

John 8:24b

For if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins. (*KJV*)

Trinitarians occasionally cite this verse to try to show the necessity of believing their doctrine, and unfortunately sometimes even to intimidate those who doubt it. They supply the word “God” after “I am,” not from the text, but from the dictates of their doctrine, and make the verse read: “For if you believe not that I am [God], ye shall die in your sins.” This is a distortion of the biblical text as a whole, and the Gospel of John in particular. The purpose of the Gospel is clearly stated in 20:31: “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is [“God”? No!] the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” In light of the explicitly stated purpose of the Gospel of John, teaching that unless one believes in Christ’s “deity,” he will die in his sins, is particularly unwarranted. The true meaning of the text is that if one does not believe that *Jesus is the Christ*, he will die in his sins, and this teaching can be found in a number of scriptures in the New Testament. Obviously, if one chooses to not believe in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, he will die in his sins. We believe the *NIV* does a good job with this particular text, especially in light of the way Christ was veiling his role as Messiah: “If you do not believe I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.” This then fits with other times he said similar things, such as in John 13:19 when he said to disciples at the last supper, “I am telling you this before it [his betrayal] happens so that when it does happen you will believe that I am he.”

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