

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

The dictionary defines “attribute” as a characteristic or quality of a person or thing. So a study of the attributes of God should help us to know more about the nature and character of God.

We cannot know God completely because only God Himself can know all there is to know about God.

When I used the personal pronoun “Himself” I have already assumed a characteristic of God, viz. that God is a “Him.” We will establish the Personhood of God as we work through these studies.

The classic work on the attributes of God is The Existence and Attributes of God, by Stephen Charnock. My copy of the book is over 1100 pages of fine print.

God’s attributes are not in conflict.

It will require proof from the Bible, but as an example, God’s wrath is not contradicted by God’s love.

Also, it is difficult to assign a primary or chief attribute of God, although the consensus tends to support the holiness of God as His leading attribute.

We will use Attributes of God, by A. W. Pink as the platform for this series of studies.

Published by

Chapel Library

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Attributes of God

by A. W. Pink

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The Attributes of God, by A. W. Pink. First Printing 1930. First Chapel Library edition 1993. Printed in the United States of America.

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A **Study Guide** is also available for this text, either in print or with this paperback text for online download from our web site. For copies or information on other Bible correspondence courses, please contact Mount Zion Bible Institute at the same address.

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.

Preface

“ACQUAINT NOW THYSELF WITH HIM, AND BE AT PEACE: thereby good shall come unto thee” (Job 22:21).

“Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the LORD” (Jer 9:23,24).

A spiritual and saving knowledge of God is the greatest need of every human creature. The foundation of all true knowledge of God must be a clear mental apprehension of His perfections as revealed in Holy Scripture. An unknown God can neither be trusted, served, nor worshipped. In this book an effort has been made to set forth some of the principal perfections of the divine character. If the reader is to truly profit from his perusal of the pages that follow, he needs to definitely and earnestly beseech God to bless them to Him, to *apply* His truth to the conscience and heart, so that his life will be transformed thereby.

Something more than a theoretical knowledge of God is needed by us. God is only truly *known* in the soul as we yield ourselves to Him, submit to His authority, and regulate all the details of our lives by His holy precepts and commandments. “Then shall we know, if we follow on [in the path of obedience] to know the LORD” (Hosea 6:3). “If any man will *do His will*, he shall know” (John 7:17). “The people that do *know* their God shall be strong” (Dan 11:32).

- A.W. Pink, 1930

Chapter 1

The Solitariness of God

THE TITLE OF THIS ARTICLE IS PERHAPS NOT SUFFICIENTLY explicit to indicate its theme. This is partly due to the fact that so few today are accustomed to meditate upon the personal perfections of God. Comparatively few of those who occasionally read the Bible are aware of the awe-inspiring and worship-provoking grandeur of the divine character.

That God is great in wisdom, wondrous in power, yet full of mercy, is assumed by many to be almost common knowledge; but, to entertain anything approaching an adequate conception of His being, His nature, and His attributes, as these are revealed in Holy Scripture, is something which very, very few people in these degenerate times have attained unto. God is solitary in His excellency. "Who is like unto Thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exo 15:11).

Before all else

"In the beginning God" (Gen 1:1). There was a time, if "time" it could be called, when God, in the unity of His nature (though subsisting equally in three divine persons), dwelt all alone. "In the beginning God." There was no heaven, where His glory is now particularly manifested. There was no earth to engage His attention. There were no angels to hymn His praises; no universe to be upheld by the word of His power. There was nothing, no one, but God; and *that*, not for a day, a year, or an age, but "from everlasting." During eternity past, God was alone: self-contained, self-sufficient, self-satisfied; in need of nothing. Had a universe, had angels, had human beings been necessary to Him in any way, they also had been called into existence from all eternity. The creating of them when He did, added nothing to God essentially. He changes not (Mal 3:6), therefore His essential glory can be neither augmented nor diminished.

His sovereign will

God was under no constraint, no obligation, no necessity to create. That He chose to do so was purely a sovereign act on His part, caused by nothing outside Himself, determined by nothing but His own mere good pleasure; for He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph 1:11). That He did create was simply for His *manifestative* glory. Do some of our readers imagine that we have gone beyond what Scripture warrants? Then our appeal shall be to the Law and the Testimony: "Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be Thy glorious name, which is exalted *above all blessing* and praise" (Neh 9:5). God is no gainer even from our worship. He was in no need of that external glory of His grace which arises from His redeemed, for He is glorious enough in Himself without that. What was it that moved Him to predestinate His elect to the praise of the glory of His grace? It was, as Ephesians 1:5 tells us, "according to the good pleasure of His will."

We are well aware that the high ground we are here treading is new and strange to almost all of our readers; for that reason it is well to move slowly. Let our appeal again be to the Scriptures. At the end of Romans 11, where the Apostle brings to a close his long argument on salvation by pure and sovereign grace, he asks, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counselor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" (vv. 34-35). The force of this is, it is impossible to bring the Almighty under obligations to the creature; God gains nothing from us. "If thou be righteous, what givest thou *Him*? Or what receiveth He of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man" (Job 35:7-8), but it certainly cannot affect God, who is all-blessed *in Himself*. "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants" (Luke 17:10)—our obedience has profited God nothing. Nay, we go further; our Lord Jesus Christ added nothing to God in His essential being and glory, either by what He did or suffered. True, blessedly and gloriously true, He *manifested* the glory of God *to us*, but He added naught to God. He Himself expressly declares so, and there is no appeal from His words: "My goodness extendeth not to Thee" (Psa 16:2).

