Our God

Pandit teaches series

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### Introduction

This Bible study is presented in the form of a dialogue between a Bible teacher, Pandit, and his student. In the end there are some questions, which can be used in group discussions. The groups should have 5–8 members each. The Bible quotations are based on the World English Translation (WEB).

### Dialogue

Student

As you know, Pandit, I have not been a believer in Jesus Christ more than a few years. Before I used to worship many different gods, but now I have accepted Jesus Christ as my personal savior. He is my God. But I am still confused about who God really is. The pastor in our church has spoken about God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, and this has made me even more confused. So, Pandit, please teach me more about God.

Pandit

This is not an easy subject, because we as human beings cannot fully understand who God is. Our human minds are limited. The apostle Paul writes like this to his disciple Timothy about God, saying that God is “the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen nor can see” (1 Tim 6:15–16). There is only one God and he is far above us human beings. His greatness and his holiness make it impossible for us reach up to him. The different religions in this world teach that man – through leading a life of merits helping the poor or making penance or through meditation – can reach God or even become God. The Bible teaches that God is beyond our approach, that he cannot be seen with our human eyes. But the good news, that is the gospel, is that this unapproachable God has revealed himself to man. The first thing is that through the Bible God has told us all that we need to know about him. Not only that! The second thing is that we can experience God in a very concrete way in our personal lives. Because God has revealed himself to us through Jesus Christ, as the apostle John writes: “No one has ever seen God. But the one and only Son, himself God and close to God, has made him known.” (John 1:18). One of the names that Jesus Christ used about himself is “Son of God.” Yes, God is a God, who wants to reveal himself to us humans through Jesus Christ. He has created us to be in personal relationship with him. He has made his character, his personality, known to us.

Student

So what does the Bible teach us about the character or attributes of God? How do we understand God?

Pandit

In John’s gospel Jesus teaches the Samaritan woman one important thing about God: God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). God is not a picture or a statue or something that we can see with our eyes and touch with our hands. The Bible actually comments on idol worship in a very negative way: “Their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but do not speak. They have eyes but do not see. They have ears but do not hear, noses but they do not smell. They have hands but do not feel, feet but do not walk. Nor can they speak with their throats. Those who make them will be like them. So will all who trust in them” (Ps 115:4–8). Here the psalmist says two things. Firstly, the idols of the peoples are powerless and they cannot help us in any way. Secondly, if we worship idols and put our trust in them, we ourselves will become like the idols. We will get the same kind of personality as the idols. Instead of becoming powerful, we will become powerless. All the nations that surrounded Israel during the Old Testament times were idol worshipers, so the prophets had to warn God’s people against idol worship: “This is what the Lord says: Do not learn the ways of the nations and do not be dismayed at signs in the sky, although the nations are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples are vanity. One cuts a tree out of the forest, and a workman forms it with his axe. They deck it with silver and gold. They fasten it with nails and with hammers so it will not move. Their idols are scarecrows in a cucumber patch. They cannot speak. They must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil nor can they do any good” (Jer 10:2-5). One of the things that the prophet Jeremiah says here is that we should not be afraid of the idols. They cannot help us, but also they cannot harm us. The apostle Paul warns the believers in Corinth not to take part in idol worship: “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry” (1 Cor 10:14).

Student

Yes, I used to be an idol worshiper before I became believer. I was really afraid of the idols and I tried to please them in so many ways. But, of course, they could not help me in my problems. And they could not give me peace in my life. That was one reason why I turned to Jesus Christ and gave my life to him.

So the Bible teaches that God is spirit and that we should not worship idols. But, Pandit, are there any other common misunderstandings about God?

Pandit

Yes, polytheism, that is to believe in many gods, in one common and basic misunderstanding about God. Another misunderstanding, which is very common in our country, is called pantheism. Pantheism is the idea that god is everything and everything is god, that god is the same as the universe, that they are identified with each other. It is true that the Bible teaches that God dwells in us through his Holy Spirit. The apostle John puts it in this way: “We know that we abide in him (in God) and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” (1 Joh 4:13). But this does not mean that we and God are the same! Because the Bible also teaches that God is above us and above his created world. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul combines God’s indwelling in us (his immanence) and his existence outside of us (his transcendence) in one short verse: “God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:6). But this teaching of Paul should not be confused with the pantheism that so many gurus of our country propagate!

