

You are Gods (John 10:31-42)

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Background

- a. **John chapters 9 and 10** are the story of Jesus healing a man born blind, and the discussions and teaching that ensued after the miracle.
- b. Jesus tells the parable of the Good Shepherd to the young man who was healed of blindness (who then believes in Jesus and recognizes Him as the Son of God), and to the antagonistic Pharisees who were aware of the miracle.
- c. In the last lesson we concluded with Jesus making a statement about Himself as the Good Shepherd that got his opponents particularly angry.
 - i. “Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one.” (John 10:25–30, NKJV)
 1. In our last lesson we looked at how many today misapply Jesus statement, “they shall never perish, neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand” to teach the false doctrine of unconditional eternal security, also known as “once saved/always saved”.
 - a. Jesus defined who His sheep are, by saying “I know them, and they follow me.”
 - i. If someone is no longer following Jesus (obeying His teachings), how can he or she claim to be one of His sheep?
 - b. We can have security in our salvation as long as we are following His teachings, which involves obeying His commands. This is what Jesus taught consistently.
 - c. The closing statement that Jesus made, “I and the Father are one” was particularly upsetting to His opponents. We pick up here for our lesson today.

II. Jesus Makes Himself Equal (in Nature) with God, the Father

- a. Read **John 10:31-42**
- b. Summary of the story.
 - i. Jesus' enemies pick up stones to stone Him.
 - ii. Jesus asks them, for which miracle that He performed are they stoning Him?
 - iii. They respond that they plan to stone Him for the sin of blasphemy, making Himself God.
 - iv. Jesus defends against this charge of blasphemy by quoting a rather puzzling passage of Scripture, from **Psalms 82** (numbered **Psalms 81** in the Septuagint).
 - v. Jesus once again asserts that He is the Son of God, with the evidence of the miraculous works He has performed.
 - vi. His enemies want to seize Him, but Jesus somehow escapes and returns to the other side of the Jordan River, near the place where John the Baptist had been baptizing in the beginning. (**John 1:28**)
 - vii. Many people there believe in Jesus.
- c. **Question:** When Jesus said, "I and the Father *are one*" (**John 10:30**), what did He mean by that?
 - i. Many Christians struggle to explain how the Father and Son (and the Spirit) can be distinct persons, yet there is only one God.
 - ii. I have heard some Christians (incorrectly) claim that Jesus and the Father are the same person; that the Father *became* the Son.
 1. Those who assert this are trying to:
 - a. defend belief in only one God as opposed to three (Muslims accuse Christians of believing in three Gods); yet also
 - b. maintain the divinity of Christ.
 2. This position is essentially the ancient heresy called Monarchianism (*mono* = one, single; *archon* = ruler).
 - a. Those who hold to monarchianism (or modalism) claim that when Jesus said, "I and the Father are one", He meant they were one (and the same) person.

- i. In other words, God consists of only one person (not a trinity of three persons).
 - b. Examples I have heard preachers use (reflecting this heretical understanding of “*Monarchianism*” or “*Modalistic Monarchianism*”) in trying to explain the divinity of Christ and the relationship between the Father and the Son, include:
 - i. God (the Father) is like a farmer, and we are like ants. The (incorrect) analogy is that the farmer *became an ant* (the Son of God, Jesus) in order to fully communicate with the ants.
 - ii. In another (incorrect) analogy, Father/Son/Spirit relationship is claimed to be similar to water, which can exist in three different forms: as liquid water, ice (solid), and steam (water vapor).
 - 1. This suggests that God can change from one form to another (for example, that the Father could change into the Son, and vice-versa).
- iii. The Scriptural problems with the monarchian type framework are substantial. Some classic examples follow.
 - 1. Jesus said, “I and the Father are one.” (The verb is first person *plural*.)
 - a. In Greek: “ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἐν ἑσμέν.” (**John 10:30**)
 - b. He did NOT say “I and the Father am one” (which would require a first-person *singular* verb).
 - 2. Therefore, Jesus is speaking of a *unified* “one” of two parts (three if the Holy Spirit is included); not a *singular* “one” which would consist of only one person.
 - a. Jesus stated that He was “sent into the world” by the Father. (**John 10:36**)
 - b. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.” (**Luke 22:42**, NKJV)
 - i. The Son and the Father have different wills; the Son submitted himself to the Father’s will.

