

John 10:33

“We are not stoning you for any of these,” replied the Jews, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.” (NIV)

1. Any difficulty in understanding this verse is caused by the translators. Had they faithfully rendered the Greek text in verse 33 as they did in verses 34 and 35, then it would read, “...you, a man, claim to be *a god*.” In the next two verses, John 10:34 and 35, the exact same word (*theos*, without the article) is translated as “god,” not “God.” The point was made under John 1:1 that usually when “God” is meant, the noun *theos* has the definite article. When there is no article, the translators know that “god” is the more likely translation, and they are normally very sensitive to this. For example, in Acts 12:22, Herod is called *theos* without the article, so the translators translated it “god.” The same is true in Acts 28:6, when Paul had been bitten by a viper and the people expected him to die. When he did not die, “they changed their minds and said he was a god.” Since *theos* has no article, and since it is clear from the context that the reference is not about the true God, *theos* is translated “a god.” It is a general principle that *theos* without the article should be “a god,” or “divine.” Since there is no evidence that Jesus was teaching that he was God anywhere in the context, and since the Pharisees would have never believed that this *man* was somehow *Yahweh*, it makes no sense that they would be saying that he said he was “God.” On the other hand, Jesus was clearly teaching that he was sent by God and was doing God’s work. Thus, it makes perfect sense that the Pharisees would say he was claiming to be “a god” or “divine.”

2. We take issue with the NIV translation of “mere man” for the Greek word *anthropos*. The English word “anthropology,” meaning “the study of man,” is derived from *anthropos*. Spiros Zodhiates writes, “man, a generic name in distinction from gods and the animals.”¹ In the vast majority of versions, *anthropos* is translated as “man.” The word *anthropos* occurs 550 times in the Greek text from which the NIV was translated, yet the NIV translated it as “mere man” only in this one verse. This variance borders on dishonesty and demonstrates a willingness to bias the text beyond acceptable limits. Unfortunately, the NIV is not the only translation that puts a Trinitarian spin on this verse. The Jews would have never called Jesus a “mere” man. They called him what they believed he was—a “man.” They were offended because they believed that he, “being a man, made himself a god (*i.e.*, someone with divine status).

3. For more on *theos* without the article, see the notes on John 1:1 and Hebrews 1:8.

Morgridge, pp. 39-42

Racovian Catechism, pp. 34-36

Snedeker, p. 422

Endnotes:

1. Complete Word Study Dictionary, (AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN, 1992), p. 180.

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