Then in many Western countries we find yet another misunderstanding about God, which is called deism. Deism is the idea that God created the world some time long ago, but he no longer cares about his creation, he does not involve himself in the world or in us human beings. But the Bible clearly shows that this is not true. In so many Bible verses we can read that God is a caring and loving God: “Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is our God. We are the people of his pasture, the sheep under his care” (Ps 95:6–7). Here the psalmist uses the beautiful picture of God as a loving and caring shepherd and we as God’s people as sheep who are dependent on him for our daily lives. The most famous verse in the Bible is also about God’s love for us: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Joh 3:16). And the apostle Paul puts it in this way: “But God proves his own love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). Jesus Christ is God’s love incarnated for our salvation!

Student

Thank you, Pandit, for describing three common misunderstandings about God. I also find it useful that you gave me some Bible verses that instead describe God’s loving and caring character. Let me summarize what you have said so far: There is only one God. God is spirit, and he lives in us believers through his Holy Spirit. God is the creator and he cares for his creation. God showed his love for us by sending us his son Jesus Christ to save us and give us eternal life.

Pandit

Very good! You have already learnt many important things about God. In the very first sentence of the Bible it is written that God is the creator of heaven and earth: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1). So his creation has a beginning, and it also has an end. But God himself is eternal. That means that he has no beginning or end and that he lives for ever. Paul writes like this to Timothy: “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1 Tim 1:17). In this verse we find many wonderful statements about God: He is the only God – there is no other God – and he is King, which is a way of describing his power. God is eternal, immortal and invisible. This magnificent God is really worthy to be praised, honored and glorified. When the apostle John had his great vision of heaven he saw how all the angels were worshiping God: “They fell down on their faces before his throne and worshiped God, saying: ‘Amen! Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen!’” (Rev 7:11–12). Also we as God’s people should join in this worship of our wonderful God, because he is worthy of our worship.

Another aspect of God is his faithfulness. There are many Bible verses that tell us about this. I will just give you two references. First one beautiful verse from the book of Psalms: “But you, Lord, are a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, abundant in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ps 86:15). Then one verse from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians: “God is faithful. He called you into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9). It is dangerous to trust people, because as human beings we are not always faithful. But we can always put our trust in God, because his faithfulness lasts for ever. He will never leave us or forsake us, as he has promised in the letter to the Hebrews: “I will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you” (Heb 13:5).

Another very important characteristic of God is his holiness. In the fourth chapter of the book of Revelation the apostle John witnesses how the four living creatures day and night proclaim God’s holiness: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and is to come!” (Rev 4:8). Because he is holy, he wants his people to be holy. Paul writes to the Ephesians about this: “Concerning your former way of life, you were taught to put away your old self, which is corrupt by its deceitful lusts. And you were taught to be renewed in the spirit of your mind and to put on the new self, created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put away falsehood and speak truth to one another. For we are members of one another” (Eph 4:22–25). When we turn to God and accept his salvation for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we at the same time turn our back to our old sinful life. As the apostle Paul says, we “put away our old self” and we “put on our new self”. It is like taking off dirty clothes and putting on new and clean and beautiful clothes instead. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us believers, to make us holy as God is holy. Paul writes about this in his first letter to the Thessalonians: “For God did not call us to impurity, but to holiness. Therefore, he who rejects this does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 4:7-8). Another day I will teach you about sanctification or living a holy life.

Student

I am looking forward to that important and interesting teaching. But, Pandit, now you must explain more to me about God and how this powerful, eternal, immortal, invisible, holy, faithful and loving God reveals himself us human beings.