- c. Jesus said regarding the Day of His return, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” (**Mark 13:32**, NKJV)
 - i. There are things the Father knows (such as the time when Christ will return) that *the Son does not know*.
 - d. Jesus also told His disciples, “I am going away and coming back to you.’ If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.” (**John 14:28**, NKJV)
 - i. The Father is *greater than* the Son.
 - ii. Jesus is *going to His Father*. (He is *not* turning *into* the Father).
 - e. Paul told the Corinthians (in the passage on headcovering and uncovering), “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” (**1 Corinthians 11:3**, NKJV)
 - i. God, the Father, is the head of Christ. The Son came from the Father and the Father is greater than the Son.
3. Clearly, based on the Scriptures just mentioned, while the Father and Son share the same nature, are two distinct persons.
- iv. Examples used in the early Church to illustrate the unity of the Father and Son include:
- 1. A tree trunk coming from the roots of the tree.
 - 2. A ray of light coming from the sun in the sky.
 - 3. A stream emanating from a spring on the side of a hill.
 - 4. Perfume scent coming from a flower.
 - a. Note that in all of these examples there is a unity, yet the second element comes from (has its origin in) the first.
 - b. In that sense, the source would be the “head” of that which proceeded from it.

5. These examples can be very useful to help us to understand the trinity the same way the early Christians did (and in line with all of the Scriptures).
 - a. These examples also can help us explain the concept to those from Muslim or Jehovah Witness backgrounds, who struggle with the divinity of Christ, the Son of God.
 6. For more on the Father/Son relationship and the trinity, with quotes and examples used by the early Church, see *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. D. Bercot, articles on “Trinity”; and “Christ, the Divinity of”.
- d. Jesus’ enemies had accused him of blasphemy.
- i. **Questions:** What is blasphemy, and why did people immediately want to stone Jesus?
 1. Many people think that blasphemy means *claiming to be God*.
 2. To blaspheme simply means to profane the name of the Lord in some way.
 - a. In Noah Webster’s 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, “blaspheme” is defined as:
 - i. “To speak of the Supreme Being in terms of impious irreverence; to revile or speak reproachfully about God, or the Holy Spirit.”
 - ii. *Note that this particular dictionary (the original Webster’s dictionary, was written with a desire to help Americans to understanding the meaning of all significant terms used in the Bible, in the context of everyday language.*
 2. You can do this by misusing the name of the Lord or cursing the Lord’s name.
 3. We can see the meaning of this word from how it is used elsewhere in Scripture.
 - a. In **Daniel 3**, we see this same word “blaspheme” used by the king of Babylon, after the three young friends of Daniel are rescued from the fiery furnace:
 - b. “So King Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, ‘Blessed is the God of Shadrach Meshach and Abednego, who sent his Angel and saved his servants who trusted in Him; but they altered the word of the king and handed

over their bodies to be burned, so as not to serve and worship any god other than their God. Therefore, I make a decree: 'Any people, tribe, or language that blasphemes the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be destroyed, and their houses plundered, because there is no other God who can deliver in this way.'" (**Daniel 3:28-29**; designated **Daniel 3:95-96** in translations based on the LXX)

- c. Clearly, from context, "blaspheme" here means to speak in a negative way or to defame God.
4. Honoring the name of the Lord was contained in the Ten Commandments (**Exodus 20:7, Deuteronomy 5:11**)
 - a. "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain." (**Exodus 20:7, NKJV**)
 - i. This is actually a very common sin today, but most people do not realize how serious it is, in the eyes of God.
 - ii. For example, be careful while at your workplace, where God's name (or that of Christ) may be being defamed regularly. Let's not get pulled into this serious sin!
 - b. The Jews, most Protestants and the Orthodox consider this the Third Commandment.
 - c. Roman Catholics and Lutherans consider this the Second Commandment.
 - d. (Everyone agrees what the 10 Commandments were; they just organize the numbering in a different way.)
 5. The penalty for blasphemy was death by stoning at the hands of the community, according to the Law of Moses. (**Leviticus 24:13-16**)
 - ii. When Jesus' enemies accuse Him of blasphemy, it seems to me that they are accusing Him of degrading God by making Himself (a man) in effect equal to God. This is why they seek to stone Him.
 1. Jesus referred to God as His Father.
 2. He said, "I and My Father are one." (**John 10:30, NKJV**)

