither slumbers nor sleeps. When He institutes a *change in His dealings* with men, He describes His course of conduct as “repenting.”

Yes, God is immutable in His counsel. “The gifts and calling of God are *without* repentance” (Rom 11:29). It must be so, for “He is in one mind, and who can turn from him? and what His soul desireth, even that He doeth” (Job 23:13).

***Change and decay in all around we see,
May He who changeth not abide with thee.***

God’s purpose never alters. One of two things causes a man to change his mind and reverse his plans: want of foresight to anticipate everything, or lack of power to execute them. But as God is both omniscient and omnipotent there is never any need for Him to revise His decrees. No, “The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations” (Psa 33:11). Therefore do we read of “the immutability of His counsel” (Heb 6:17).

Can human beings be depended upon?

Herein we may perceive the infinite distance which separates the highest creature from the Creator. Creaturehood and mutability are correlative terms. If the creature was not mutable by nature, it would not be a creature; it would be God. By nature we tend toward nothingness, since we came from nothing. Nothing stays our annihilation but the will and sustaining power of God. None can sustain himself a single moment. We are entirely dependent on the Creator for every breath we draw. We gladly own with the Psalmist, Thou “holdeth our soul in life” (Psa 66:9). The realization of this ought to make us lie down under a sense of our own nothingness in the presence of Him in Whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Act 17:28).

As fallen creatures we are not only mutable, but everything in us is *opposed* to God. As such we are “wandering stars” (Jude 13), out of our proper orbit. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it *cannot rest*” (Isa 57:20). Fallen man is inconstant. The words of Jacob concerning Reuben apply with full force to all of Adam’s descendants: “unstable as water” (Gen 49:4). Thus it is not only a mark of piety, but also the part of wisdom to heed that injunction, “cease ye *from man*” (Isa 2:22). No human being is to be depended on. “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is *no help*” (Psa 146:3). If I disobey God, then I deserve to be deceived and disappointed by my fellows. People who like you today may hate you tomorrow. The multitude who cried, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” speedily changed to “Away with Him, crucify Him.”

Where to fix our feet

Herein is *solid comfort*. Human nature cannot be relied upon; but God can! However unstable I may be, however fickle my friends may prove, God changes not. If He varied as we do; if He willed one thing today and another tomorrow; if He were controlled by caprice, who could confide in Him? But, all praise to His glorious name, He is ever the same. His purpose is fixed; His will is stable; His word is sure. Here then is a *Rock* on which we may fix our feet, while the mighty torrent is sweeping away everything around us. The permanence of God’s character guarantees the fulfillment of His promises: “For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee” (Isa 54:10).

Herein is encouragement to prayer .

What comfort would it be to pray to a god that, like the chameleon, changed color every moment? Who would put up a petition to an earthly prince that was so mutable as to grant a petition one day, and deny it another? (Stephen Charnock, 1670).

Should someone ask, But what is the use of praying to One whose will is already fixed? We answer, Because He so requires it. What blessings has God promised without our seeking them? “If we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us” (1Jo 5:14), and He *has* willed everything that is for His child’s good. To ask for anything contrary to His will is not prayer, but rank rebellion.

Herein is *terror for the wicked*. Those who defy Him, who break His laws, who have no concern for His glory, but who live their lives as though He existed not, must not suppose that, when at the last they shall cry to Him for mercy, He will alter His will, revoke His word, and rescind His awful threatenings. No, He has declared, “Therefore will I also deal in fury: Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in Mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them” (Eze 8:18). God will not deny Himself to gratify their lusts. God is holy, unchangingly so. Therefore God hates sin, eternally hates it. Hence the *eternality* of the punishment of all who die in their sins.

The divine immutability, like the cloud which interposed between the Israelites and the Egyptian army, has a dark as well as a light side. It insures the execution of His threatenings, as well as the performance of His promises; and destroys the hope which the guilty fondly cherish, that He will be all lenity to His frail and erring creatures, and that they will be much more lightly dealt with than the declarations of His own Word would lead us to expect. We oppose to these deceitful and presumptuous speculations the solemn truth, that God is unchanging in veracity and purpose, in faithfulness and justice (John Dick, 1850).

Study Questions: Lesson 4

Chapter 6 The Sovereignty of God

First please read chapter 6 in the text.

RESPONSE

God's sovereignty defined

1. Explain, in your own words, the meaning of the *sovereignty* of God. Include the Scripture references and the key point of each.
2. List three specific aspects of the sovereignty of God mentioned and include the Scripture reference and key point.

Human responsibility and divine sovereignty

3. In Psalm 115:3 we learn that God does whatsoever He pleases. Consequently, God sovereignly chooses to place each of His creatures on a particular footing that seems good in His sight. Please list the three examples given that discuss conditional footing.
4.
 - a. Where does creature responsibility begin?
 - b. Is there an end to God's sovereignty?
5.
 - a. What kind of footing did God ordain for His elect, and what benefits does this footing include?
 - b. How did the elect obtain this righteous position?
 - c. Can a true believer lose his salvation when he sins? Why?

