



Effective Criticism in the Evangel

by
Paul of Tarsus



My early days as a Pharisee.

Greetings again, all who are termed saints around the world, set to inherit eonian life at the casting of an eye toward Christ. Martin Zender has loaned me the pen once again to conclude my testimony of the time I withstood Peter to his face in Antioch. I am here

also—invited by my host for this purpose—to combat the erroneous teaching that brothers in Christ ought to exercise woman-like (that is, delicate) sentiments to avoid offending one another, as though we were all made of sticks and straw, rather than sinews and bone. In some circles of the body of Christ today, I am told, it is considered a sin to argue, to vehemently disagree, or to contend for the faith. I do not know from whence such error arises, but it is error indeed, and can only weaken the ecclesia and risk infecting it with error.

I EMPLOY HYPERBOLE TO GOOD EFFECT IN ANTIOCH

I already told you how I withstood Peter to his face in Antioch at the wedding feast of our mutual friend, for Peter had publicly played the hypocrite. Before some from James arrived, he dined with those of the nations, delighting them. I had already told the Greeks that they had been accepted by God and Christ, but they trembled with joy at the very thought that those of reputation in Jerusalem, especially Peter, could possibly acknowledge their new status. When Peter acquiesced to sit with them at the feast, they looked at me with great satisfaction. For them, the truth had gained a layer of reality. The acceptance from God had passed from theoretical—in some of their minds—to practical at the joining to them of the greatest apostle of Jesus Christ. I could not have been prouder of Peter.

But then the “James Gang” arrived, and Peter shrank away. Peter made a pretense of going to a food table to refresh his plate, but it was only an excuse to re-seat himself with the Jerusalem contingent. He did not want the “important men” from Jerusalem seeing him sitting with Greeks. By this shady maneuver, Peter fouled all that he had gained. Everyone among the Greeks noticed.

They looked at me, distraught. “Paul, is this real, or isn’t it?” said one. Within me, the heat and agitation arose. This was too important not only for the Greeks, but for the Circumcision in attendance. It was too important for the footing of the new message. So, as I related to you two weeks ago, I banged my plate until everyone’s attention was upon me, and I said to Peter loudly in front of everyone,

“If you, being inherently a Jew, are living as the nations, and not as the Jews, how are you compelling the nations to be judaizing?”



Here is one of the lamps that sat at my table at the wedding feast. This was excavated at Antioch.

These were deadly words, I suppose. I meant them to be. They had to kill in order to make alive. Think about it. I convicted Peter of “living as the nations.” I exaggerated, yes, but such a thing served my purpose. I was red hot. Sitting with the nations is not exactly living as the nations, but how could I have taken it back if I’d wanted to? I was inspired by the holy spirit, and the holy spirit apparently enjoys dashes of hyperbole. Then came another dose of hyperbole, which I could not rightly help: “How are you compelling the nations to be Juda-

izing?” I thought about this later, and I don’t think I’d ever uttered such an extravagant embellishment. On second thought, I would rather call it the figure of hyperbole. I put it to useful purpose. Was Peter compelling any of the Greeks, directly, to join the Circumcision? Of course not. He was only going to a table to get more lamb so that he could re-seat himself with the Circumcision. But what thoughts swirled in the heads of the Greeks then! I could see it in the way they slumped into their seats. No one was poised to begin Judaizing—sacrificing lambs, circumcising themselves, condemning the rest of the world for being idiots—but the seed had been sewn. With my words, I projected this seed into full bloom. I skipped the seedling altogether and went straight to Pentecost and waved the first sheaf of wheat. How can I apologize? Besides, it worked. It served its purpose.

Oh, how it served its purpose. Peter knew it straight-away. Perhaps he was used to my verbal enlargements. I will lend to Peter the benefit of the doubt to say that the man did what he did without a thought. It was unconscious, his rising and leaving. Had I let it pass, the entire slight would have dissolved unnoticed into the non-annals of history. I believe that most of the Greeks would have recovered from it. Besides, I would have helped them to recover. I would have made them to recover. As it was, I believe that God wanted a public recognition of the hypocrisy of one of the Circumcision, for the sake of future readers. And how many readers have there been? Hundreds of millions? A billion? Thus, the holy spirit inspired me. I jumped from my seat like a potato on fire, and the rest is history—as you like to say.

“Peter did not exactly say, ‘Screw them,’ but it was the Hebrew equivalent.”

