
Epistolae Pauli et Senecae † THE LETTERS OF PAUL AND SENECA

INTRODUCTION

The collection of 14 letters purportedly between St Paul and Seneca the Younger (a stoic Roman philosopher) has been known since the 4th Century (cf. the prologue, written by St Jerome). They were long considered genuine (though never included in the NT canon); however, in the 15th Century, scholars began critical examination and, today, they are considered forgeries – scholars have detected errors of fact and chronology that the genuine Seneca would not have made, but a forger not intricately familiar with Roman history writing centuries later might have.

The text survives in numerous Latin manuscripts, with the oldest dating from the 9th Century, but most being of a later era. The [Latin text presented herein](#) is from Eugen Westerborg's 1881 publication, "*Der Ursprung der Sage dass Seneca Christ gewesen sei*," and the English text is based (for the most part) on [M.R. James' 1924 translation](#). We also include some notes adapted from Claude W. Barlow's 1938 edition, published by the American Academy in Rome, and have added some footnotes marking significant divergences between our text and his.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATES

The letters (internally) claim to have been written *circa* 58–64 CE but, in fact, date from the early 4th Century. The identity, location, and purpose of the author (i.e., the forger) are not known. The letters were almost certainly written in Latin.

The 11th letter, dated to 64 CE, bears a different writing style of Latin from the others, and is out of chronological sequence with the rest of the correspondence. This leads scholars to think that a different forger may have written that letter.

Prologus

S. HIERONYMUS DE SENECA IN CATALOGO SANCTORVM.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca Cordubensis, Sotionisⁱ stoici discipulus et patruus Lucani poetae, continentissimae uitae fuit. quem non ponerem in catalogo sanctorum, nisi me epistulae illae prouocarent quae leguntur a plurimis, Pauli ad Senecam et Senecae ad Paulum, in quibus, cum esset Neronis magister et illius temporis potentissimus, optare se dicit eius esse loci apud suos cuius sit Paulus apud Christianos. hic ante biennium quam Petrus et Paulus martyrio coronarentur, a Nerone interfectus est.

PROLOGUE

ST JEROME ON SENECA, IN THE CATALOGUE OF SAINTS.

ⁱⁱ Lucius Annaeus Seneca of Corduba – a pupil of the Stoic Sotion and uncle of the poet Lucan – led a life of great temperance. I would not include him in the list of saints were I not prompted by those widely read letters exchanged between Paul and Seneca; in them, despite being Nero’s tutor and a man of immense power at the time, he expresses the wish to hold the same standing among his own people that Paul held among the Christians. He was put to death by Nero two years before Peter and Paul were crowned with martyrdom.

ⁱ Barlow has the name in italics, indicating that it is omitted by some MSS.

ⁱⁱ James does not include this prologue in his translation.

Epistola I

SENECA PAVLO SALVTEM.

Credo tibi, Paule, id nuntiatum esse quod heri cum Lucilio nostro de apocryphis et aliis rebus habuerimus. erant enim quidam disciplinarum tuarum comites mecum. nam in hortos Salustianos secesseramus, quo loco occasione nostra alio tendentes hi de quibus dixi uisis nobis adiuncti sunt. certe quod tui praesentiam optauimus, et hoc scias uolo. libello tuo lecto, id est ex plurimis aliquas litteras quas ad aliquam ciuitatem seu caput prouinciae direxisti mirae exhortationis uitam moralem continentes, usque refecti sumus. quos sensus non puto ex te dictos sed per te, certe aliquando ex te et per te. tanta enim maiestas earum rerum est tantaque generositate calensⁱ, ut uix suffecturas putem aetates hominum, quibus institui perficique possit. bene te ualere, frater, cupio.

LETTER 1

SENECA TO PAUL, GREETINGS.

I believe, Paul, that you have been informed of the talk that I had yesterday with my Lucilius about the apocryphaⁱⁱ and other things; for, certain sharers in your teaching were with me. For, we had retired to the Gardens of Sallustⁱⁱⁱ 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 that 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 warm with such nobility, that I think whole ages of men could hardly suffice for the instilling and perfecting of them. I desire your good health, brother.

PAUL & SENECA 1

ⁱ In place of *calens*, Barlow has *clarent*.

ⁱⁱ Another possible reading for '*apocrypha*' is '*secret mysteries*'.

ⁱⁱⁱ The '*Gardens of Sallust*' were a large tract of land in Rome between the present Piazza Barberini and the Porta Pia; they became imperial property under Tiberius.

