

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord:

Greetings from all of us here in Maryville, Tennessee. I pray this letter finds you in good spirits and good health. This month I would like to start by asking you a question. Is it blasphemy to say you are Gods? The Jews said it was, as they picked up rocks to stone Christ. Why? Because that is a hard saying for the natural mind to accept when you first hear it.

Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods" (John 10:31-34) [*New King James Version* throughout unless noted].

Let us examine that statement in the Psalms from where the quote is taken and understand why He called them gods.

God stands in the congregation [or family] of the mighty [or mighty ones]; He judges among the gods (Psalm 82:1).

Who are these "gods"? Let us find out.

"Gods" is #430 in *Strong's Concordance* and means "exceeding very great, mighty, or mighty judges."

God says to these mighty god-like judges in verse 2:

How long will you [god-like judges or potential gods] judge unjustly, And show partiality to the wicked [to accept the persons of the wicked]?

This is a question which He wanted answered. Then God commands these potential gods who are judging unjustly in verse 3 to:

Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy.

Also in verse 4 God says:

Deliver the poor and needy; Free them from the hand of the wicked. They [these potential gods who were supposed to defend the poor and fatherless] do not know, nor do they understand; They walk about in darkness; All the foundations of the earth are unstable [or out of course].

Why? Because they have not judged righteously the people of God. Instead of serving the people, they sought to take advantage because of their position. Despite the Lord's warning and correction there seems to be no hope of improvement. Why? Because they fail to act with knowledge and understanding, since they themselves as the potential sons of God, are groping about in darkness. So there seems to be little hope in their helping others who need direction. As a result of their failure to act righteously and wisely, the foundations of the church and society are unstable. It seems that law and order have all but vanished. So the psalmist David asks the question in the person of Jesus Christ, who inspired the scripture to be written:

Verse 2: how long will this partiality to the wicked continue?

The prophet Habakkuk asked the same question and got this answer from the Lord recorded in the Book of Habakkuk. The burden which this true prophet of God saw in his own land about which he was deeply distressed was the moral and spiritual conditions around him in his own country. He loved his nation (the nation of Judah) and knew it was moving closer and closer to the precipice of destruction by continuing to break the laws of God. Therefore, two questions troubled and burdened him greatly, and he was beseeching God for answers in this book.

The two questions were: How long would this condition of lawlessness continue? and, Why was it allowed to continue? The answer to the second question is that God has mercifully given time for the people He loves to repent. His plan is to bring them all to repentance. He gave His life for this very reason!

The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw. O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" And You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises.

Therefore the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore perverse judgment proceeds (Habakkuk 1:1–4).

It seems the wicked have taken over; this is what Habakkuk saw in his own land of Judah. People whom the Eternal calls "gods" were not setting a very good example. God even gives them—these potential sons—His name (god) knowing they will eventually become part of the God Family. This is God's desire, that all will be saved and will put on God's divine nature! Now back to Psalm 82:6–8:

I [God] said, "You are gods, And all of you are children of the Most High [God's potential sons].

Actually they are not divine yet, but because of their position as God's priests and ministers, to administer God's government, they are dignified with the name of gods. Their greatest distinction is that the Word of God came to them first. They were first to know God's way of life, and because of this they were officially ordained, or set apart by God, as the higher powers who will judge the earth. Yet they have not judged correctly. Even so, God still calls them "gods" because of their potential to become gods in the God Family and to help Christ judge the nations.

Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints [as potential gods] will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? (1 Corinthians 6:1–4).

Although these potential gods are exalted to a heavenly privilege in that God calls them to judge righteously, they shall be cast down in punishment like all men who pervert justice. "But you shall die like men, And fall like one of the princes" (Psalm 82:7).

The fact that God calls them gods and children of the Most High does not grant them immunity from judgment and correction. They will be subject to the same treatment and correction as other men and princes of this world.

The LORD stands up to plead, And stands to judge the people. The LORD will enter into judgment With the elders of His people And His princes: "For you have eaten up the vineyard [symbolic of God's church]; The plunder of the poor is in your houses [of worship]. What do you mean by crushing My people And grinding the faces of the poor?" Says the Lord GOD of hosts (Isaiah 3:13–15).