As a postscript, I must tell you that Peter *so* received the rebuke that he returned to his seat among the Greeks, practically before I’d finished my rant. What else could he do? And he did it without a word to the James Gang—without a word, but not without a shrug! That’s right. Peter turned to them, shrugged his shoulders as only he can, made a funny face (I can only assume), and returned to us. As he returned to our table he said, “You’re right, Paul. Screw them.” I am translating here from the Hebrew. He did not exactly say, “screw them,” but it was the Hebrew

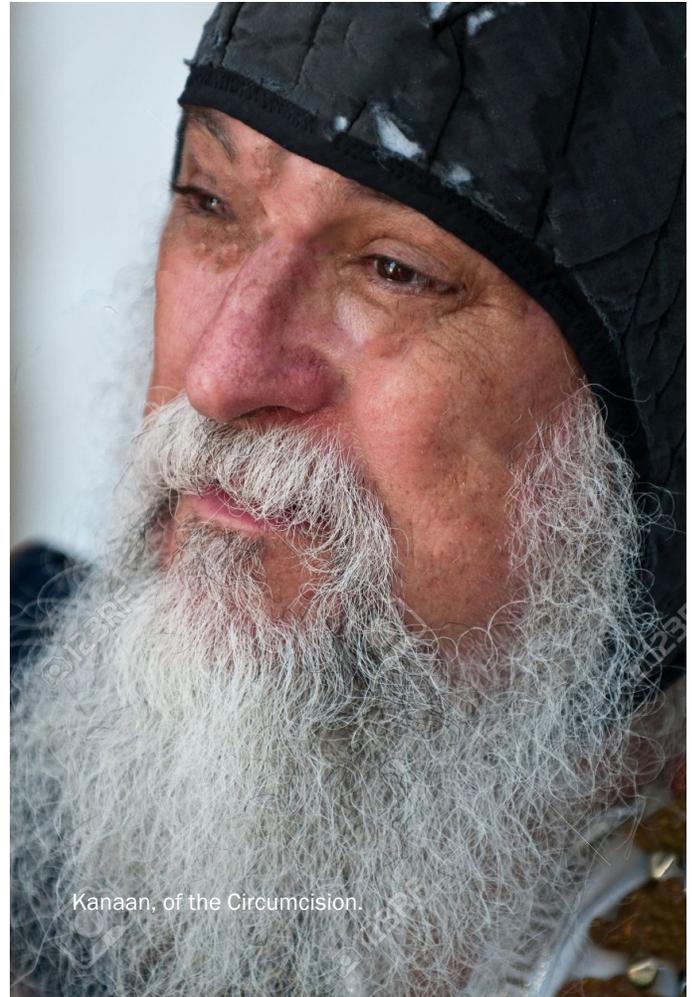
equivalent. To me he said, “Thank you so much, you poisonous ant.” This was a joke. It is one of our idioms. You would say, “pain in the ass.” We have “you poisonous ant.” He also added, “you poisonous, *exaggerating* ant,” and then it was my turn to shrug. He was right; I exaggerated it beyond even what I knew I was capable of. All in all, Peter was very loving. This is how a fisherman loves, you see. His love smells like a shrimp and day-old oysters, but it’s still love. Peter smiled as he said all of this, and this is how I lay it out to you. I will never forget that there was broccoli between his front teeth, however. I hope that you are somehow edified by this fine detail.

PETER EXPOSES A MISUSED PASSAGE

Believe it or not, as we were leaving the wedding feast—with Peter and me arm in arm and actually laughing about the event—one of the Circumcisionists—it was Kanaan—snuck up on me and, with venom on his breath, whispered loudly into my face a verse I knew well, from Proverbs 6:16-19. The man was so inebriated that it is a wonder I did not become intoxicated by his declaration. He quoted from Solomon, and here is what he said, “Paul, there are six things Yahweh hates, even seven that are abhorrences to His soul: exalted eyes, a false tongue, hands shedding innocent blood; a heart engrossed with lawless devisings, feet hastening to run to evil, a false witness who blows out lies, *and one who instigates quarrels between brothers.*”

He said that last part through gritted teeth, and of course I knew what he was driving at. He thought that I had instigated a quarrel between Peter and myself. I was prepared to correct this misguided, whisky-ridden soul, but I needn’t have bothered. Peter was already on top of it. He had heard the man, naturally—and said,

