

The Correspondence Of Paul And Seneca

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Introduction

The Correspondence of Paul and Seneca existed in the fourth century, for Jerome mentions it, says it was 'read by many', and is led by it to insert Seneca in his catalogue of Christian authors; Augustine also, quoting the genuine Seneca, says, 'of whom some letters to the apostle Paul are current read'. The Pseudo-Linus inserts a paragraph in his Passion of Paul telling how Seneca frequently conversed and corresponded with Paul, admired him much, and read some of his writings to Nero.

Manuscripts as old as the ninth century exist, and of the twelfth--fifteenth centuries there are many. The composition is of the poorest kind: only its celebrity induces me to translate it once again.

1. SENECA TO PAUL, greeting

I believe, Paul, that you have been informed of the talk which I had yesterday with my Lucilius about the apocrypha (or possibly the secret mysteries) and other things; for certain sharers in your teaching were with me. For we had retired to the gardens of Sallust, where, because of us, those whom I speak of, going in another direction, saw and joined us. Certainly we wished for your presence, and I would have you know it. We were much refreshed by the reading of your book, by which I mean some of the many letters which you have addressed to some city or capital of a province, and which inculcate the moral life with admirable precepts. These thoughts, I take it, are not uttered by you but through you, but surely sometimes both by you and through you: for such is the greatness of them and they are instinct (warm) with such nobility, that I think whole generations (ages) of men could hardly suffice for the instilling and perfecting of them. I desire your good health, brother.

2. PAUL TO SENECA, greeting

I received your letter yesterday with delight, and should have been able to answer it at once, had I had by me the youth I meant to send to you. For you know when, and by whom, and at what moment, and to whom things ought to be given and entrusted. I beg, therefore, that you will not think yourself neglected, when I am respecting the dignity of your person. Now in that you somewhere write that you are pleased with my letter (or, write that you are pleased with part of my letter) I think myself happy in the good opinion of such a man: for you would not say it, you, a critic, a sophist, the teacher of a great prince, and indeed of all -unless you spoke truth. I trust you may long be in health.

3. SENECA TO PAUL, greeting

I have arranged some writings in a volume, and given them their proper divisions: I am also resolved to read them to Caesar, if only fortune be kind, that he may bring a new (an interested) ear to the hearing. Perhaps you, too, will be there. If not, I will at another time fix you a day, that we may look over the work together: indeed, I could not produce this writing to him, without first conferring with you, if only that could be done without risk: that you may know that you are not being neglected. Farewell, dearest Paul.

4. PAUL TO ANNAEUS SENECA, greeting

Whenever I hear your letters read, I think of you as present, and imagine nothing else but that you are always with us. As soon, then, as you begin to come, we shall see each other at close quarters. I desire

your good health.

5. SENECA TO PAUL, greeting

We are much pained by your retirement. What is it that causes you to keep away if it be the anger of the lady (Poppaea) because you have left the old rite and sect, and have converted others, there will be a possibility of pleading with her, that she may consider it as done on due reflection and not lightly.

6. PAUL TO SENECA AND LUCILIUS, greeting

Of the subject on which you have written I must not speak with pen and ink, of which the former marks out and draws somewhat, and the latter shows it clearly, especially as I know that among you -that is, in your homes and in you- there are those who understand me. Honour is to be paid to all, and so much the more because men catch at opportunities of being offended. If we are patient with them, we shall certainly over-come them at every point, provided they be men who can be sorry for their actions. Farewell.

7. ANNAEUS SENECA TO PAUL AND THEOPHILUS, greeting

I profess myself well content with the reading of your letters which you sent to the Galatians, Corinthians, and Achaean; and may we so live together as you show yourself to be inspired with the divine frenzy (holy spirit). For it is the holy spirit which is in you and high above you which expresses these exalted and adorable thoughts. I would therefore have you careful of other points, that the polish of the style may not be wanting to the majesty of the thought. And, brother, not to conceal anything from you, and have it on my conscience, I confess to you that the Augustus was moved by your views. When I read to him the beginning of the power (virtue) that is in you (perhaps he meant your exordium about virtue) his words were these: that he could wonder that a man not regularly educated could think thus. I replied that the gods often speak by the mouths of the simple (innocent), not of those who try deceitfully to show what they can do by their learning. And when I cited him the example of Vatienus the rustic, to whom two men appeared in the territory of Reate, who afterwards were recognized as Castor and Pollux, he appeared fully convinced. Farewell.