Pandit

In the Bible we read that God created man to have fellowship with him. Sadly this fellowship in the Garden of Eden between God and man was broken, as Adam and Eve disobeyed God and turned their backs to him. But when we read the stories in the Old Testament we see how God again and again reveals himself. Some of these stories may seem a little strange to us, but they are very fascinating reading. In Genesis chapter 18 God reveals himself to Abraham. In the first verse it says that the Lord appeared to Abraham. And in the next verse we see that the Lord appears in the form of three men. In Genesis chapter 32 the Lord appears to Abraham’s grandson Jacob at a place called Peniel. In verse 22 we read that Jacob wrestles with a man, and then when the struggle is over Jacob says in verse 30: “I have seen God face to face.” God also revealed himself to the prophets in the Old Testament. When Isaiah was called by God to be a prophet he had a vision of the Lord in the temple: “In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up. And the train of his robe filled the temple” (Is 6:1). Then the Lord speaks to him and sends him with a message to the people of Israel. Many years later, when the people of Israel were held in captivity in Babylon, the prophet Ezekiel had visions of God: “Now it happened in the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God” (Ezek 1:1).

But let us look a little closer to the powerful experience of God that Moses had as he was tending his father-in-law’s sheep at the mountain of Horeb. We find this story in Exodus chapter 3 verses 1 to 15. In verse 2 it says: “The angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. Moses looked and saw that the bush was on fire and yet it did not burn up.” And then in verse 4 we read: “When the Lord saw that Moses had gone over to look, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’ And Moses said, ‘Here I am.’” Here we see how God appears to Moses in a way in which is within his human capacity to experience. “The angel of the Lord” is actually a manifestation of God himself. This is clear from the continuation of the story where it says that the Lord saw, that God called to him from within the bush, that God said: “I am the God of our father.” And Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. God told Moses that he had seen the misery of the people of Israel and heard their cry, and now he had a plan for the deliverance of his people from Egypt. Then God reveals his name to Moses: “I am who I am” (Ex 3:14). God here reveals that he is the essence of existence, the source of life, the creator, the father of all. He is the God who shows himself to Moses and he is the God who becomes the deliverer of his people.

The deliverance of the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt is the most important event in the history of the Jewish people. Every year, as they celebrate the Passover meal, they are reminded of this wonderful deliverance. The celebration of this event gives identity to the Jewish people even today. At the same time it foreshadows – points forward to – an even greater deliverance, the deliverance of all peoples from the bondage of sin and death. It points forward to God’s deliverer, the Messiah or Christ and to Gods salvation through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Student

Yes, these are really very interesting stories. But can we really expect to have visions of God in these ways – through a burning bush, through angels or through visions?

Pandit

Of course, God can reveal himself to us in whatever way be pleases. But I do not think that it is necessary for all believers to have this kind of experiences. There are two reasons why I say this. Firstly, the people that had this type of revelations of God in the Old Testament (Abraham, Jacob, Moses, other prophets) were not ordinary people. They were special tools that God used at certain crucial times in the history of the people of Israel. Secondly, there is not the same need for God’s people today to have this type of revelations of God. Do you know why?

Student

No, I don’t know why! Don’t we all want to experience God in a powerful way? Don’t we need to have special revelations of God’s majesty even in our days? So that we really get to know God’s will for our lives and for the ministry in our churches?

Pandit

My answer to all your questions is “Yes!” But hasn’t God already revealed himself to us in a very special and powerful way? Please think! What is the important difference between the Old Testament time and the New Testament time?

Student

You must mean Jesus. He is the one who comes with God’s New Covenant. Jesus is God’s New Covenant.

Pandit

Yes, of course! Jesus is the full and final revelation of God. In Jesus we see God and understand his innermost nature and his character most clearly. I would like to give you some Bible references that show this important truth to us.

The apostle John starts his gospel with a beautiful passage about Jesus and who he is: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him. Without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men” (John 1:1–4). “The Word became flesh and lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory of a father’s only son And he was full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). “From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the Son, who is always close to the Father, who has made him known” (John 1:16-18). Jesus Christ is the Word of God, and the Word of God is God. In Jesus God became flesh and lived a life of humans. Nobody has ever seen God, but Jesus Christ has made God known to us.

