



## What is the Bible?

*And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last. (1 Thessalonians 2:13-16)*

When conversations with friends and acquaintances “turn spiritual”—to matters of faith and God, purpose and justice, right and wrong—that’s our time to gently respond with the truth of God’s Word, but it’s not uncommon for someone to ask: well, what is the Bible? Why should the Bible be a valid source of authority over my beliefs and decisions? In one way or another it often boils down to the question, “Is the Bible man’s words or God’s words?” If you’ve ever found yourself locked in such a debate, the way through is not in having some smart philosophical answer, but instead to pose the question, “How does the Bible want to be understood?” As with any other piece of writing, we should respect the Bible enough to take it as the authors themselves intended. In similar fashion it would be unfair and deceptive to portray a news report as a fairytale or a piece of fiction as historical fact.

The Bible makes no apologies for claiming to be divinely inspired. Here we have yet another example of this doctrine as Paul equates his spoken and written words with the words of God himself (for other examples see: John 14:26, 16:13; 2 Peter 3:16; Rev. 1:1-3). Paul praises God that the Thessalonians received his message as God’s Word spoken through him as God’s agent that was now powerfully active in their lives.

Trust in God’s Word of truth always produces a number of changes in one’s heart and life, among them a willingness to suffer for adhering to it. Jesus told his disciples to expect that the world will hate us for no other reason than that we hold to his words (John 17:14). As “diversity and inclusion training” are made mandatory in our public schools and workplaces it is far more likely that we will be called backwards, bigoted, closed-minded, misogynistic, homophobic, transphobic, and worse, but this retaliation for refusing to actively affirm ungodly lifestyles may go well beyond words to include warnings, disciplinary actions, and even termination.

At times like these when clinging to the Word means becoming a target for our unbelieving countrymen, may we remember that it has always been this way. Cain hated and killed his believing brother Able. The prophets were silenced, exiled, and stoned. Our Lord Jesus was crucified. The apostles were persecuted and forcefully driven out of Judea.

But even should we be forced to the fringes of our society, may God keep us from turning self-righteous and circling the wagons and becoming closed up and closed off! Sadly, such became the attitude of many in the Jewish nation! They didn't see anyone else as being as worthy of God's love as themselves, and so they tried to stop those who were spreading God's grace. Like the Thessalonian Christians we are all the unworthy recipients of God's mercy, who have been called to stand on the Word of God, which has changed us and saved us!

Prayer: *Crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ, give us the courage and the opportunity to stand firmly and unashamedly on your holy Word in our private conversations and our public lives, no matter what the cost. In your name we pray. Amen.*