

# Dartmouth

## Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Who is God/Who God Is Lesson 4

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-14 etc.

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### ***The Sovereign God***

**Ephesians 1:3-14** (ESV) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

**Introduction** This fall, in this pulpit, we are “going back to basics”. I know that football is taking some criticism these days but I have noticed over the years, football coaches say this often, and predictably every few seasons. You hear a coach say to his players—we’ve gotten too full of ourselves. We need to get back to blocking, tackling, kicking (the ball, not each other), conditioning, completing passes and scoring points.” For us we are going back to the basics of Who God is. People are asking and debating, “who IS God?” We are saying here, Who He is.

If you are a Christian I’m going to assume that you love the fact that your God is **LOVING, MERCIFUL, POWERFUL, WISE, GENEROUS, FORGIVING, CREATIVE, BEAUTIFUL, LOVABLE and DEPENDABLE**. No Christian (or non-Christian that I have met) ever criticizes God for being any of all of those ten things. But today I would suggest to you that if you are an *honest* Christian, you may admit to yourself that there are also aspects to WHO GOD IS that you do not completely grasp or understand—or even believe God to be. You might wrestle a little with the concept of a God that has any **wrath** at all or holy anger, as part of Who He is. You might struggle with one of the three “O”s: **omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence**. You may not completely get a God of total **holiness**. I call those

questions “honest”. It isn’t IF you ask them, that is important—because I think they’re good questions. It is *how* you answer them. And we will get to each of those attributes of God in this series.

Today however, I am going to share with you about another attribute of God, one which *doesn’t always get on the list* as preachers do this kind of series. But it is actually my favorite feature of Who our God is. In fact, I can tell you that *before I even came to faith* I somehow found this feature attractive and said at the time “if there IS a God, He would be this.” Today we are going to consider if GOD IS SOVEREIGN?

My initial acquaintance with this attribute of God came from two sources: first, a classmate of mine loaned me his copy of a sermon manuscript called LET GOD BE GOD by some preacher named Jack Arnold from a town thirty miles away. My friend, Jeff, got upset with me when I took the manuscript that he loaned me to the library and made a photocopy of it for myself, concerned as he was because he felt it was so controversial. Second, the church I began attending that summer had a series going from the pulpit by a pastor named Martin Clark. Pastor Clark, in that series, was going through the subject of the sovereignty of God (and using Arthur Pink’s 1918 book of the same title.) That summer and fall, as I was a brand new Christian I cut my teeth on an excellent sermon series (indeed, I learned how to listen to sermons for the first time that summer) and it greatly appealed to me. The idea of the sovereignty of God appealed to me even as a non-Christian and then far more once I had met Christ in my heart. I have never had any problem at all with this doctrine.

My conviction and observation are that the sovereignty of God is all over the Bible. It is so obvious to me and inescapable in Bible study that I cannot see how anyone could miss it. But I also admit that to some it is a threatening idea. We do not naturally want God to be sovereign. *WE* want to be sovereign. So let’s first define the idea. What do we mean to say God is “sovereign”. And we freely admit that we are delving into a deep area—we feel like the apostle Paul—***how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out*** (Rom. 11:33). And people wonder: Is God sovereign? Is He in control? Is He always fair and is He always loving?

The sovereignty of God is the biblical teaching that ALL THINGS ARE UNDER GOD'S RULE AND CONTROL, AND THAT NOTHING HAPPENS WITHOUT HIS DIRECTION OR PERMISSION. God works not just some things but all things according to the counsel of His own will (see Eph. 1:11). His purposes are all-inclusive and never thwarted (see Isa. 46:11); nothing takes Him by surprise. The sovereignty of God is not merely that God *has* the power and *right* to govern all things, but that He

does so, always and without exception. In other words, God is not merely sovereign *de jure* (in principle), but sovereign *de facto* (in practice).<sup>1</sup>

Arthur Pink put it this way: "What do we mean by the sovereignty of God? We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God.

To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that God is God.

To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High.

To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in Heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (Psa. 115:3)<sup>2</sup>.

To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is "The Governor among the nations" (Psa. 22:28)<sup>3</sup>, setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleases Him best.

To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the "Only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1<sup>st</sup> Tim. 6:14b,15)<sup>4</sup>. Such is the God of the Bible."<sup>5</sup>

Pink says that "the sovereignty of God may be defined as the *exercise* of His supremacy, which he defines as ALL THAT HE HAS DESIGNED, HE DOES. ALL THAT HE HAS DECREED HE PERFORMS.

But does the Bible *really* teach this absolute RULE of God?

Psalm 135:6 Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.

Isaiah 46:10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose

Daniel 4:35 all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

Ephesians 1:11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will...

If people struggle with God's rule now, it is nothing new—

Isaiah 45:9 Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles?'

