

Preacher/Teacher Modus Operandi

This article not some sort “pull back the curtain on the Wizard of Oz” exposé wherein the secret means and methods of preachers and teachers are revealed by an insider to the people in the pews. Instead, it’s a simple noticing of pertinent points from a few verses of the Sacred Text toward what should be the motivations, means, and objectives of those who desire to teach others the gospel. So please read **Acts 17:1-4** carefully relative to the apostle Paul’s efforts in Thessalonica, noting especially a few key words:

- **“custom,” v.2a-** It was Paul’s *habit* or “*custom*” to do certain things each time he began to preach and teach in a new area or town. These “habits” represent a formula he followed, and thus are surely worthy of our notice and attention if we want to develop his proven methods in our own study, preparation, and teaching.
- **“reasoned,” v.2b-** *Dialegomai* is the Greek word here, and it more literally means “to revolve in the mind.” Paul wanted his hearers to *think*; to *roll* or *revolve* God’s Word around in their minds in a way that perhaps even brought it into conflict with what they already thought and/or believed. But he didn’t seek to accomplish this purpose by yelling and screaming. Instead, he used logic and *reason* in an appeal to their *understanding*, rather than just their *emotions*.
- **“with them,” v.2c-** Not “at” them. There is an important difference between speaking/reasoning “with” someone rather than “at” them. The first seeks to *lead* them to proper conclusions, while the latter tries to *push* or *shove* them to action. This distinction in method is marked by motivation: wanting them to *understand* and *obey* as a result, versus them doing “the right thing” because you say so whether they understand the “why” or not. Asking good questions, listening perceptively to their answers, and then responding appropriately *leads* rather than *pushes* them to the proper conclusions and resultant activities.
- **“from the Scriptures,” v.2d-** Such is not only the ultimate authority (what you or they “think/feel/believe” must be subjugated to “what God says”), it must be basis of our “*reasoning*” and appeal. The objective is not “who” is right, but “what” is right according to God’s Word. Our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and practices will not be eternally judged by our own estimations, but by the standard revealed in God’s Word, cf. John 12:48.
- **“explaining,” v.3a-** *Dianoigo* means to “to rouse the faculty of understanding” as an “opening” of the mind to new information or enhanced comprehension. If one is literate, they can *read* the Bible themselves. But being able to recognize and articulate the words does not necessarily mean one understands them. Thus, a *guide* who possesses such comprehension *explaining* those words is often essential, cf. Acts 8:30-31. This “*explaining*” aids by providing express meanings of words and supplying additional context from God’s Word “*to give the sense so that they understood the reading,*” Neh.8:8.
- **“giving evidence,” v.3b-** The literal meaning is “to set before” as “food on a table.” Thus, the *explanations* provided must be supported by and fortified with substantiation from “*the utterances of God*” in the Scriptures, 1Pet.4:11. Personal suppositions, preconceived ideas, and “*doctrines*” and “*precepts of men*” cannot be

allowed to “*invalidate the word of God*,” Matt.15:9,6, and cannot be substituted for its evidentiary value and authority. In keeping with the definition of “*giving evidence*,” God’s Word is intended to be the entree, not a mere condiment.

- “**persuaded**,” v.4a- The Greek word from which our English word is here translated is “*peith*,” which means “to induce by words to believe or move” (mentally). Preaching and teaching is supposed to be about *persuasion* and *inducement* through *words* (by *giving evidence* from and *explaining* the Scriptures) to proper conclusions and appropriate actions, rather than badgering, bullying, and demanding. As an older and now departed dear friend once prayed, “Lord, help us to remember that we’re *leading sheep* not *driving cattle*.” Indeed, and “Amen.”

A couple of keys to any successful journey are: knowing where you’re going; and, knowing how you’re going to get there. Thus, our ‘destination’ in preaching/teaching must be three-fold: 1) *lead* the hearer(s) to realize the authority inherent in the Bible; 2) *reason with them from* and *explain* the Text to produce understanding of it; and, 3) *persuade* them to act in accordance with the Truth God’s Word they now comprehend. For, “*the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith*,” 1Tim.1:5. I hope these things help us all to be better preachers and teachers in *reasoning*, *explaining*, and *persuading* others to understand and obey God’s Word- all to His glory! (Philip C. Strong; Viking Drive Church of Christ; 3791 Viking Drive, Bossier City, LA; online at vikingdrivechurchofchrist.com; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)