III. You are *Gods*?

- a. Here Jesus quotes a rather puzzling passage, from **Psalm 82**.
- b. Read all of **Psalm 82** (**Psalm 81** in the LXX).
 - i. At first glance, this passage may strike you (as it did me) as rather odd: almost “*New Age*”. There is only one God; so why does it speak about “gods” (plural)?
 1. I recently had a similar question, from my own son, who was reading in the Psalms and was mystified by this reference.
 - ii. Let us pay attention to what it says in **Psalm 82:1** and **82:6** about “gods”.
 - iii. Also consider what it says in **Psalm 82:2** and **82:7** about those same beings that are described as “gods”.
 - iv. The passage speaks of both God (at start of **Psalm 82:1**) and “gods” (in **Psalm 82:1** and **82:6**). What we learn in this passage about these “gods”:
 1. In **Psalm 82:1-2**, God is standing in the midst of and passing judgment *against* these “gods”. The “gods” have been judging unjustly, apparently showing favoritism toward the rich and powerful sinners, over the poor and orphans.
 2. In **Psalm 82:6-7** it says that on the one hand these “gods” are sons of the Most High (God). On the other hand, these “gods” *die like men*; it also says they *fall* like one of the rulers of men.
 3. Based on these observations, it seems that the term “gods” as used here is being applied to men who are rulers or judges over other people.
 4. **Question:** Why does it call these unjust judges “gods”?
 - a. **Possible Answer:** Perhaps because they are in fact “sons of the Most High”, as it says in **Psalm 82:6**?
 - b. **Possible Answer:** Perhaps because in their role as judges or rulers over men they are exercising some of the properties or roles that are associated with God, as suggested by what it says in **Psalm 82:2**?
 - v. Regardless of the reason, the Word of God is clearly referring to people as “gods” here. Jesus is pointing that out to his opponents, to back off those who are challenging Him about His claim to be the Son of God.

1. Jesus is saying, if God called people *gods*, why do you have a problem with the One sent into the world to the people being called the Son of God?
- c. Scriptures that come to mind regarding us being able to inherit properties of the divine include:
- i. “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (**John 1:11–13**, NKJV)
 - ii. “Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (**2 Peter 1:2–4**, NKJV)
 1. Peter continues to discuss the progression we are called to make as we add to our faith the very nature and qualities of God:
 2. “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love....” (**2 Peter 1:5–7**, NKJV)
 3. Note, that the invitation (and our ability) to become partakers of the divine nature is not automatic!
 - a. Peter warns us to be diligent to the end, and to be prepared at all times for the Coming of Jesus. He concludes, “be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless...beware lest you fall from your own steadfastness...” (**2 Peter 3:14–18**)
 - iii. “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” (**1 Corinthians 15:51–53**, NKJV)
 1. Paul also reminds us that immortality is not automatic for disciples. He concludes, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, *be*

steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58, NKJV)

- iv. Jesus told the church in Thyatira, “And *he who overcomes*, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’— as I also have received from My Father ...” (**Revelation 2:26–27**, NKJV)
- v. Jesus promised to Christians from the lukewarm church of Laodicea, “*To him who overcomes* I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (**Revelation 3:21**, NKJV)
- vi. Paul similarly said, “*If we endure*, we shall also reign with Him.” (**2 Timothy 2:12**, NKJV)
- vii. Some people ask why did God make man? What was the purpose? (For example, was He bored?) The Scriptures suggest something wonderful has been promised and prepared for those who follow Jesus to the end, who overcome.
 - 1. We can become children of God.
 - 2. We can be elevated from our fallen nature.
 - 3. We can reclaim immortality, a property of God.
 - 4. We can partake of the divine nature.
 - 5. We can, one day, rule over the nations and sit on the throne of Christ Himself.
 - 6. While we will never approach the uncreated nature of God, somehow He is willing to share with us *some of the properties of His nature, if we follow Him faithfully to the end.*
 - a. Perhaps that is why the Scriptures say, “you are gods”?
- d. Early Christian insights into “you are gods” and our ability to participate in the divine nature:
 - i. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 AD), a philosopher from Samaria who converted to the Christian faith, used this passage from the **Psalms** in a debate with Trypho (a Jew) and his Jewish friends. Justin had stated that those who follow Christ are the true descendants of Israel, the true “sons of God”. Justin continues this discussion:

1. “And when I saw that they were perturbed because I said that we are the sons of God, I anticipated their questioning, and said, ‘Listen, sirs, how the Holy Spirit speaks of this people, saying that they are all sons of the Highest; and how this very Christ will be present in their assembly, rendering judgment to all men. The words are spoken by David, and are, according to your version of them, thus: ‘God stands in the congregation of gods; He judges among the gods. How long do ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Judge for the orphan and the poor; and do justice to the humble and needy. Deliver the needy; and save the poor out of the hand of the wicked. They know not, neither have they understood; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth shall be shaken. I said, you are gods, and are all children of the Most High. But you die like men; and fall like one of the princes. Arise, O God! judge the earth, for You shall inherit all nations.’”
(Psalm 82)
2. “...in order to manifest the disobedience of men, - I mean of Adam and Eve, - and the fall of one of the princes, i.e., of him who was called the serpent, who fell with a great overthrow, because he deceived Eve. But as my discourse is not intended to touch on this point, but to prove to you that the Holy Spirit reproaches men because they were made like God, free from suffering and death, provided that they kept His commandments, and were deemed deserving of the name of His sons, and yet they, becoming like Adam and Eve, work out death for themselves; let the interpretation of the Psalm be held just as you wish, yet thereby it is demonstrated that all men are deemed worthy of becoming ‘gods,’ and of having power to become sons of the Highest; and shall be each by himself judged and condemned like Adam and Eve...”
 - a. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, pp. 261–262).
 - ii. Irenaeus (c. 130-200 AD), bishop of the church in Lyon (in modern-day France) had been a student of Polycarp, who in turn was a disciple of the apostle John.
 1. A summary of Irenaeus’ understanding of “you are gods”:
 - a. Both men and angels were given free will.
 - b. Men and angels are created beings, created by God who is uncreated.

- c. Like a mother does not give her child solid food at first, because it is not ready for it, God did not at first grant perfection to man.
 - d. Although we were not uncreated, God loves us and wants to bestow good things upon *us including immortality*, which is a characteristic of divinity.
2. “Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord. For God is He who is yet to be seen, and the beholding of God is productive of immortality, but immortality renders one nigh unto God.
 3. “Irrational, therefore, in every respect, are they who do not await the time of increase, but ascribe to God the infirmity of their nature. Such persons know neither God nor themselves, being insatiable and ungrateful, unwilling to be at the outset what they have also been created—men subject to passions; but go beyond the law of the human race, and before that they become men, they wish to be even now like God their Creator, and they who are more destitute of reason than dumb animals [insist] that there is no distinction between the uncreated God and man, a creature of today.
 4. “For these, [the dumb animals], bring no charge against God for not having made them men; but each one, just as he has been created, gives thanks that he has been created. For we cast blame upon Him, because we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods; although God has adopted this course out of His pure benevolence, that no one may impute to Him invidiousness or grudgingness. He declares, ‘I have said, you are gods; and you are all sons of the Highest.’ But since we could not sustain the power of divinity, He adds, ‘But you shall die like men,’ (**Psalm 82:6-7**) setting forth both truths—the kindness of His free gift, and our weakness, and also that we were possessed of power over ourselves.
 5. “For after His great kindness He graciously conferred good [upon us], and made men like to Himself, [that is] in their own power; while at the same time by His foreknowledge He knew the infirmity of human beings, and the consequences which

would flow from it; but through [His] love and [His] power, He shall overcome the substance of created nature. For it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited; then, after that, that what was mortal should be conquered and swallowed up by immortality, and the corruptible by incorruptibility, and that man should be made after the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil.”