REFLECTION

6. Read again the quote from Charles Haddon Spurgeon on pages 35-36. Spurgeon states that believers proclaim an enthroned God and His right to do as He wills with His children. Are there any areas in your life that you have not fully surrendered to God? Take a few minutes to reflect upon this and pray, and then write your thoughts about the steps you will take in your response to the God who rules.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

7. Spurgeon states, in the section *God's sovereignty defined*, that when trials and afflictions occur, God's children believe that God's sovereignty reigns and that His sovereignty will sanctify them. Has the study of this chapter clarified and expanded your understanding of this? Please explain.

Chapter 7 The Immutability of God

First please read chapter 7 in the text.

RESPONSE

God is distinguished from His creatures

8. What does *the immutability of God* mean? Please explain in your own words and include the reference and key point for each of the Scriptures mentioned.

Aspects of God's immutability

9. List the three aspects of God's immutability and include the reference and key point of each Scripture.

Can human beings be depended upon?

10. As fallen creatures, we are mutable [prone to change] and are opposed to God. List the Scripture references and their key points that describe this condition of human beings.

Where to fix our feet

11. In your own words, please explain the term '*solid comfort.*' Include the Scripture passage.
12. Why and how do we pray to One whose will is already fixed?
13. What is meant by the phrase *terror for the wicked*?

REFLECTION

14. In the section *Where to fix our feet*, Pink discusses the issue of our own nothingness in the presence of God and our dependency upon Him for every breath we draw. Spend some quiet time contemplating the truth of this, as it opposes a world that encourages you to *take charge* and *be independent*. Do you find freedom in the face of your nothingness? Please explain.

Lesson 4 The Sovereignty and Immutability of God

1. *Sovereignty of God is the exercise of God's supremacy. No one can oppose or hinder Him.*
 - Is. 46:10 My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.
 - Dan 4:35 He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand .
 - Eph. 1:11 God is on the Throne of the universe, directing and working all things "after the counsel of His own will."
2.
 - a. Unrivaled in majesty
 - b. Unlimited in power
 - c. Unaffected by anything outside of Himself
 - Ps. 135:6 Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the sea, and all deep places.
3.
 - 1) When God created **angels**, He placed some on conditional footing and others He gave an unchangeable standing before Him. 2) God placed **Adam** in the Garden of Eden on the conditional basis of creature responsibility – so that he stood or fell according to his obedience or non-obedience to the laws which were given to him by God. 3) **Israel** was placed upon a conditional footing. God gave them certain laws and made national blessing for them contingent upon their observance of God's laws.
4.
 - a. In the sovereignty of the Creator.
 - b. There is not and never will be any end to God's sovereignty.
5.
 - a. Unconditional footing. It is a standing that a does not change, is not predicated on any condition.
 - b. In the Everlasting Covenant, Jesus Christ was appointed their Head, took their responsibilities upon Himself, and wrought out a righteousness for them which is perfect, indefeasible [cannot be undone or made void], and eternal.
 - c. No; it is unconditional, based solely on the finished work of Christ at the cross.
- 6-7. Personal answers.
8. God is always the same: His being, attributes and decisions do not change. He can know no change.
 - Deut. 32:4 God is like a rock, without iniquity, filled with justice.
 - James 1:17 God is 'light' and does not change
9. God is immutable in His essence. He is infinite; there never was a time when He was not; He will never cease to be. All He is today, He has always been and will be forever.
 - Mal 3:6 I am the Lord, I change not.
 - Ex. 3:14 I am that I am

God is immutable in His attributes. God's attributes are the same now as before the universe was called into existence, and they will remain so for ever

 - Ps. 119:89 For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven
 - Jer. 31:3 I have loved thee with an everlasting love
 - John 13:1 Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end
 - Ps. 100:5 For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations

God is immutable in His counsel. His will never varies. He does not revise His decrees.

 - Rom. 11:29 The gifts and calling of God are without repentance
 - Job 23:13 He is in one mind, and who can turn from Him? and what His soul desireth, even that He doeth
 - Ps. 33:11 The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations
 - Heb 6:17 The immutability of His counsel
10.
 - Jude 13 Wandering stars, out of proper orbit
 - Is. 57:20 The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest
 - Gen. 49:4 Unstable as water
 - Is. 2:22 Cease ye from man
 - Ps. 146:3 Put not your trust in men, in whom there is no help
11. Human nature cannot be relied upon, but God can. His purpose is fixed; His will is stable; His Word is sure. Here is where we fix our feet when we are under pressure.
 - Is. 54:10 No matter what, God will not abandon us..

12. We pray because He requires it and we ask according to His will.
13. Those who defy God, break His laws, have no concern for His glory, and live their lives as though He doesn't exist must not expect that He will alter His will, revoke His Word, and rescind His awful threatenings - even if they have an outward "profession" to be Christians.
 - Ez. 8:18 Therefore will I also deal in fury: Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in Mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.