I. **Paul’s Practice: (His custom) (vs. 2, 10, 16-17)**

According to Paul’s custom... (vs. 2, 10, 17) He would go into the synagogues and trying to reason with the Jews according to the Scriptures... explaining and giving evidence that Jesus was the Christ... the crucified and resurrected Messiah.

Reasoned (vs. 2) we get the word dialogue from it. It describes a discussion... not a formal sermon... from which Paul repeatedly fielded questions from his hearers.

Paul had three qualities that compelled him to proclaim the gospel... courage, boldness, and passion. The prospect of resistance or trials or persecution didn’t deter him from carrying out his calling. The thought of people rejecting him didn’t hinder him.

Provoked (vs. 16) Gk. paroxuno, literally means to incite... to become angry... or to be irritate. It’s a picture of sticking one’s lip out when being provoked and becoming mad. In medical terminology it means a seizure or epileptic fit. It describes Paul as being mad and having a fit. The tense is imperfect, meaning that Paul didn’t have a sudden burst of anger, but a constant and continuous irritation or displeasure.

Unfortunately today, we have become comfortable with political correctness. Very little stirs us or gets us upset... irritates us. And even when it does, what are we willing to do about it?

II. **Paul’s Persuasion:** (vs. 3, 11-12, 18-31)

The Bereans received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so (vs. 11).

Examining (vs. 11)... a word used to describe a judicial investigation. They carefully sifted through the evidence and concluded that the gospel Paul proclaimed was the truth that fulfilled Old Testament promises.

During Paul’s visit to Athens, he met some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (vs. 18) and dialogued with them about Jesus. This led them to bring him before the court of Areopagus... an institution revered from the city’s earliest times... a court that met upon the hill called Areopagus (Mars Hill). Its purpose was to decide religious matters. Members of the court were curious about Paul’s proclamation regarding their worship to a god they didn’t know... an altar with the inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD (vs. 23).

Epicurean... They were hedonist, atheists, or at best deist. Their philosophy can be summed up in the phrase... “If it feels good, do it.” They said the chief end of man was pleasure and happiness. This pleasure they believed, was attained by avoiding excesses... and the fear of death was overcome by seeking tranquility. This pleasure was also obtained by seeking to be free from pain, and by loving mankind. They believed that if gods existed they didn’t become involved in human events.

Stoics... They held to a philosophy that taught that self-mastery was the greatest virtue and that it was based on knowledge. It taught that the wise lived in harmony with a divine reason... or fate... or providence that governs nature and directs history... that they had a great purpose in life. They believed that this great purpose was indifferent to the fluctuations of fortune and pleasure and pain. They sought to reach a place where one feels nothing.

Paul’s proclamation to the court (vs. 22-31) provides a model for communicating the gospel to a group that has no Bible background or understanding... intellectual pagans. He drew from his surroundings by mentioning the Athenian love for religion, demonstrated by their many idols. He then made his plea for Christianity by declaring that God does not dwell in man-made temples (vs. 24).
The thrust of his message was clear...the Creator God, who has revealed Himself in Creation, has now commanded all to repent, for everyone must give an account to Jesus Christ whom God raised from the dead (vs. 29-31).

III. THE PEOPLE’S PROTEST: (vs. 5-9, 13, 32)

Notice the comparison between verse 5 and verse 11. The Jews in Thessalonica never looked at the Scriptures to see if what Paul was teaching was correct. They were jealous and felt threatened...their positions and power were being threatened. Their traditions were being challenged.

IV. THE PEOPLE PERSUADED: (vs. 4, 12, 32-34)

Paul’s presentation of the gospel was so compelling that some of the Thessalonian Jews were persuaded...even though the majority rejected it. Most of the converts in Thessalonica were Gentiles steeped in idolatry (I Thessalonians 1:9)...people from various nationalities and social positions. An even greater harvest was reaped in Berea, where many of the Jews believed. In Athens, it says that some men joined him and believed...while others said that they would wait and hear Paul again concerning this. The majority in Athens just sneered when they heard of the resurrection of the dead.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- Don’t underestimate the power of the Gospel. It’s the power of the Gospel that persuades man...not the eloquence of our presentation.
- We tend to stay where we are comfortable...to stay with what we consider normal. The problem is...we can’t stay where we are...and go with God.
- We must be willing to be bold...to be vulnerable. We must be willing to have people resist us or even turn against us. We have to be willing to be Christ-centered...counter-cultural.