- a. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 522)
- b. The points Irenaeus is making include:
 - i. Don't blame God for your weaknesses. We were made men (and subject to sin/infirmity) but have been given the opportunity to become “gods” over time (the opportunity to participate in the divine nature).
 - ii. Animals don't blame God for the fact that they were not created men.
 - iii. With God's help and power, we can overcome our nature, and the mortal can be overcome by immortality.

IV. How Jesus Viewed the Scriptures

- a. This passage provides a valuable window into how Jesus (and His opponents) viewed the Scriptures.
- b. “If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken)” (**John 10:35**, NKJV)
 - i. After quoting a line from **Psalm 82**, He makes his point and then comments “and the Scripture cannot be broken.”
- c. People often ask me, “*What kind of Christian are you?*” After all, there are so many varieties out there. What does your church believe on X, Y or Z? Are you a “fundamentalist Christian”? Do you take everything in the Bible literally?
 - i. I generally respond that I try to have the same attitude regarding the Scriptures that Jesus Himself had. Then I point to the words of Jesus.
- d. Jesus' attitude: the truth of the Scriptures is beyond question.
 - i. “But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.” (**Matthew 23:8**, NKJV)

1. Jesus is the king over the kingdom. He is the Christ, the Son of God, who was begotten of the Father before all ages, and through all things were made. He is *The Teacher*.
- ii. Jesus' attitude: The Scripture cannot be broken. Some examples:
 1. In this case (**John 10:35**), His entire argument hangs on *one word* within one psalm that most would have considered rather obscure.
 - a. Actually, His point hangs on the last letter one word in the LXX (whether it is sigma or iota), the difference between gods (plural) and god (singular) in **Psalm 82:6**.
 2. Read **Matthew 22:41-46**.
 - a. Jesus challenges the Pharisees by quoting from **Psalm 110**, there basing his entire argument on one word: The Lord said to my Lord...".
 - b. Jesus then asks, how can the Christ be the son of David, if David refers to him as his Lord?
 - c. Jesus' attitude: David was *inspired by the Holy Spirit* when he wrote the words of this psalm.
 3. Read **Matthew 22:23-33**.
 - a. Jesus again argues his point (this time on the resurrection, to the Sadducees) by quoting from **Exodus 3:6**, where the Lord speaks to Moses from the burning bush.
 - b. Here, Jesus' entire point rests on the tense of one word. The Lord said, "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (present tense). He did not say "I was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (past tense).
- iii. My absolute reliance in and confidence in the Scriptures, inspired down to the words and even letters, is not based on my church or training. It is based on Jesus' attitude. The Scriptures cannot be broken.
 1. Very few today are willing to accept that. They want to *break or bend* the words of God (teachings, commands, etc.) that are unpopular or harder to follow.

2. Sadly, here in Massachusetts I see banners that say, “God is still speaking” in front of many churches. (These words are meant to suggest that we can continually “*update*” revealed truth as we go along.)
 - a. Actually, if “God is still speaking”, then He is still saying the same thing (because the Scriptures cannot be broken).
 - i. The problem is that people who don’t want to hear it are closing their eyes and ears, and gathering around themselves teachers who say what their itching ears want to hear.
 - ii. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables.” (**2 Timothy 4:3-4**, NKJV)
3. The foundation must be complete trust and reliance on the Word of God.
 - a. I acknowledge that translators or copyists may make mistakes. Also, no translation is perfect (*the translators* are not directly inspired by the Holy Spirit).
 - b. Some things we read in Scripture may be puzzling and difficult to understand.
 - c. We still need to discern when Jesus is speaking literally versus when He is speaking figuratively (examples: “destroy this temple” in **John 2:19**; “Lazarus sleeps; I go that I may wake him up” in **John 11:11**, etc.).
 - d. However, the desire must be to understand the original intent of the speaker or writer; not to break or bend.
4. This is a hill worth dying on (inspiration of Scripture). If Satan wins on that one, it is just a matter of time before it all falls apart (family, roles in the church, homosexuality, etc.).
5. Let us continue to commit ourselves to deep, consistent study of God’s Word, to the Scriptures which Jesus says, “cannot be broken”!