Epistola II

L. ANNAEO SENECAE PAVLVS SALVTEM.ⁱ

Litteras tuas hilaris heri accepi, ad quas rescribere statim potui, si praesentiam iuuenis quem ad te eram missurus habuissem. scis enim, quando et per quem et quo tempore et cui quid dari committique debeat. rogamus ergo non putos neglectum, dum personae qualitatem respicio. sed quod litteris meis uos bene acceptos alicubi scribis, felicem me arbitror tanti uiri iudicio. neque enim hoc diceres, censor sophista magister tanti principis et iam omnium, nisi quia uere dicis. opto te diu bene ualere.

LETTER 2

TO L. ANNAEUS SENECA, PAUL, GREETINGS.

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,ⁱⁱ 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.

PAUL & SENECA 2

ⁱ Barlow lacks the opening 'L.'.

ⁱⁱ An alternative reading suggested by James is, 'write that you are pleased with part of my letter'.

Epistola III

SENECA PAVLO SALVTEM.

Quaedam uolumina ordinaui et diuisionibus suis statum eis dedi. ea quoque Caesari legere sum destinatus. si modo fors prospere annuerit, ut nouas aures afferat, eris forsitan et tu praesens. sin, alias, reddam tibi diem, ut hoc opus inuicem inspiciamus. et possem non prius edere ei eam scripturam, nisi prius tecum conferam, si modo inpune hoc fieri potuisset, ut scires non te praeteriri. uale Paule carissime.

LETTER 3

SENECA TO PAUL, GREETINGS.

I have arranged some writingsⁱ 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 ear to the *hearing*ⁱⁱ. 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.

PAUL & SENECA 3

ⁱ It is not clear if Seneca refers to some of his own works, or some of Paul's.

ⁱⁱ The word, '*hearing*', following James, does not appear in the Latin text.

Epistola IV

ANNAEO SENECAE PAVLVS SALVTEM.

Quotiescunque litteras tuas audio, praesentiam tui cogito nec aliud aestimo quam omni tempore te nobiscum esse. quam primum itaque uenire coeperis: inuicem nos et de proximo uidebimus. bene te ualere cupio.ⁱⁱ

LETTER 4

TO ANNAEUS SENECA, PAUL, GREETINGS.ⁱ

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.

PAUL & SENECA 4

ⁱ For the title, James reads: *PAUL TO ANNAEUS SENECA, GREETINGS* (see Paul's explanation in Letter 10).

ⁱⁱ For the farewell, Barlow has *Bene te valere opto*.

Epistola V

SENECA PAVLO SALVTEM.

Nimio tu secessu angimur. quid est? quae res remoram faciunt? si indignatio dominae, quod a ritu et secta ueteri recesseris et alios rursum conuerteris, erit postulandi locus, ut traditione factum, non leuitate hoc existimet. Bene vale.ⁱ

LETTER 5

SENECA TO PAUL, GREETINGS.

We are pained by your retirement. What is it? What causes keep you away? If it is the anger of the ladyⁱⁱ because you have left the old rite and sect, and have converted others, you will have a chance to plead with her, that she may consider it done on *due*ⁱⁱⁱ reflection and not lightly. Farewell.

PAUL & SENECA 5

- ⁱ The farewell follows Barlow and is absent from both Westerborg's text and James' translation.
- ⁱⁱ Letters 5 & 8 each contain references to a 'lady', who can hardly be any other than Poppaea (James adds her name in parentheses, here). Seneca tells Paul to be careful not to offend her, since she will not like his having deserted Judaism for Christianity; this implies some sympathy for the Jews on the part of Poppaea, which it is, in fact, possible to substantiate from other sources.
- ⁱⁱⁱ The word, 'due', here following James, does not occur in the Latin text.

Epistola VI

SENECAE ET LVCILIO PAVLVS SALVTEM.

De his quae mihi scripsistis non licet arundine et atramento eloqui, quarum altera res notat et designat aliquid, altera euidenter ostendit, praecipue cum sciam inter uos esse, hoc est apud uos et in uobis, qui me intellegant. honor omnibus habendus est et tanto magis, quanto indignandi occasionem captant. quibus si patientiam demus, omni modo eos ex quaque parte uincemus, si modo hi sint, qui poenitentiam sui gerant. bene ualete.

LETTER 6

PAUL TO SENECA AND LUCILIUS, GREETINGS.

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. Respectⁱ 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 overcome them at every point, provided they are men who can be sorry for their actions. Farewell.

ⁱ James has 'Honour' in place of 'Respect'.

Epistola VII

ANNAEVS SENECA PAVLO ET THEOPHILO SALVTEM.