In John’s gospel we also have several sayings of Jesus in which he uses the expression “I am”: “I am the bread of life” (Joh 6:35), “I am the light of the world” (Joh 8:12; 9:5) “I am the good shepherd” (Joh 10:14), “I am the resurrection and the life” (Joh 11:25), “I am the way and the truth and the life” (Joh 14:6), and others. This expression “I am” links Jesus with the God who revealed himself to Moses and who said that his name is “I am who I am” (Ex 3:15). Jesus makes this clear in the three verses where he uses the expression “I am he” (Joh 8:24, 28; Joh 13:19). The Jewish leaders who heard Jesus say this were very upset. How can any man say that he is God? This is blasphemy! So that was the main reason why they wanted to have Jesus killed. Let us look at one more of Jesus’ sayings – John 8:58 – where we find a very peculiar expression: “Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly,I tell you, before Abraham was born, I am!’” Jesus did not say: “before Abraham was born, I was.” No, he uses the expression “I am,” which is a clear reference to the Lord God himself, he “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev 1:8). Jesus Christ is God!

Student

Yes, Pandit, this is really wonderful and very interesting. But so far you have only taken references from the gospel of John. What about the other books of the New Testament? Do they also claim that Jesus is God?

Pandit

All right. I will give you some more Bible references. Let us first look at Hebrews: “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, upholding all things by his powerful word” (Heb 1:3). Jesus, the Son of God, represents in an exact way the character of God. This means that God’s innermost nature is expressed in Jesus Christ. In him we see God’s love, God’s faithfulness, God’s holiness, and so on.

Let us now go to the epistles of the apostle Paul. In Philippians Paul writes like this about Jesus Christ: “who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited” (Philip 2:6). In his letter to the Colossians Paul writes like this: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him” (Col 1:19). And again in the next chapter: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily” (Col 2:9). So the apostle Paul teaches that Jesus Christ is equal with God and that God dwells in him in all his fullness. This means that we see God in Jesus. When we read the wonderful stories in the gospels about Jesus – his life, his teaching, his miracles, his compassion, his suffering, his death and his resurrection – we actually read about God, his love, his compassion, his power and his sacrifice for our salvation. In Jesus we see God and understand his nature and his character more clearly than anywhere else. God does not reveal his fullness in burning bushes or in angels or even in visions of his heavenly throne. No, only in Jesus Christ can we find God’s fullness revealed. When we look into Jesus’ face, we actually see God’s face!

Student

These are wonderful thoughts, Pandit. I have never before understood Jesus in this way. And now I understand so much more about God. What else is there to know?

Pandit

God actually reveals himself to man in one more very important way. Perhaps we can say that this revelation is in an intimate and mysterious way. When Jesus lived here on earth he was limited in time and space. His ministry lasted only three or four years. After he had completed his sacrificial work on the cross of Calvary, he left his disciples and returned to the Father in heaven.

But before Jesus left, he had a long talk with his disciples. He wanted to comfort them and explain to them what would happen after he had left them. This talk we can find in the gospel of John chapters 14–16. One surprising thing that he tells his disciples is this: “But I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I am go away. For if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go away, I will send him to you” (John 16:7). “But when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth. For he will not speak on his own, but only what he hears will he speak. And he will declare to you things that are coming. He will glorify me for he will take from what is mine and he will declare it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13-15). A little while earlier Jesus had told his disciples: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive him, because it does not see him, nor does it know him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you” (John 14:16-18). “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and he will remind you of all that I have said to you” (John 14:26).

So here Jesus is speaking about the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, the Counselor (or Comforter or Helper), who was to come and take the place of Jesus. The Holy Spirit and Jesus are so intimately connected with each other that Jesus could say, “I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you” (John 14:18). So in one way we can say that the Holy Spirit is Jesus living with his disciples, being in them, teaching them, guiding them, reminding them, comforting them. Somebody has said that Jesus was God walking in sandals through the country of Palestine almost two thousand years ago. And the Holy Spirit is God living in us who believe in him. He is always with us, unlimited in time and space. And he never leaves us alone. He is God who lives in his temple, that is in his church. But he also lives in each believer. He gives us power to work for him. He anoints our eyes so that we see clearly. He sanctifies our lives and makes us more like Jesus.

