

To Paul From Asthenes

Dear Paul,

Peace and grace to you from our God and Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. I want to commend you for your wonderful work of preaching Christ and Him crucified. Your compassion and concern for the jailer at Philippi was inspiring. I also appreciate your comment, "I have been crucified with Christ...who loved me and gave Himself for me." What wonderful words of comfort. Thank you.

I have a concern though; a concern that you may not have noticed, but others have. I know this to be so because I have discussed it with them and they feel the same way I do. I want you to be aware of it so your service to Christ may be even more effective, more fruitful. My concern is this, your poor attitude and actions toward others on some occasions--not all--but some. It seems to be driving people away from Christ instead of drawing them near. This cannot be good under any circumstances, can it? Let me give you specific cases.

The other day, I received a copy of Luke's version of the beginning of the church and your many travels. In it he said you blinded a man. Now, I understand that he was opposing the things you taught, but doesn't everyone have a God-given right to their own opinion? Why, Paul did you strike this man blind? Why did you not try to first talk to him and let him know about the love and compassion of Christ? Why did you have to be so harsh? Don't you know you likely drove him away from the Savior forever? It amazes me that the proconsul believed after this incident. You are lucky he continued to listen to you.

Also in Luke's narrative, I read that you upset the Jews at Antioch and drove them away from the good news. Paul, I know these Jews and they are devout people. My cousin lives there, though I do not know if he was among the crowd you upbraided, and he is a good man--no one is more sincere and devoted. This seems to be a pattern with you. If it was isolated, I could understand, but it is not. You even alienated Barnabas. Paul, why can't you get along with people any better?

By the way, I am not just picking on you. If Stephen were alive today I would also write him with my concerns. Don't get me wrong, I know the people he was addressing were in the wrong, but Stephen could have put it in a nicer way. I can understand why they were upset, though I

don't agree with their subsequent actions.

Furthermore, Paul, I also have a copy of the letters you wrote to the Galatian churches and the Philippian saints. Both letters have many good points in them. However, you don't even greet the Galatian brethren properly. You come across cold and callous. You even made reference to men mutilating themselves in the private area of their body. I could not let my wife or mother read such things. Your language is too crude. In the letter to Philippi, you call some men dogs. Paul, don't you see this is why more people don't listen to you. They hear harsh, mean things like this and it turns them off. Haven't you heard that Jesus said to do unto others as you would have them do unto you? Would you want to be called a dog? Why then do you call others dogs? Surely, you can do better. I know you can do better.

Another thing that has been bothering me are your letters to Timothy. A brother here has a copy of each and I am supposed to get copies soon--but I have read them. I know you love Timothy, but it seems to me you are setting a poor example for this young man. You not only encourage him in militaristic terms ("wage a good warfare," "fight the good fight of faith," "soldier of Jesus Christ"), but you also give the names of men who, in your opinion, teach error or have otherwise strayed from the faith. Did you not know others would read the letters you wrote to Timothy? Don't you think your language is too aggressive? Did you personally talk to the men you named and let them know you were going to inform others about your opinion of them? Paul, it seems to me that love for these brothers would demand you hide their faults. The wise man said, "love covers all sins." I don't understand, Paul, how you could give the names of brethren and publicly shame them. After all, does it really matter whether or not you believe the resurrection is already past or not? I mean, does your salvation depend upon believing the resurrection is past or in the future? No matter what anyone believes, it won't change the reality of it--will it? These men still believe in Jesus and baptism. They still believe and teach the one true body of Christ. They still stand against drunkenness and sexual immorality. I know one of them is strong on divorce and remarriage, because I heard him preach on it a few years ago; best sermon I ever heard on the subject--maybe you could get his notes.

Further, I wrote Demas over in Thessalonica to ask him about what you said about him--"Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world." He wrote back and said you are misrepresenting him. He doesn't love this present world. He insist you are not being fair to him and have a

personal vendetta against him. Paul, how can you spread such things around about a brother in Christ?

Finally, I want you to know my love for you, the Lord and our brethren. As you have acknowledged, you don't have long on this earth. It won't be long before you have no more opportunities to right all your wrongs--well, maybe that word is too strong--you don't have long to mend fences with some you have alienated. I don't mean to judge here, but it seems you could do something to help the situation. Maybe you could write a letter addressing all my concerns and I will share it with others to let them know you have changed.

May the Lord Jesus be with your spirit.

Asthenes

(Asthenes is Greek for weak)