Profiteor bene me acceptum lectione litterarum tuarum quas Galatis Corinthiis Achaeis misisti, et ita inuicem uiuamus, ut etiam cum horrore diuino esse exhibes. spiritus enim sanctus in te et super te excelsus sublimi ore satis uenerabiles sensus exprimit. uellem itaque cures et cetera, ut maiestati rerum cultus sermonis non desit. et ne quid tibi, frater, subripiam aut conscientiae meae debeam, confiteor Augustum sensibus tuis motum. cui lecto uirtutis in te exordio ista uox fuit: mirari eum posse, ut qui non legitime imbutus [sit,]ⁱ taliter sentiat. cui ego respondi solere deos ore innocentium effari, haut eorum qui praeuaricare ordinaria doctrina sua quid possint. et dato ei exemplo Vatiene hominis rusticuli, cui uiri duo adparuissent in agro Reatino, qui postea Castor et Pollux sunt nominati, satis instructus uidebatur. uale.

LETTER 7

ANNAEUS SENECA TO PAUL AND THEOPHILUS, GREETINGS.

I profess to be content with the reading of your letters you sent to the Galatians, Corinthians, and Achaeansⁱⁱ; and may we so live together as you show yourself to be inspired with the divine frenzy. For, it is the Holy Spirit that is in you and high above you that expresses these exalted and adorable thoughts. So, I would 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 that is in you, 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, not of those who try deceitfully to show what they can do by their learning. And, when I cited him the example of Vatiene 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.

PAUL & SENECA 7

ⁱ Barlow lacks the brackets, here following Westerburg.

ⁱⁱ No Pauline letter, canonical or apocryphal, is known to have been addressed to the Achaeans; it is not likely that such an Epistle has been lost, after having been known in the 4th Century, or that its existence should not have been mentioned by any other writer.

Epistola VIII

SENECAE PAVLVS SALVTEM.

Licet non ignorem Caesarem nostrum rerum admirandarum, si quando deficiet, amatorem esse, permittes tamen te non laedi sed admoneri. puto enim te grauiter fecisse, quod ei in noticiam perferre uoluisti quod ritui et disciplinae eius sit contrarium. cum ille enim gentium deos colat, quid tibi uisum sit, ut hoc scire eum uelles, non uideo, nisi nimio amore meo facere te hoc existimo. rogo de futuro ne id agas. cauendum est enim ne, dum me diligis, offensum dominae facias, cuius quidem offensa neque oberit, si perseuerauerit, neque, si non sit, proderit: si est regina, non indignabitur, si mulier est, offenditur. bene uale.

LETTER 8

PAUL TO SENECA, GREETINGS.

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 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 notⁱ. As a queen, she will not be angry; as a woman, she will be offended. A kind farewell.

ⁱ James has a note here that 'this is nonsense'.

Epistola IX

SENECA PAVLO SALVTEM.

Scio te non tam tui causa commotum litteris quas ad te de editione epistolarum tuarum Caesari feci, quam naturae rerum, quae ita mentes hominum ab omnibus artibus et moribus rectis reuocat, ut non hodie admirer, quippe ut is qui multis documentis hoc notissimum habeam. igitur noue agamus, et si quid facile in praeteritum factum est, ueniam irrogabis. misi tibi librum de uerborum copia. uale Paule carissime.

LETTER 9

SENECA TO PAUL, GREETINGS.

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 expressionⁱ. Farewell, dearest Paul.

PAUL & SENECA 9

ⁱ The literal translation of ‘*elegance of expression*’ (as James) is ‘*store of words*’.

Epistola X

SENECAE PAVLVS SALVTEM.

Quotiescumque tibi scribo nec nomen meum tibi subsecundo, grauem et sectae meae incongruentem rem facio. debeo enim, ut saepe professus sum, cum omnibus omnia esse et id observare in tua persona quod lex Romana honori senatus concessit, [perlecta epistola ultimum locum eligere]ⁱ nec cum aporia et dedecore cuiuspiam efficere quod mei arbitrii fuerit. uale deuotissime magister. data quinto Calendarum Iulii Nerone IV et Messala consulibus.

LETTER 10

TO SENECA, PAUL, GREETINGS.

Whenever I write to you and do not place my name after yours, I do a serious thing and one unbefitting my sectⁱⁱ. 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.ⁱⁱⁱ

PAUL & SENECA 10

- ⁱ Barlow lacks the brackets, here following Westerborg.
- ⁱⁱ James has 'persuasion' in place of 'sect', adding the latter in parentheses.
- ⁱⁱⁱ The date is June 27th, 58 CE.

Epistola XI

SENECA PAVLO SALVTEM.

