

(Appendix 5) Refuting the Fallacy of "Man Becoming God" (Caleb Huang)

The Origin of the Fallacy of "Man Becoming God"

The concept of "man becoming God" first appeared in the fourth century AD, initiated by Athanasius, an elder of the church in Alexandria. He was a stalwart opponent of Arianism and a vigorous defender of the Nicene Creed; his efforts ensured that future generations of Christians would have a correct understanding of Christ's divinity, thereby establishing the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. However, in his famous work **On the Incarnation**, he wrote: "He [Christ] became man so that we might become God." His original intention was to explain that, due to the Fall, human nature was corrupted and the image of God was lost. Now, God has become man in Christ—possessing both full divinity and full humanity—and through our faith and acceptance, we become children of God, receive God's life, and partake of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). In doing so, we manifest God's image and fulfill God's original purpose in creating man (Genesis 1:26–27; 5:1–2). Unexpectedly, this statement was later taken out of context by leaders of certain Christian heresies to support erroneous doctrines—such as the theory of "man becoming God" and the doctrine of "papal infallibility"—thereby deceiving followers into revering them. Ordinary believers came to believe that while they were in the process of being transformed into "God," they still remained in a stage where the "human" element predominated, whereas their leaders had already metamorphosed into the state of "God."

Arguments for "Man Becoming God"

Just as proponents of other heresies cite Scripture—often out of context—to support their views, advocates of the "man becoming God" fallacy also cite specific verses to claim that the Bible indeed reveals the doctrine of "man becoming God." The verses they cite most frequently are as follows:

"I said, 'You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High'" (Psalm 82:6). "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, 'You are gods"'? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came... do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the

world, "You are blaspheming," because I said, "I am the Son of God"?" (John 10:34–36)
"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). Taken literally, the three passages above might seem to provide strong support for the idea that "man becomes God." However, when we examine their contexts, we find that they refer to something else and do not imply that "man" is literally "God."

A Brief Exposition of Psalm 82

The theme of this psalm is "the righteous, Most High God sternly rebuking unrighteous judges and the leaders of the people." In this psalm, these unrighteous judges and leaders are referred to as "gods" (verse 1) and "gods" (verse 6)—terms that are plural in the original language—whereas the Most High "God" (verse 8) is singular. Judges and leaders among the people of Israel were God's representatives on earth; thus, the Old Testament frequently refers to them using the plural term *Elohim* ("gods") (see the original Hebrew of Exodus 21:5–6; 22:8–9, 28). As representatives of the righteous God, they were duty-bound to administer justice impartially. Yet, in reality, many judges and leaders—though regarded as God's representatives—"judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked" (Psalm 82:2), thereby incurring the rebuke of the Most High God.

Thus, the statement "You are gods" (Psalm 82:6) does not actually acknowledge them as gods; rather, it carries a negative, condemnatory tone, implying that they fail to live up to the title they bear. Thus, it goes on to say: "Nevertheless you will die like men" (Psalm 82:7). Therefore, we can confidently assert that the statement "you are gods" can by no means be used to prove the concept of "man becoming God."

A Brief Exposition of John Chapter 10

In this chapter, the term "the Jews" refers to the Pharisees and rulers who were the custodians of God's word. They habitually regarded themselves as God's spokesmen and were zealous in upholding the Law; yet, unwittingly, they kept God's people (the flock) confined and bound by the Law, preventing them from enjoying the salvation of God's life. Now, Jesus Christ—the "Good Shepherd"—had come to set His sheep free from the sheepfold so they might obtain abundant life; however, because these "Jews" did not know Him, they vehemently opposed Him and accused Him of blasphemy. Consequently, the Lord Jesus was compelled to reason with them using the very words of the Law with which they were familiar.

Here, the Lord Jesus accommodates their level of understanding by pointing out that, according to the Old Testament, rulers entrusted by God to govern His people were called "gods." How, then, could it be considered blasphemy for the One "whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world" to claim to be the Son of God (John 10:36)?

This serves as another reminder that the statement "I said, 'You are gods'" is not a positive affirmation in the sense often implied; it certainly cannot be used to substantiate the idea of "man becoming God."

The Meaning of "Like Him" in 1 John

1 John tells us that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all (1:5); to be "like Him" means walking in the light, just as God is in the light (1:7). Loving the brethren serves as proof that we are walking in the light (2:9–11). This love for the brethren originates from the life of God (4:7–9). Although we believers already possess the life of God (5:11–13), it is still possible for us not to live by that life; therefore, we must "abide in the Lord" by holding fast to the truth heard from the beginning and obeying the teaching of the Lord's anointing (2:24–27). As we abide in Him, He abides in us (3:24). In this way, "love" is perfected within us (4:16–17).