The whole of that Psalm is a Psalm of Christ. Christ's goodness or righteousness reached unto His saints in the earth (v.3), but God was high above and beyond it all. God only is "the Blessed One" (Mark 14:61, Greek).

It is perfectly true that God is both honored and dishonored by men; not in His essential being, but in His official character. It is equally true that God has been "glorified" by creation, by providence, and by redemption. This we do not and dare not dispute for a moment. But all of this has to do with His manifestative glory and the recognition of it by us. Yet had God so pleased He might have continued alone for all eternity, *without making known* His glory unto creatures.

Whether He should do so or not was determined solely by His own will. He was perfectly blessed in Himself before the first creature was called into being. And what are all the creatures of His hands *unto Him* even now? Let Scripture again make answer:

Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before Him are as nothing; and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto Him? (Isa 40:15-18).

That is the God of Scripture; alas, He is still "the *unknown* God" (Acts 17:23) to the heedless multitudes.

It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: that bringeth the princes to nothing; He maketh the judges of the earth as vanity (Isa 40:22,23).

How vastly different is the God of Scripture from the "god" of the average pulpit! Nor is the testimony of the New Testament any different from that of the Old: how could it be, seeing that both have one and the same Author! There too we read, "Which in His times He shall shew, who is the blessed and *only* Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords: Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen" (I Tim 6:15,16). Such an One is to be revered, worshipped, adored. He is solitary in His majesty, unique in His excellency, peerless in His perfections. He sustains all, but is Himself independent of all. He gives to all, but is enriched by none.

By revelation

Such a God cannot be found out by searching. He can be known only as He is *revealed* to the heart by the Holy Spirit through the Word. It is true that creation demonstrates a Creator so plainly that men are “without excuse”; yet, we still have to say with Job, “Lo, these are parts of His ways: but *how little* a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?” (26:14). The so-called argument from design by well-meaning “Apologists” has, we believe, done much more harm than good, for it has attempted to bring down the great God to the level of finite comprehension, and thereby has lost sight of His solitary excellence.

Analogy has been drawn between a savage finding a watch upon the sands, and from a close examination of it he infers a watch-maker. So far so good. But attempt to go further: suppose that savage sits down on the sand and endeavors to form to himself a conception of this watch-maker, his personal affections and manners; his disposition, acquirements, and moral character—all that goes to make up a personality; could he ever think or reason out a real man—the man who made the watch, so that he could say, “I am acquainted with him?” It seems trifling to ask such questions, but is the eternal and infinite God so much more within the grasp of human reason? No, indeed. The God of Scripture can only be known by those to whom He *makes Himself known* .

Nor is God known by the intellect. “God is Spirit” (John 4:24), and therefore can only be known spiritually. But fallen man is not spiritual; he is carnal. He is dead to all that is spiritual. Unless he is born again, supernaturally brought from death unto life, miraculously translated out of darkness into light, he cannot even see the things of God (John 3:3), still less apprehend them (I Cor 2:14). The Holy Spirit has to shine in our hearts (not intellects) in order to give us “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (II Cor 4:6). And even that spiritual knowledge is but fragmentary. The regenerated soul has to *grow* in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus (II Peter 3:18). The principal prayer and aim of Christians should be that we “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and *increasing* in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10).

Study Questions: Lesson 1

First please read chapter 1 in the text.

1. Please commit to make time daily, for the duration of your taking this course, to quietly contemplate the attributes of God in a private place. Indicate on your answer sheet where and when will be your normal practice for such devotions.

RESPONSE

Before all else

2. “In the beginning God...” In your own words, explain what this means regarding God’s *solitariness*.

His sovereign will

3. Why did God choose to create? Please include the key point of the Scripture passage in your answer.

[Note: by key point we mean the basic meaning of the pertinent phrase in the verse. Please do not merely quote the verse, but rather paraphrase the meaning of the main point of the verse in your own words.]

4. Does God gain from our existence, our worship, or our obedience? Why?
5. Why did God *predestinate* His *elect*? Include the key point of the Scripture passage in your answer. [Note: *predestinate* means to predetermine for a specific destiny; His *elect* means the people whom God has sovereignly chosen to become His own children.]

By revelation

6. a. Can God be found by searching? Why?
b. How is God found?
7. Can God be known by one’s own intellect? Why?
8. a. How can men know God?
b. Write the reference and key point for each of the four Scripture passages mentioned:
- John 3:3
- 1 Cor. 2:14
- 2 Cor. 4:6
- 2 Peter 3:18

REFLECTION

9. In your efforts to comprehend God, in what ways do you try to make God conform to human behaviors? Read Romans 11:34-35 and respond (also reread section *His sovereign will*).
10. What is the difference between God’s glory and God’s *manifestative* glory? (Refer to section *His sovereign will*.)
[Note: Pink describes God as ‘complete,’ and therefore without being added to by the work of Christ. Please understand that everywhere Pink exalts Christ as God, as the Second Person of the Trinity, and as Deity who took on human form. Pink’s comments are intended to exalt the Godhead as a whole, not diminish Christ.]
11. The Scripture says “God so loved the world...” (John 3:16). Some interpret this to mean that God was incomplete without us, that He somehow needed us for fellowship, and that His giving Christ for us shows us that we have value and ‘worth.’ In light of this chapter, what would you say to this idea?

MAKING IT PERSONAL

12. Read all of the scripture passages discussed in the text. In what ways have you discovered new attributes of God's awe-inspiring, worship-provoking grandeur?
13. a. What is the principle prayer and aim of a Christian? (Reread the last two paragraphs of the chapter.)
 - b. Will you memorize Colossians 1:10?