“Kanaan, did you leave any whisky for anyone else? You’ve enough on your breath to intoxicate both Paul and myself, but I am in no mood for it; I cannot speak for my friend here, so I will speak for myself. You assume that anyone who defends truth or contends for it is, by default, instigating a quarrel. What is your problem? I mean, besides whisky. A man who instigates a quarrel manufactures it. He brings up from his own being something that does not exist. Did Paul do this? You can ask him yourself, for here he is, but I believe the man was minding his own business when he spotted a certain fisherman from Galilee vacillating—that means going back and forth, Kanaan—between



accepting Greeks into God’s family and not accepting them. The fisherman was not doing this on purpose, but was doing it, for all *practical* purposes, by his actions. It was *this* that our friend Paul here acted upon. In what way did Paul instigate anything? *I* was the instigator, not our lovely lad from Tarsus. But not even I instigated a quarrel, in fact, but simply proved myself to be a hypocrite. Paul reacted to a problem created by my hypocrisy—can’t you see that? Paul reacted to a difference of opinion serious enough to warrant his ridiculous yet wonderful outburst. Paul was not instigating a quarrel, he was solving a problem. He was correcting a contradiction. How is this even remotely the same as fishing up a quarrel from nowhere? Are you getting this, Kanaan, or do you always look this stupid?”

These were Peter’s exact words, and I cannot add to them.

PATIENTLY REBUKING

When I wrote to Timothy I tried to instill in that boy the strength to deal with the many contradictions to

the truth that would arise. It is in this letter that I told him to “expose, rebuke and entreat with all patience and teaching.” (2 Timothy 4:2). It is no contradiction to say that one can rebuke with patience. After all, I rebuked Peter with patience, did I not? I gave the man time to correct himself, which he did in short order. I did not race to tackle him and throw him to the ground. No, for that would not have shown any patience at all, although I’m sure that it would have entertained many of the guests. I spoke strongly and with conviction, but I was not angry. I was hot, yes; disturbed, yes; agitated, of course. But not angry. I did not shout in anger. I spoke loudly enough for all to hear, but this is not the same as shouting in anger, and no sane person ought to suppose that it is.

I also wrote to Timothy in the same letter (2 Timothy 2:23-26)—

Now stupid and crude questionings refuse, being aware that they are generating fightings. Now a slave of the Lord must not be fighting, but be gentle toward all, apt to teach, bearing with evil, with meekness training those who are antagonizing, seeing whether God may be giving them repentance to come into a realization of the truth, and they will be sobering up out of the trap of the Adversary, having been caught alive by him, for that one’s will.

We are not to argue about stupid and crude questions, but only things of consequence. Who cares what sorts of pots ought to be used when believers gather to cook together at fellowships? Who cares who is related to whom? Who cares if one wears sandals to a meeting, or is barefoot? No, but we have very much to do with teaching, and the correction of false teaching. We do not bear with evil in order to tolerate the evil, but only long enough to correct it. We do not run from it. Some would say that I was not gentle toward Peter in Antioch, and that, had I been gentle toward him, I would have said, “Excuse me, Peter” and “Pardon me, Peter” and “I hate to interrupt these gracious proceedings, my dear fisherman friend,” and other such social niceties. And then I would have introduced my remarks to Peter with such flowers and so many spices that no one could have grasped the issue, so that by the time I had finished with my, “Peter, we all know that you are such a nice man,” or my, “With all due respect to your esteemed eminence,” or with my, “No one doubts that you are the best fisherman in Galilee, and that your vaunted walk with Jesus

Christ...”—on and on *that* business could go—but by the time I would have finished weaving my beautiful little basket in which to carry my main points, my main points would be lost. So I jumped right in and said, “If you, being inherently a Jew...”—and you know the rest.

DAISIES BLOWING IN THE WIND

Martin Zender tells me that you people are living in such an age where folks simply cannot say what they mean without being thought of as crude and argumentative. I would die in your time, I think. From what I hear, you have too many rules. From what I hear, you are all too sensitive. Are there none among you who can take honest criticism? But instead—I am told—everyone is deemed to be correct. No one is deemed to be in error. I cannot even imagine such stupidity. Have all of your men become as women? Women are more sensitive to the social graces than are men, we all know.