Student

I have never thought of the Holy Spirit in this way before, Pandit. Actually I have found quite difficult to understand the Holy Spirit. Is the Holy Spirit a force or a power, as the word “spirit” implies? Or is the Holy Spirit a person? I find it a little strange that Jesus uses the word “he” about the Holy Spirit, as he does in John chapter 15: “he will testify about me” (verse 26).

Pandit

The Holy Spirit is a person. He is a person just as much as God the Father or Jesus Christ. He is God just as much as God the Father or Jesus Christ our Savior!

Student

Wait a minute, Pandit! If I understood you correctly before, there is only one God. Of course, God is God. Then you said that Jesus Christ is God. And now you say that the Holy Spirit is God. Please tell me: Do you believe in only one God or do you believe in three gods? In college I had some Muslim friends who said that Christians believe in three gods.

Pandit

As I told you in the beginning of this lesson, it is impossible for our limited human minds to understand God completely. And here we have one of the great mysteries of God. I believe in only one God. The Bible shows us that this one God reveals himself as God the Father, God the Son Jesus Christ and God the Holy Spirit. But that does not mean that he in three gods. The word “trinity” is not found in the Bible, but it has been used through the history of the Christian church as way to try to describe the complexity of God. But even if the word “trinity” is not found in the Bible, the doctrine of the Trinity is something that comes out the Biblical texts. God is greater than we can understand. God reveals himself in different ways. God is one God and at the same time three persons. Bible scholars have been trying to think of ways to illustrate this truth and help us to understand it. For instance, somebody has said that God is like one triangle with three sides. Somebody else has said that God is like water that comes in three forms – solid ice, liquid water and steam. But none of these illustrations can catch the nature of God in a true way. Muslims say that Christians believe in three gods, because one plus one plus one makes three – even a child knows that! Then some Christians have answered: But one times one times one still makes only one – even a child can understand that! But this answer does not catch the true nature of our God. The truth is that we cannot understand how one plus one plus one makes one and not three – when we talk about our God! Because God is beyond our human understanding. The Father is God, the Son is God, the Spirit is God – but God is one and not three. The Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit. The Son is not the Father and not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Father and not the Son. But God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Student

Yes, Pandit, God is truly beyond our human understanding!

Pandit

Yes, my friend, but God is not beyond our human experience! Over six hundred years ago the Russian emperor asked the most famous artist in his country to paint a picture of the Trinity. The artist thought and prayed for a long time before he finally painted the picture. The painting showed a square table with three persons sitting at it. The person in the centre represented God the Father. The person to the left represented God the Son. The person to the right represented God the Holy Spirit. But nobody was sitting at the fourth side of the table, the side that was in the front of the picture, closest to the viewer. That place was empty, inviting you and me to come and sit with the Triune God. We are invited to experience God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Our God is really a God who reveals himself. It is good to know about God. But it is better to know him personally, to experience him. The apostle Paul wrote like this to the church in Galatia: “And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, calling out, ‘Abba, Father’” (Gal 4:6). Yes, we can really get to know God, as a child gets to know its father. Paul kept on praying for the believers in Ephesus that they would know God better: “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may come to know him better” (Eph 1:17).

Student

Thank you, Pandit, for your lesson today. It has really inspired me to know God in a deeper way. I want to know God better!

Pandit

Before you go I would like to give you two more Bible verses. Both these verses mention the three persons in the Trinity. The first one is the command that Jesus gave to his disciples just before he left them to go back to heaven. We find it at the end of the gospel according to Matthew, and I think is a command also for us believers today:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19). The second verse is a blessing that the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth and which is very often read at the end of our church services today: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all!” (2 Cor 13:14)

### Questions

1. Polytheism and idolatry can be found in many cultures. What does the Bible say about these things?
2. The New Testament writers claim the divinity of Jesus? Give some examples of this.
3. Jesus told his disciples, “I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you” (John 14:18). What did he mean by this?
4. How would you explain the Christian understanding of God to a Muslim friend who says that we believe in three gods?

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