Since the verdict is guilty, the punishment is coming and unavoidable.

"Look among the nations [the Gentile nations] and watch—Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you. [What is that work that God will do?] For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans [a Gentile nation], A bitter and hasty nation Which marches through the breadth of the earth, To possess dwelling places that are not theirs. [This is the unbelievable work God will bring about to correct His people.] They are terrible and dreadful; Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves. Their horses also are swifter than leopards, And more fierce than evening wolves. Their chargers charge ahead; Their cavalry comes from afar; They fly as the eagle that hastens to eat. "They all come for violence; Their faces are set like the east wind. [The enemy comes like locust carried on the east wind.] They gather captives [God's people] like sand. They scoff at kings, And princes are scorned by them. They deride every stronghold, For they heap up earthen mounds and seize it [that is Jerusalem—God's people] (Habakkuk 1:5–10).

This is the work that God is going to do! Did you understand? He is raising up a mighty Gentile nation to inflict punishment on His own people. This is happening now in our time! It is not to rebuild the "Armstrong Empire" or the Worldwide Church of God as it was in the past, but to punish those who have not kept their covenant agreement at baptism with God. It will be a work you will not believe though it were told you because after He corrects them by this Gentile army, He will restore them by redeeming them. This unbelievable work which God will do lies just ahead of us.

. . . Then his mind changes [the mind of this Gentile nation that God used to punish His people], and he transgresses; He commits offense, Ascribing this power to his god." [his false, weak, powerless god] (verse 11).

He does not understand that God the Eternal gave him his power. Then Habakkuk addresses God:

Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We [Judah] shall not die, O LORD, You have appointed them [Israel] for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them [Israel] for correction (verse 12).

The *King James Version* renders it: "O Mighty God, You have marked them for correction." "O Mighty God" in the Hebrew means "O Rock." Who is the Rock to whom Habakkuk is referring? Jesus Christ is the God of the Old Testament. To substantiate that, we read in 1 Corinthians:

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1–4).

Habakkuk 1:12 in the *Living Bible* reads: ". . . you [Jesus Christ] have decreed the rise of these Chaldeans to chasten and correct us for our awful sins." Actually the degree of punishment (speaking of Judah) will be greater because of their calling and greater privilege of being addressed as gods, a name they did not live up to. How about God's people today. Are they living up to the name God has given them? Habakkuk continues speaking to God:

You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those [the Chaldeans] who deal treacherously, And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours A person more righteous than he? (Habakkuk 1:13).

Yes, in the process of conquering Israel the Chaldeans did prove themselves in the past worse than the people they were sent to correct. War can certainly affect the way people think and act in the heat of battle.

Why do You make men [of Israel] like fish of the sea, Like creeping things that have no ruler over them? (verse 14).

It is because Israel has rejected God from ruling over them.

They [the Chaldeans] take up all of them with a hook [angle], They catch them in their net, And gather them in their dragnet. Therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice to their net, And burn incense to their dragnet [or drag—which I believe was their strong military machine] (verse 15).

This is what caused the Gentile nation, or army God is using, to have a mind change in verse 11. They have come to believe that it is through their own power they have been able to do this to Israel. This is why they burn incense to their dragnet or drag. The word "drag" is #4365 in *Strong's* and it means "fisher's net or dragnet," symbolic of their military machine that has enabled them to capture so many of God's people. Because of this mind change, God will have to correct them also after He is finished using them to correct His own people.

Shall they [Chaldeans] therefore empty their net [of Israelites], And continue to slay nations without pity? (verse 17).

This is what they plan to do because of their mind change. They now think that they can conquer the world! But the implied answer is, No! God will correct them also when they have accomplished His will in correcting Israel, God's people in this end time.

Now we get to the why and for how long—the answer to Habakkuk's question.

I will stand my watch And set myself on the rampart [or tower], And watch to see what He will say to me, And what I will answer when I am corrected [or reproved]. Then the LORD answered me and said: "Write the vision And make it plain on tablets [or on a billboard for all to see], That he may run who reads it. [To do what? To spread the word, of course.] For the vision is yet for an appointed time [future]; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry. "Behold the proud [or the wicked], His soul is not upright in him [Why? He does not believe this vision will ever come.]; But the just shall live by his faith [that this vision will come to pass] (Habakkuk 2:1–4).