(Zender has just read my draft to this point, and he tells me that, with my question, “Have all your men become as women?” I will be accused of being a “misogynist,” which I had no idea what it meant, but Martin Zender tells me that it means I hate all women.

(I am beside myself over what I am being told. I am becoming hot. If anyone thinks that I hate women, they err grievously. Did I not just suggest to you that women are better behaved, in the social graces, than men? But this does not suit them very well to evangelism, for the evangelist must be thick-skinned, to-the-point, bearing with evil in order to correct it—no weaver of rose garlands. It takes a person of manly constitution—even some women can be this—to expose false teaching and rebuke those forwarding





The meek and mild Christ.

the error. No era is more filled with error than your era, my dear ones. It is the tail end of the apostasy in which you live. I tell my host that it seems to me that the so-called men of his time—and yours—are so many daisies blowing in the wind, the slightest breeze bruising their delicate stems. I could not survive in such an era. I am not a daisy, you see. I cannot be.)

In my opinion, I was gentle toward Peter. The opposite of gentle is, to me, hitting someone in the face. The opposite of gentle is tackling them to the ground and punching them. Or running a knife through the liver, which would effectively quiet one but that may possibly be thought of as “rude.” In your day, apparently, “gentle” means doing nothing. It means planting daisies. It means not offending anyone. It means weaving whole paragraphs of “niceties” before getting to the point, which you will then be lucky to remember. In my day, we had a completely different idea of “gentle.” I think that, in your day, men become women and children. Yes, of course I hate all women and children. Just ask Martin Zender. I think that *he* hates all women and children, as well. He hates anyone who disagrees with him, Zender does, just like me. (I trust that you see that my tongue is set firmly into my cheek.) I think that I would last five minutes in your generation before I was removed

from polite society without ceremony and sent to the outer darkness to weep and gnash my teeth.

HOW TO MEEKLY HIT AN ANTAGONIZER

“With meekness training those who are antagonizing,” I wrote. Yes, I did. I wrote that, and I stand by it, opportunely and inopportunely. Do you know which Greek word I used there—the one that was translated “training”? I used the Greek word *paideuo*, and it means “to hit.” Your English element is “hit.” It is to strike. I told Timothy, then, to “meekly hit those who are antagonizing.”

This is a complicated trick, yes? It is a fine walk, to hit someone meekly. But this is the challenge to the teacher and the evangelist. He must speak plainly and with truth and authority so that no one mistakes him, yet at the same time display meekness. Again, I insist to you that I hit Peter meekly in Antioch. We had a different idea of meekness in our day as well. Was Jesus Christ meek? I insist to you that He was. The Word of God calls Him such. And yet did not this same One overturn the tables of the money changers and drive out the buyers and sellers with a whip? It was the same Man. I contend to you, then, that He whipped those fools meekly, without an arrogant bone in His body. He

calmly and with great control whipped those idiots out of the place. I'm afraid to ask what "meekness" means to you, but I am thinking that it has something to do with daisies. And perhaps daffodils. And perhaps the lacy undergarments of women. But there I go again.

The goal in all of this is to deliver from peril those who have been captured alive by the Adversary, that is, by his cunning teachings. When a man is drowning, what do people of your generation do? Do you politely ask the victim if he or she would like to be saved? Do you introduce yourself to the victim before dragging him or her from the water? Do you send the one so near death a greeting card? Do you make a speech? Do you bow? Do you curtsy? Is that what you do? Do you plant daffodils upon the shore?

"DO NOT SHOOT ARROWS THROUGH THE HEARTS OF YOUR ADVERSARIES"

I told Timothy in my first letter to him (3:3) not to be quarrelsome. I did not mean by this that Timothy was never to argue over Scripture. Or never to prove his points. Or never to disagree with anyone. Or never to expose or rebuke anyone. Is the problem the fact that many in your day assume me to be a double-talking idiot? Very clearly, I told Timothy to rebuke false teachers. I also told him not to be quarrelsome. I said, "Don't bother with nitpicky arguments." (I told him this on the side; don't look for it in your Bibles.) I told him not to argue for argument's sake, but to make sure that a thing is consequential before laying into it. And I told him not to whine. I told him not to sound like a squeaky door when he makes his case and forwards his arguments. I told him not to pound tables or throw objects. (I only pounded a table once, in Antioch. But I did it to get attention.) I told him not to murder anyone. "Do not shoot arrows through the hearts of your adversaries," I told him. It was a joke, of course. But in your era, I see that nothing is a joke. Your era seems to be practically bereft of humor. You have funerals for mirth, I think. I used hyperbole on Peter in Antioch; it worked like a charm. Oh! It reminds me that I am the one who invented the term, "maimcision."

