

Deism and Pantheism

By Charles Carpenter

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read the comments related to Psalm 46 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: How is God understood in light of this passage? What are His characteristics?

Assignment Two

Read the comments related to Genesis 1:1–30; 3:8; and 5:22–24 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: Why is it important to show God separated from His creation? Why does the Bible show God walking with His people?

Assignment Three

Read the comments related to 1 John 1:1–4 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: Why does the Bible show that Jesus was seen, touched, and heard?

Scripture to Memorize

I love those who love me; and those who seek me diligently will find me. Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold, and my yield better than choice silver. Proverbs 8:17–19

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand the difference between deism and pantheism and how these two beliefs are contrary to a biblical worldview.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-life Scenario

You're sitting at lunch having a great conversation concerning the differences between one religious faith and another. Sabrina breaks into the conversation and declares everything to be God. Seth responds, rejecting this claim. He says God cannot be everything for He is far above all things and cannot be equated to any kind of materiality. Seth thinks the material universe is evil. How do you respond to these two who have fallen into two extremes beyond Christianity?

What Are Deism and Pantheism?

In the attempt to explain God's attributes, many reduce God's nature and character to the point where God seems to be in all things or beyond all things.

Pantheism is the belief that the world and God are one (*pan* = all things; *theism* = God).

Deism is the belief that God cannot be known except through human reason.

For a long time philosophers challenged the belief that God is present while at the same time separated from His creation. Two well-known philosophers, Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) fell into two intellectual and spiritual pits. Spinoza equated God to nature, showing God to be in all things—pantheism; while Kant reduced God to man's reason, resulting in deism.

The Character of God

Read Psalm 46 out loud.

Study the Passage

Verse 1. refuge and strength. Parmenides and Thales (fifth century BC) wanted certainty only in what they could sense or prove. This radical, irrational, unsettling position is fundamentally different from the psalmist. The psalmist, especially in times of trouble, found refuge and strength in God. Parmenides and Thales trusted only in their ability to reason all things and could not be settled with saying it is the Lord's work.

The psalmist understood God as the sovereign protector who gave life meaning as he remained connected to God in a covenant relationship. God can be called on, for He exists and is a very present help.

Verse 9. wars cease . . . breaks the bow and shatters the spear. The deist position tries to make God irrelevant by reducing His works to man's reason and ability. The deist would claim that man is the author of world peace. The psalmist declares in opposition to the deist that God is our refuge, strength, and stronghold.

Verse 10. I will be exalted among the nations. The passage shows God exalted among the nations and exalted in the earth, while at the same time the Lord of hosts is with us. **Be still, and know that I am God.** Note that in this passage He is *not* a "very present help" with us because we have called on Him or reasoned Him into existence. Rather, He simply *is*.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week may now share a report.

Discussion Question

How should a disciple address God, and how should he understand God—near, far, etc.? How would you respond to someone who made the following statements?

1. “God is far above all things, and His acts can be known only through human explanation.”
2. “Prayer is unnecessary, for all things are products of my human reason.”

God the Creator and Separator

Read Genesis 1:1–30; 3:8; 5:24; and Colossians 1:17 out loud.

Study the Passage

Genesis 1:2. moving. God was “hovering” over the earth just before creating all things. The word translated “hovering” has many nuances. The word implies God’s separation, protection, provision, and hesitation as He considered the creation of the world.

Verse 1:3. God said. This passage also shows God speaking His creation into order. This speech shows His intimate connection to His creation. God understood all that would become of the earth and man’s ability to choose between good and evil.

Verse 1:4. God separated the light from the darkness. God separated the heavens from the earth, the waters from the dry ground, animals from man, man from woman, and good from evil. All of this separation demonstrated that one thing is to complement the other, protecting it from tyranny and isolation.

Verse 3:8. walking in the garden in the cool of the day. God’s separation does not imply abandonment, for He remained with His creation. Those who remained faithful to the Creator were known as those who “walked with God” (see Genesis 5:24). The Bible neither implies that God is in everything nor that He is removed from everything. God is intimate with His creation and “upholds all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3) for His glory and our good.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week may now share a report.

Discussion Questions

How does the Bible show God’s intimacy with the things He has created? How would you respond to someone who made the following statements?

1. “God created the world but remains removed from it.”
2. (A believer) “Since God knows all, it’s unnecessary to pray.”

God Is Not Corrupted Because of Materiality

Read 1 John 1:1–4 out loud.

Study the Passage

The first epistle of John addressed an early church dispute. Some were teaching a heresy that

God (immaterial) and man (material) are eternally separated without reconciliation.

Verse 1. we have heard . . . seen with our eyes . . . touched with our hands. John's purpose was to show Christ, the source of eternal life, as both divine and human. Christ's coming in the flesh radically addresses both pantheism and deism. Concerning God the Father's elevation of the flesh, Christ came; concerning Christ's intimate connection to flesh, He performed many miraculous works, inexplicable according to man's reason. (Deists cannot contend with Christ's miracles, so they deny them.)

Verse 2. the life was made manifest. Christ presented Himself to all in the flesh.

Verse 3. fellowship. Jesus ate with others (a physical act) and performed miracles in order that His disciples might testify concerning eternal life without saying that all flesh is corrupt.

Deism neither gives hope of eternal life nor acknowledges Christ's miraculous signs. Christ's incarnation is an event that further shows His separation and provision from all and for all.

Verse 4. so that our joy may be complete. The coming of Christ to earth and His mission of redemption make the believer's joy complete.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week may now share a report.

Discussion Questions

1. How can you explain the pitfalls of deism as it relates to Christ and His mission?
2. How can you address pantheism's inclusive and pervasive worldview compared to Christianity's exclusive yet pervasive worldview?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

At Home: Nail It Down

The following are biblical foundations of truth concerning God's being and presence.

- God existed before the created order. In the beginning only He existed.
- God is separate from His creation, but He has remained intimately connected with that creation.
- Those who have been redeemed are able to walk with God.
- God can be known but cannot be articulated in such a way as to explain all of His works.
- God is to be sought as the Protector and Sustainer.
- All those who faithfully seek God through Christ are to acknowledge and live in His abiding presence.
- Jesus was all man and all God.
- Christ's mission radically shows God's concern for all men and His desire to see all men saved through Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

Follow up Question

In what ways can you acknowledge the presence of God in your daily life without making God's name trite?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.