When verse 3 is quoted in Hebrews 10:37, the "it" referring to the vision becomes "He"—the Lord—who will surely come and will not tarry.

"For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith [in His appearing]; But if anyone draws back, [through lack of faith] My soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who draw back to perdition [or destruction], but of those who believe to the saving of the soul (Hebrews 10:37–39).

These will be the gods who will rule with Christ when He comes.

Jesus answered them [the Jews] "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods" [potential sons of the Kingdom] (John 10:34)?

The "I" in this verse is referring to Jesus Christ, the God of the Old Testament who said in Psalm 82:6, "You are gods."

If He [Christ—referring to Himself] called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him [Christ—who caused it to be written] whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? (John 10:35–36).

Christ was simply quoting scripture from Psalm 82:6. "I said, 'You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.' How can that be blasphemy if I am only quoting from the Holy Scriptures? And if you cannot accept the scriptures, believe the works that I do!"

If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him. [But instead they sought to destroy Him for the words that He spoke to them from the scriptures.] Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand (John 10:37–39).

But they will be corrected in time because God scourges every son who He receives.

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? [The implied answer is none.] But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons (Hebrews 12:5–8).

After God corrects His sons—who are potential Gods—and they repent and are redeemed and come to understand and accept God's way as their way of life, He will say to them at the resurrection:

Arise, O God [A better rendition would be, "Arise, O gods," because "God" can mean more than one], judge the earth; for You shall inherit all nations (Psalm 82:8).

"I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession (Psalm 2:7–8).

Revelation 5:10 says, "And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."

How long? We shall reign for one thousand years.

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his

image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4).

Yes, Christ and His saints—having become spiritual Gods—will intervene in the affairs of man, bringing righteousness and justice to replace corruption and inequity. At this time, as the prophets predicted, justice will dwell in the wilderness and righteousness will remain in a fruitful field. We find this prophecy in Isaiah 32:

Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, And righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The work of righteousness will be peace, And the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places (Isaiah 32:16–18).

The earth will enjoy a time of social justice and freedom from graft and deceit.

So is it blasphemy to call God's people "gods"? No!! Not at all! Why? Because you are the anointed of the Lord, the potential gods that will rule with Him when He returns to the earth to set up His Kingdom.

Is it wrong to want to be God? Is it something we should seek with all our might? Well, it depends upon how badly we want to serve, to bring God's way of life to this sick and dying world. As Gods we will have the power! Think of it—we will have the power to help convert this world when Christ returns to set up His Kingdom of peace and joy with His saints.

Today we see a lot of injustices and graft in the world. We see rioting, war, unrest, sickness and starvation everywhere. The news is depressing to watch on TV. This is going to change when Christ returns.

So, do you want to be instrumental in bringing about that change? If you do, then you will have to become God to bring it about. If this is the reason you want to become God—to serve the people and not to be served—then you have the right motivation to become God, to bring about this change for good.

If you have this hope, then you need to be doing something, and that something is found in 1 John 3:1–3:

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us [Why?],

because it did not know Him [Christ]. Beloved, now [present tense] we are children of God [I like the *King James Version* better, "Now we are the sons 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 (verse 2).

And how will He appear? As God! So how will we appear? As God! This is our hope brethren, to become God! So verse 3 tells us what we must be doing to bring this about.

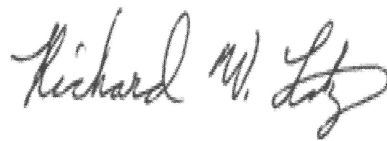
And everyone who has this hope in Him [Christ] purifies himself, just as He is pure (verse 3).

Christ set us the example and told us who would be great in His Kingdom.

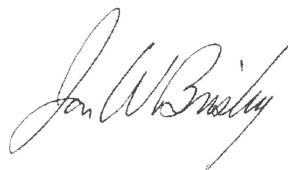
But Jesus called them [His disciples] to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant [or minister]. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave [or servant]— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25–28).

This is our calling, brethren, to serve and not be served. If this is our motivation in becoming God, then that is a good thing—something that we should seek with all our might.

Your devoted servant in the family of gods,



Richard W. Litz



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