

Jesus defends his claim using language they should be able to understand, through an appeal to the law. He cites a text that uses the word *god* of those who are not God: *Is it not written in your Law, "I have said you are gods"?* (v. 34). It is unclear who is being referred to in Psalm 82:6. Of the several proposals made by scholars (cf. Beasley-Murray 1987:176-77), the most likely takes this as a reference either to Israel's judges or to the people of Israel as they receive the law. The latter is a common understanding among the rabbis (for example, *b. 'Aboda Zara* 5a; *Exodus Rabbah* 32:7), but the former is also represented in Jewish interpretation (*Midrash Psalms*; *b. Sanhedrin* 6b; 7a; *b. Sota* 47b). Jesus' explanation that these *gods* are those *to whom the word of God came* (v. 35) might point to the Israelites receiving the law. In this case the contrast between these *gods* and Jesus would be that Jesus is the one who both fulfills the law and is greater than the law. But this expression *to whom the word of God came* could also refer to the judges (as suggested by the rest of Ps 82) who have received a commission from God to exercise the divine prerogative of judgment on his behalf. The psalm is actually a condemnation of the judges for not exercising their responsibility faithfully, thus corresponding both to the condemnation of these Jewish leaders in John and to Jesus as the true judge.

To make his point Jesus uses an argument from the lesser to the greater, a very common form of argument in the ancient world, not least among the rabbis. He compares the people who are called *gods* to himself, the Son of God. They merely received the word of God, whereas he is *the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world* (v. 36). Here is a succinct summary of the central truth of his identity, which has been emphasized throughout this Gospel. He is using the language of an agent (see note on 5:21), but the implication is that he existed with the Father before coming into the world. Thus, he is putting himself in the category of the law that was given by God rather than in the category of one of the recipients of that law. By saying he was *set apart* ("consecrated," *hagiazos*) he is claiming a status similar to the temple, whose reconsecration these opponents are celebrating at this feast.

The opponents in Jerusalem have rejected him, but now, across the Jordan, many come to him and believe in him (vv. 41-42). They have received John's witness concerning Jesus: *Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true* (v. 41). No miracles are associated with John in the New Testament, Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* 18.116-19) or any other source (Bammel 1965:183-88). This is striking because "the praise of a man of God who did *not* perform miracles was completely unknown in Jewish sources" (Bammel 1965:191). This makes John's witness to Jesus stand out even more as the great accomplishment of his

ministry. From a Christian point of view, such witness *is* a great work for it enables people to do the work of God, to believe in the one sent from God (6:29).