I CALL THE CIRCUMCISIONISTS EVERY NAME IN THE BOOK

Do you remember this one? I'm proud of it. I wrote it to the Philippians (3:2-3). I said to them, "Beware of curs, beware of evil workers. Beware of the *maimcision*, for we are the circumcision who are offering divine service in the

spirit of God, and are glorying in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in flesh." How about that! Yes, I called the Circumcision dogs. I compared them to animals. Does this mean that I hate all dogs? No, it means that I hate all Circumcisionists! I called them evil workers, which is what they were. But I did them too high of an honor to call them "Circumcisionists." It was too complimentary. So I was in a fine fettle the day that I wrote to the Philippians, and I coined the term "maimcision," which is the antithesis of true Circumcision; it is merely a maiming of the flesh. So I invented this funny word, you see. Zender says that some people think it is mean to call another person names. But I am speaking of the Circumcisionists. They must be gagged!



Which reminds me! I got no complaints about the following, but I suppose that today I am in deep mud and hot water simultaneously for what I wrote to Titus (1:7-14). I suppose that you will think of this as a "doozie," and that the daisies among you will be scratching your little furrowed brow-petals over it—

For the supervisor must be unimpeachable as an administrator of God, not given to self-gratification, not irritable, no toper, not quarrelsome, not avaricious; but hospitable, fond of that which is good, sane, just, benign, self-controlled; upholding the faithful word according to the teaching, that he may be able to entreat with sound teaching as well as to expose those who contradict. For many are insubordinate, vain praters and imposters, especially those of the Circumcision, who must be gagged, who are subverting whole households, teaching what they must not, on behalf of sordid gain. One of them, their own prophet, said: "Cretans are ever liars, evil wild beasts, idle bellies." This testimony is true. For which cause be exposing them severely, that they may be sound in the faith, not heeding Jewish myths and precepts of men who are turning from the truth.

Looking back on this (and chuckling to myself) I would be hard pressed to know if I ever used any more creative names, in one place, to call those idiots of the Circumcision. In this one passage, I imply that they are 1) insubordinate, 2) vain, 3) imposters, 4) subversive, 5) sordid, 6) liars, 7) evil wild beasts, 8) idle bellies (this is my favorite), 9) unsound, 10) mythologists. All of this in four sentences! I think I left out, “morons,” but I was under inspiration of the holy spirit at the time and cannot be blamed for the omission. I add it today, as a postscript: “The Circumcision are morons.” Ahh—I feel much better now.

Why all these names? I could not contain myself, for the Circumcisionists were introducing elements of the law into the precious evangel of the grace of God. I simply could not stand for it and so I felt compelled to call them out in no uncertain terms. I despise uncertainty, you see.

The question may be asked how I can call for a supervisor to be “not irritable,” “not quarrelsome,” “sane” and “self-controlled” at the same time that I, myself, call the Circumcision “subversive, sordid, lying, evil idle bellies”? Simply this: I was completely sane when I said it. I wrote these words in perfect self-control—and not only self

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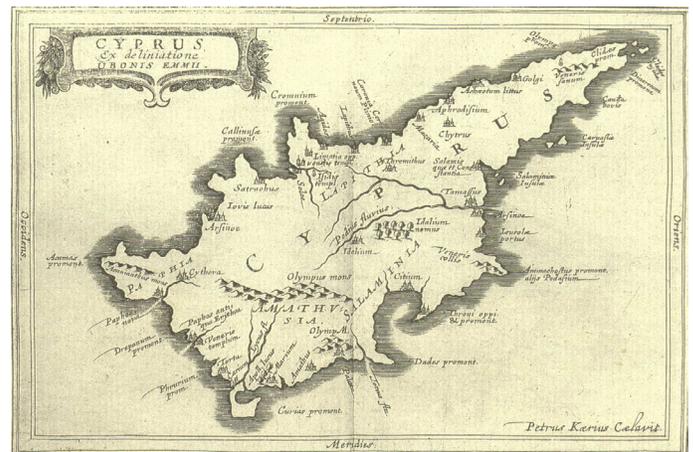
control, but directly controlled by the holy spirit of God. You may say, “But Paul, you were quite irritated when you wrote this.” Indeed I was. But this is quite a different thing from being irritable—can you see that? An irritable person is that always—forever apt to be irritated by the smallest thing. I am a restful person, by nature. I was not always this way, but Jesus Christ changed me. People who deal with me in person are amazed at “what a nice guy” Paul is. I think that, from my letters, people think that I am a white tornado, or a dust devil of the desert. No. My letters are strong, yes, but my physical presence is weak. (Well, except in Antioch. Oh, and I still haven’t told you what happened on the island of Cyprus, but I suppose you already know about that. But I will tell you anyway.)