Romans 9:17,18 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theopedia.com/sovereignty-of-god>

<sup>2</sup> ***Our God is in the heavens; He does all that he pleases.***

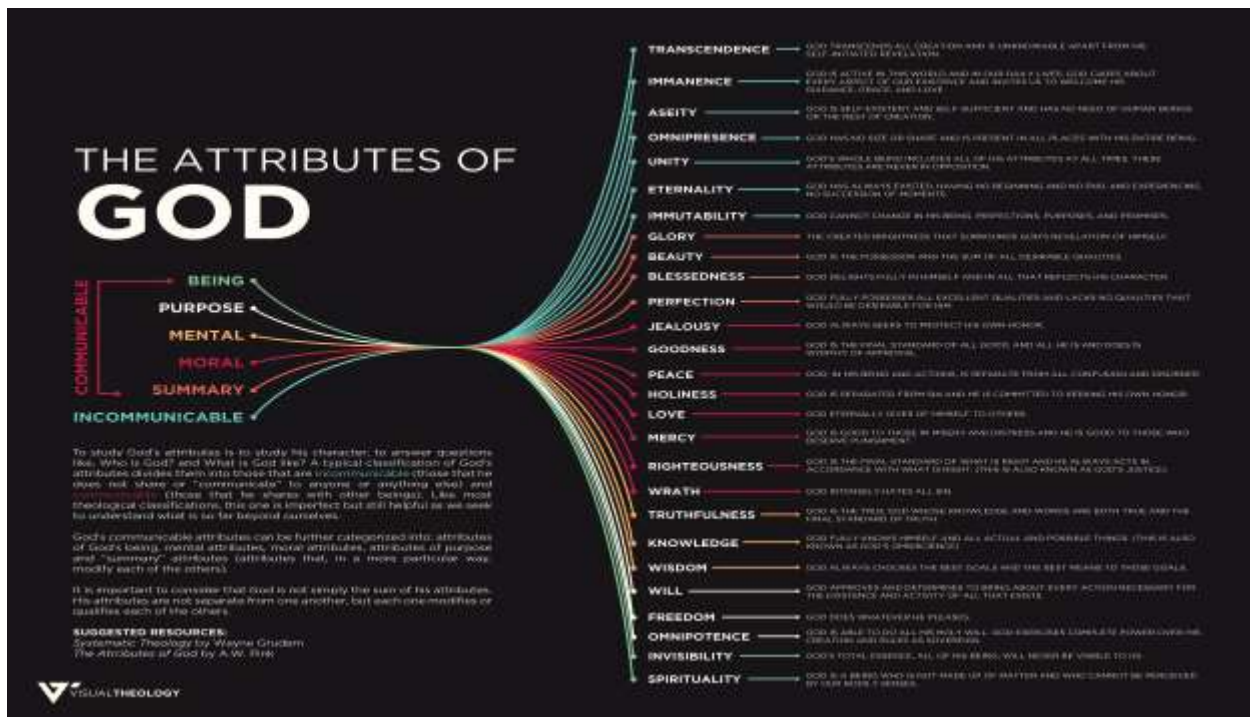
<sup>3</sup> ***For kingship belongs to the LORD, and He rules over the nations.***

<sup>4</sup> ***the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords***

<sup>5</sup> A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, chapter 1.

be proclaimed in all the earth.” So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

This would be a good time to point out the powerful idea that all of God’s attributes are in harmony with each other, and He is never out of balance in determining His will and plan, and loving His creatures perfectly. In short, as we assume His complete right and prerogative to rule, but we also assume that the exercise of His rule and plan is driven by a perfect consistency with His love, mercy and compassion. These are also in concert with His patience and longsuffering nature and with all the rest of His attributes too. Here is a wonderful chart from Tim Challies:



This isn't really all that hard to understand, if you have been a parent. On one hand you want your children to grow up thinking critically with wisdom and discretion. And you raise them with that goal. But you also feel other things—affection, delight, anticipation, pride, or maybe frustration, exasperation, even anger. If you feel angry with your child you do not stop loving them. They work in harmony as a parent. So to speak of a perfectly holy and glorious God, it should be easy to imagine that He is always consistent.

Much more could be said about this attribute and I refer you to Jack's *Let God Be God* notes and/or to a chapter of A.W. Pink's book *The Attributes of God* that you can pick up in the foyer... So let's close with some plain implications of this doctrine:

<sup>6</sup> Visual Theology, Tim Challies 2017

## **Implications of God's sovereignty**

1. God does whatever He wants
  - He is not like us
2. God will see good prevail
3. God never loses
4. The plans of God cannot be thwarted
  - His plans incorporate all the setbacks of human and galactic history
  - His plans traverse time;
  - Predestination is a logical event in His plan and consistent with every other attribute of God, and without apology.
5. Whom God puts His eye upon, will experience His full plan
6. Evil will be utterly and permanently defeated
7. Jesus is the absolute and permanent Sovereign

When Christ shall come  
With shout of acclamation  
And take me home  
What joy shall fill my heart  
Then I shall bow  
With humble adoration  
And then proclaim My God  
How great Thou art  
Then sings my soul  
My Savior, God, to Thee  
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