

John 10:34-35 Are Men “Gods?”

“Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken:” John 10:34-35 KJV

This passage is part of the longer section dealing with Jesus’ disputation with the Jews concerning who He is and just how He relates to the Father. Unfortunately, this passage has been utilized by many different groups to teach that men either can become gods (such as the Mormon Church) or that men are right now gods in some sense or another. Just why did Jesus say these words? What do they mean?

The first thing to do when approaching any passage of Scripture is to determine the context - what was being said? John 10:1-18 presents Jesus as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. Verse 19 tells us that the Jews were divided over the issue of who Jesus was, some saying He had a demon, others pointing to His works and saying that demonized individuals don’t do things like that. In verses 22-25 the Jews surrounded Jesus in Solomon’s porch and asked Him directly if He was the Messiah. Jesus’ answer in verses 25 through 30 represents one of the greatest Christological passages in John. Christ finishes the brief discourse with the words, “I and the Father are one.” The Jews’ reaction to this statement was natural and quick - they picked up stones again to stone Him. Jesus asks them for a reason for their action in verse 32, and in verse 33 the Jews respond by saying, “For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.” Again John points out the real problem of the Jews - they would not accept Jesus Christ for Whom He revealed Himself to be. Jesus had earlier addressed this problem in 8:24 by saying, “I said, therefore, unto you, that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.”

At this point we encounter Jesus’ words in John 10:34. A few brief comments need to be made on the passage itself. First, Jesus says “is it not written in your law?” Actually, it is written in Psalm 82:6. This is vital to the understanding of the passage. Jesus often quoted from the Old Testament to demonstrate a truth to the Jews. Here He quotes from the 82nd Psalm. We will look at that passage in a moment.

Second, the word “are” is in the present tense - if someone claims that this passage teaches that men can become gods, why is it that Jesus said the Jews were right then “gods?” However He meant it, it certainly cannot be taken in reference to eventually being exalted to the status of a true “god.”

Jesus went on from verse 34 to claim that He was sanctified and sent into the world by the Father, and that they should believe in Him if for no other reasons than the works He had done before them.

And so we come back to the original question, this time in a better position to answer it. The key to understanding John 10:34 is found in Jesus’ use of the Old Testament quotation from Psalm 82. What is Psalm 82 about? The answer is found by reading this brief 8 verse Psalm. Verse 2, in reference to the “gods” says, “How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked?” Psalm 82 is about unrighteous judges, the judges of Israel. These judges were called “elohim” (gods) because of their position of judging Israel in the place of God. Yet Psalm 82 indicates that many of these judges did not act righteously, causing the Psalmist to lament this condition. Notice what verses 6 and 7 say: “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.” The Psalm itself contains the prophecy of the doom of these unrighteous judges. Obviously, therefore, the Psalm is not about eternal, infinite “gods” (infinite, true “gods” don’t “die like men”) but rather applies the term “gods” to men in a figurative way due to their position as judges in Israel.

Realizing that the Jews would know this background, what was the significance of Jesus’ quotation of Psalm 82:6? As can be seen, Jesus was, in effect, calling His accusers false judges by applying this passage to them. He then goes on to point out the error of accusing Him of blasphemy despite the Father’s clear approval of the Son (vs. 36). Then in verse 38 He asserts the inter-penetration of the Father and the Son (“the Father is in me, and I in him”) which is followed again by the attack of the Jews (vs. 39) which causes Jesus to withdraw from Judea (vs. 40).

Any kind of interpretation of John 10:34 that ignores the Old Testament background of the passage is bound for error. The writers of the New Testament did not contradict the Old when it quotes God as saying, “Is there a God beside me? Yea, there is no God; I know not any.” (Isaiah 44:8) God also said, “... before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.” (Isaiah 43:10) Hence, the interpreter of John 10:34 must keep in mind that Biblically the One True God is completely and totally unique -

there are none like Him. (Psalm 77:13; 113:5, Isaiah 46:9) It is good to remember the words of God: “You thought I was just like you: I will reprove you, and state the case in order before your eyes.” (Psalm 50:21)



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