Haueⁱ mi Paule carissime. si mihi nominique meo uir tantus et dilectus omnibus modis non dico fueris iunctus sed necessario mixtus, optume actum erit de Seneca tuo. cum sis igitur uertex et altissimum omnium gentium cacumen, non ego uis laeter, si ita sim tibi proximus, ut alter similis tui deputer? haut itaque te indignum prima facie epistolarum [nominandum] censeas, ne tam temptare me quam ludere uidearis, quippe cum scias ciuem esse te Romanum. nam qui meus, tuus [apud te] locus: qui tuus, uelim ut meus. uale mi Paule carissime. data X Kal. Aprilis Aproniano et Capitone consulibus.

LETTER 11

SENECA TO PAUL, GREETINGS.

Hail, my dearest Paul. If you, so great a man, so beloved in all ways, are – I do not say 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. ⁱⁱ

PAUL & SENECA 11

ⁱ Barlow opens with Ave in place of Haue.

ⁱⁱ The date is March 28th, 59 CE.

Epistola XII

SENECA PAVLO SALVTEM.

Haueⁱ mi Paule carissime. putasne me haut contristari et non luctuosum esse, quod de innocentia uestra subinde supplicium sumatur? dehinc quod tam duros tamque obnoxios uos reatui omnis populus iudicet putans a uobis effici, quidquid in urbe contrarium fit? sed feramus aequo animo et utamur foro, quod sors concessit, donec inuicta felicitas finem malis imponat. tulit et priscorum aetas Macedonem Philippi filium post Darium et Dionysium, nostra quoque C. Caesarem, quibus quidquid libuit, licuit. incendium urbs Romana manifeste saepe unde patiatur constat: sed si effari humilitas humana potuisset, quid causae esset, et inpune in his tenebris loqui liceret, iam omnes omnia uiderent. Christiani et Judaei quasi machinatores incendii supplicio adfecti, ut fieri solet: grassator quisquis est iste cui uoluptas carnificina est et mendacium uelamentum, tempori suo destinatus est, et ut optimus quisque unum pro multis donatum est caput, ita et hic deuotus pro omnibus igne cremabitur. centum triginta duae domus, insulae quattuor sex diebus arsere, septimus pausam dedit. bene te ualere, frater, opto. data V. Kal. April. Frugi et Basso consulibus.

LETTER 12

SENECA TO PAUL, GREETINGS.

Hail, my dearest Paul. Do you think 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 that Rome suffers is 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. ⁱⁱ

PAUL & SENECA 12

ⁱ Barlow opens with Ave in place of Haue.

ⁱⁱ The date is March 23rd, 64 CE.

Epistola XIII

SENECA PAVLO SALVTEM.

Allegorice et aenigmaticae multa a te usquequaque [opera]ⁱ concluduntur et ideo rerum tanta uis et muneris tibi tributa non ornamento uerborum sed cultu quodam decoranda est. nec uerere, quod saepius te dixisse retinco, multos qui talia affectent sensus corrumpere, rerum uirtutes cuirare. certum mihi concedas uelim latinitati morem gerere, honestis uerbis speciem adhibere, ut generosi muneris concessio digne a te possit expediri. bene uale. data pridie Non. Iul. Leone et Sabino consulibus.

LETTER 13

SENECA TO PAUL, GREETINGS.

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. ⁱⁱ

PAUL & SENECA 13

ⁱ Barlow lacks the brackets, here following Westerburg.

ⁱⁱ The date is July 6th, but the year cannot be determined, because the named consuls are not known.

Epistola XIV

PAVLVS SENECAE SALVTEM.

Perpendenti tibi ea sunt reuelata quae paucis diuinitas concessit. certus igitur ego in agro iam fertili semen fertilissimum sero, non quidem materiem quae corrumpi uideatur, sed uerbum stabile, dei deriuamentum crescentis et manentis in aeternum. quod prudentia tua asecuta, indeficiens fore uidebis, ethnicorum Israelitarumque obseruationes censere uitandas. nouum te auctorem feceris Christi Jesu praeconiis ostendendo rhetoricis inreprehensibilem sophiam, quam propemodum adeptus regi temporali eiusque domesticis atque fidis amicis insinuabis, quibus aspera et incapabilis erit persuasio, cum plerique illorum minime flectantur insinuationibus tuis, quibus uitale commodum sermo dei instillatus nouum hominem, sine corruptela perpetuam animam parit ad deum istine properantem. uale Seneca carissime nobis. data Kal. Augusti Leone et Sabino consulibus.

LETTER 14

PAUL TO SENECA, GREETINGS.

To your meditations have been revealed those things that 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 unfailing – 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 wellnigh 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 is instilled into them, will be a vital gain, producing a new man, incorrupt, and an everlasting soul that shall hasten hence to God. Farewell, Seneca, most dear to me. Given on the kalends of August; Leo and Sabinus consuls. ⁱ

PAUL & SENECA 14

ⁱ The date is August 1st, but the year cannot be determined, because the named consuls are not known.