Therefore, viewing the entire First Epistle of John, the statement that "we shall be like Him" (3:2) does not imply that "man becomes God"; rather, it means that we will fully manifest the attributes of God's life—such as light, love, truth, righteousness, holiness, and goodness—to the utmost degree, becoming truly like Him and bearing His likeness.

There is no concept of "man becoming God" in the Bible.

A thorough search of the entire Bible reveals no verse mentioning "man becoming God" (or "becoming gods"). Even the expression "are gods" (referring to *elohim*) appears in the Old Testament merely to designate judges and civil leaders, often carrying a negative connotation. In the New Testament, the only instance of this phrase occurs when the Lord Jesus quotes the Psalms to refute the Jews (John 10:34–36).

Proponents of the "man becoming God" doctrine have reportedly cited the term "man of God" from the Old Testament (Deut. 33:1; 1 Sam. 9:6–10; 1 Kings 13:6, 10, 19; 17:24; 2 Kings 1:10, 12; 4:9, 21–22, 25, 27) as evidence that certain individuals are in the process of becoming God. In reality, this is a misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Scripture. The term "man of God" in the Chinese Union Version corresponds to the phrase "man of God" in the New Testament (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 3:17); it simply denotes a person's identity as belonging to God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9; 1

John 4:4, 6; 5:19). The Desire to "Become God" Was the Path of Satan's Fall

Readers of the Bible know that the King of Tyre in the Book of Ezekiel typifies Satan. Originally an archangel created by God—exceedingly beautiful—he became arrogant in his heart and aspired to liken himself to "God"; consequently, he was cast out by God and hurled to the ground (Ezekiel 28:1–2, 6, 11–17).

The Book of Isaiah also records the cause of Satan's fall: he was once the "Day Star, Son of the Morning," but because he sought to exalt himself to equality with God, his ultimate fate was to be "brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the pit" (Isaiah 14:12–15; cf. Revelation 20:10). The New Testament also reveals that when the "man of sin"—the son of perdition—is eventually revealed, he will "proclaim himself to be God" (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4).

As Christians, we ought to reject the mindset that led to Satan's fall and instead adopt the mind of Christ Jesus—"Who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:5–11). While we live on earth, we should submit to the likeness and status of "man"; as for our future, we should trustingly commit it to God's will and plan—why should we ever seek to usurp the status of "God"?

The Desire to "Become God" Is an Expression of Dissatisfaction with God's Salvation

The Bible shows us that by believing in and accepting the Lord Jesus Christ, sinners are "born of God" (John 1:13), receive the right to become "children of God" (John 1:12), possess the "life of God" (1 John 5:12), and partake of the "divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Is such a great salvation (Hebrews 2:3) not already excellent and exalted enough? Why must we use language not found in the Bible to describe this salvation? Ultimately, this stems from a sense of dissatisfaction with the salvation clearly described in the Bible—as if being a "child of God" or possessing the "life of God" were not enough, and one must "become God" to be truly fulfilled. This is a matter of grave seriousness and significance!

Proponents of the "man becoming God" doctrine argue: "We advocate for man becoming God so that we may live out a holy life like God's." The implication is that possessing the life of God is somehow insufficient for Christians to overcome sin; yet, such thinking directly contradicts biblical teaching (cf. 1 John 3:9).

The Dangers of the "Man Becoming God" Doctrine

Although some advocates of this doctrine acknowledge that the "God" they speak of possesses only "divine nature" rather than "divine personhood"—thereby claiming not to blaspheme the one true God—the slogan "man becoming God" insidiously erodes the minds of some Christians, leading them unwittingly into one of two extremes:

- (i) Those who have made some spiritual progress may consider themselves superior, harboring the desire to liken themselves to God, thereby repeating the error that led to Satan's fall.
- (ii) Ordinary believers, feeling inadequate—seeing that after years of learning they remain merely the "old Adam"—may turn to venerate the spiritual giants in their eyes, treating them as if they were "God."

The Example of the New Testament

In the early church, the apostles possessed extraordinary miraculous powers that commanded great reverence from both the general public and fellow believers; yet, they never dared to liken themselves to "God." Instead, they consistently demonstrated their humanity. When Cornelius fell at his feet to worship him, the Apostle Peter said, "Stand up; I myself am also a man" (Acts 10:25–26). Upon hearing that the crowd intended to offer sacrifices to them, the apostles Paul and Barnabas tore their garments, rushed into the midst of the people, and cried out: "Men, why are you doing this? We too are men, with the same nature as you" (Acts 14:13–15). Even when the Apostle John, in his old age, beheld visions of heaven, he harbored no notion of transcending humanity or "becoming God." He remained filled with such reverence that he inadvertently committed the error of worshipping an angel; the angel's words of correction clearly demonstrate that, even into eternity, we remain God's servants (Rev. 19:10; cf. Rev. 22:3). We are not God, nor will we ever become God. — Caleb Huang