8. PAUL TO SENECA, greeting

Though I am aware that Caesar, even if he sometimes lapses, is a lover of our wonders, you will suffer yourself to be, not wounded but admonished. For I think that you took a very serious step in bringing to his notice a matter alien to his religion and training. For since he is a worshipper of the gods of the nations, I do not see why you thought you would wish him to know this matter, unless I am to think that you did it out of excessive attachment to me. I beg you not to do so in future; For you must be careful not to offend the empress in your love for me: yet her anger will not hurt us if it lasts, nor do good if it does not [this is nonsense]. As a queen, she will not be angry: as a woman, she will be offended. Farewell.

9. SENECA TO PAUL, greeting

I know that you are not so much disturbed on your own account by my letter to you on the showing of your letters to Caesar, as by the nature of things, which so calls away the minds of men from all right learning and conduct -so that I am not surprised, for I have learnt this for certain by many examples. Let us then act differently, and if in the past anything has been done carelessly, you will pardon it. I have sent you a book on elegance of expression (store of words). Farewell, dearest Paul.

10. TO SENECA, PAUL, greeting

Whenever I write to you and do not place my name after yours (see the heading) I do a serious thing and one unbecoming my persuasion (sect). For I ought, as I have often declared, to be all things to all

men, and to observe in your person that which the Roman law has granted to the honour of the senate, and choose the last place in writing (text, reading) a letter, not striving to do as I please in a confused and disgraceful way. Farewell, most devoted of masters. Given on the 5th of the kalends of July; Nero the fourth time, and Messala, consuls (A. D. 58).

11. SENECA TO PAUL, greeting

Hail, my dearest Paul. If you, so great a man, so beloved in all ways, be -I say not joined- but intimately associated with me and my name, it will indeed be well with your Seneca. Since then, you are the summit and topmost peak of all people, would you not have me glad that I am so near you as to be counted a second self of yours Do not, then, think that you are unworthy to be named first on the heading of letters, lest you make me think you are testing me rather than playing with me -especially as you know yourself to be a Roman citizen. For the rank that is mine, I would it were yours, and yours I would were mine. Farewell, dearest Paul. Given on the 10th of the kalends of April; Apronianus and Capito consuls (59).

12. SENECA TO PAUL, greeting

Hail, my dearest Paul. Think you that I am not in sadness and grief, that your innocent people are so often condemned to suffer And next, that the whole people thinks you so callous and so prone to crime, that you are supposed to be the authors of every misfortune in the city Yet let us bear it patiently and content ourselves with what fortune brings, until supreme happiness puts an end to our troubles. Former ages had to bear the Macedonian, Philip's son, and, after Darius, Dionysius, and our own times endured Gaius Caesar: to all of whom their will was law. The source of the many fires which Rome suffers plain. But if humble men could speak out what the reason is, and if it were possible to speak without risk in this dark time, all would be plain to all. Christians and Jews are commonly executed as contrivers of the fire. Whoever the criminal is whose pleasure is that of a butcher, and who veils himself with a lie, he is reserved for his due season: and as the best of men is sacrificed, the one for the many, so he, vowed to death for all, will be burned with fire. A hundred and thirty-two houses and four blocks have been burnt in six days, the seventh brought a pause. I pray you may be well, brother. Given the 5th of the kalends of April; Frugi and Bassus consuls (64).

13. SENECA TO PAUL, greeting

Much in every part of your works is enclosed in allegory and enigma, and therefore the great force that is given you of matter and talent () should be beautified, I do not say with elegance of words, but with a certain care. Nor should you fear what I remember you have often said; that many who affect such things vitiate the thought and emasculate the strength of the matter. But I wish you would yield to me and humour the genius of Latin, and give beauty to your noble words, that the great gift that has been granted you may be worthily treated by you. Farewell.

Given on the day before the nones of June; Leo and Sabinus consuls (non-existent).

14. PAUL TO SENECA, greeting

To your meditations have been revealed those things which the Godhead has granted to few. With confidence, therefore, I sow in a field already fertile a most prolific seed, not such matter as is liable to corruption, but the abiding word, an emanation from God who grows and abides for ever. This your wisdom has attained and you will see that it is unailing -so as to judge that the laws of heathens and Israelites are to be shunned. You may become a new author, by showing forth with the graces of rhetoric the unblameable wisdom of Jesus Christ, which you, having well nigh attained it, will instil into the temporal monarch, his servants, and his intimate friends, yet the persuading of them will be a rough and difficult task, for many of them will hardly incline to your admonitions. Yet the word of God, if it be instilled into them, will be a vital gain, producing a new man, incorrupt, and an everlasting

soul that shall hasten from hence to God. Farewell, Seneca, most dear to me.

Given on the kalends of August; Leo and Sabinus consuls.

Scanned and Edited by Joshua Williams Northwest Nazarene College, 1995