I am not irritable, but I am quite capable of being irritated, and no one irritates me more than those idle bellies

the Circumcisionists, who have nothing better to do than to sneak into people’s lives and subvert the truth of the pure grace of God. They ought to be gagged—not literally (I did not mean that literally, my friends; I do not believe in stuffing rags into people’s mouths), but I meant that they should be shut up by the truth, by some strong teacher like myself, or Timothy, or Titus, who are quite able to figuratively gag them (shut them up) by means of the divine method of exposure and rebuke; expose their teaching, and rebuke *them*.

SPEAKING OF CYPRUS

Speaking of Cyprus, you do remember that one, don’t you? (Acts 13:4-12). I was there with Barnabas, having just been separated by the holy spirit for the work which God had directed us to do, and we landed at Cyprus (the port at Paphos, to be exact), and were received well by the proconsul there, Sergius Paulus. I was explaining the evangel to him most excellently (in my humble opinion), when suddenly a Jewish magician entered, Elymas, who contradicted my word, seeking to dissuade the proconsul from hearing the evangel. It is not so bad, this idea that anyone would contradict my word, but when they are keeping someone from believing who is primed by God to be believing, that



is when I become irritated. By the inspiration of the holy spirit, I unloaded on the rat, Elymas. I looked him straight in the eye and said, “O, full of all guile and all knavery, son of the Adversary, enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, lo! the hand of the Lord is on you, and you shall be blind, not observing the sun until the appointed time.”

Instantly, there fell upon that little idle-belly a fog and darkness, and he groped around looking for someone to lead him by the hand. It was all very satisfying to me.



“People want and need the strong declaration.”

Why? Because the proconsul, seeing what had occurred, believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord!

THAT’S THE WHOLE IDEA

And that, my friends, is the whole idea of exposure and rebuke. It’s not necessarily for the sake of the one being rebuked (in Peter’s case in Antioch, it was), but for the sake of onlookers who are being diverted from the faith by the one bringing the tripwire, who are teaching things contradictory to the truth. Never had I witnessed so fast a turnaround—I am speaking of Sergius Paulus now—for in the one minute, the proconsul was scratching his head, merely considering what I was saying, and in the next minute—after I’d lambasted the subversive mythologist Elymas—he was head over heels believing in my evangel. Stupendous! All because of the drama of exposure and rebuke.

This event early in my career sealed, in my mind, the value of exposure and rebuke. Nothing is more powerful toward bringing others into the faith. Nothing. On the heels of exposure and rebuke, those witnessing the event are moved, and light comes. Light comes with the ensuing entreaty. People want and need the strong declaration. They want and need certainty. They want and need that the truth is white and that the error is black. They greatly respect those who point out sureties and who do not back

away from them. God Himself is black and white. He hates gray. He hates lukewarm. He would rather that something be either hot or cold. Anything in-between agitates Him. As it does me. And as it did our Lord.

It is not exposers and rebukers that we are to stand aloof from, but from erroneous teachings.

Our Lord’s greatest successes on earth (in gaining followers) came after severe rebukes of the Pharisees. He publicly ridiculed and lambasted them, calling them hypocrites, a brood of vipers, whitewashed tombs—and more. The result was that people said, “No man has ever spoken like this!” and hundreds believed because of it. The Lord Jesus Christ made waves. They were divinely-inspired waves, and with them, His enemies were idled and the truth was forwarded. This is to be preferred over the truth being idled and the enemies of truth forwarded. Our Lord’s words were not immediately intended for those on the stinging end of the rebuke, but for the sake of the onlookers whose faith was being subverted, even prevented, by the liars, the idle-bellies, the whitewashed tombs. Our Lord would not countenance it. I certainly did not.

And neither should you. —*Paul*