

THE PAULINE GREETING FORMULA IN FOCUS: A TEXT-CRITICAL STUDY OF TITUS 1:4

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Abstract

This paper offers a text-critical examination of Titus 1:4, focusing on the Pauline greeting formula and its textual variation. The central issue analysed is whether the original salutation included “grace and peace” or the expanded “grace, mercy, and peace.” Drawing on manuscript evidence and scholarly opinions, the study demonstrates that “grace and peace” is the more likely original reading, supported by early and diverse textual witnesses such as Codex Sinaiticus and the Latin Vulgate. The inclusion of “mercy” in later manuscripts appears to be a harmonisation influenced by the pastoral epistles to Timothy. Theologically, the salutation affirms key Christian doctrines and establishes a foundational tone for the epistle. The paper concludes that while the textual variant does not alter the doctrinal message, “grace and peace” should be preferred for its originality and consistency with Pauline style.

Keywords: Titus 1:4, Pauline epistles, textual criticism, grace and peace, greeting formula.

Introduction

The greetings in Titus 1:1–4 is one of the longest salutations in Paul’s corpus. It is second in length only to the greetings found in Rom 1:1–7. According to Paul Zehr, the salutation in the epistle to Titus contains “sixty-five-word sentence” in USB5 and of which the primary purpose is to demonstrate “God’s salvation history, which centers in Jesus Christ.”¹ As it was the standard of letter writing in the ancient world, Paul highlighted three basic areas in the prelude of the epistle – namely; the name of the sender, the name of the recipient(s), and a salutation which included a prayer. There is a textual variation in this prayer section that warrants consideration. The question therefore is: Did Paul originally pray for “cavri~ (grace) and ejrhvnh (peace)” or “cavri~ (grace), ejvleo~ (mercy), and ejrhvnh (peace)?” This is the main issue that this paper intends to address.

Greek Text and Translation²

Titus 1:4 is rendered in Greek using UBS variant (5th edition) as follows:

Tivtw/ gnhsivw/ tevknw/ kataV koinhVn
pivstin: cavriç kaiV ejrhvnh ajpoV qeou`

1. Paul M. Zehr, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus: Believers Church Bible Commentary*, eds. Douglas B. Miller and Loren L. Johns (Scottsdale: Herald, 2010), 240.

2. Translation is the author’s.

patroVç kaiV cristou` jhsou` tou`
swth`roç hJmw`n.

This is translated as: To Titus, a child according to common faith; grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Notably, the UBS text omits the word ἔλεος (“mercy”) found in other textual traditions such as the Byzantine Majority Text and the Textus Receptus, which read cavriç, ejvleoç, ejrhvnh (“grace, mercy, peace”). A further investigation of the text shows that the reading “cavri~ kaiV ejrhvnh” receives an “A” rating from the translation committee, indicating that the reading, “grace and peace” is highly probable that, that is what was in the original text. This reading receives the support of some earlier manuscripts such as codex Sinaiticus (4th cent. manuscript), Ephraemi Rescriptus (5th cent. manuscript), some uncial and minuscules, Latin vulgate (4th and 5th cent.), Old Syriac (3rd/4th cent.), Coptic, Armenian versions, and as well as some secondary sources such as church fathers. On the other hand, the reading “cavri~, ejvleo”, ejrhvnh” is supported by some manuscripts like Alexandrinus (5th cent.), Byzantine witnesses, some minuscules, and lectionaries.

Similarly, surveying through some English Bible translations, it is evident to notice that the word mercy (eleo”) is not found in some

major English translations including but not limited to NIV, NLT, NCV, ASV, DARBY, HCSB, NRSV, LEB, NIrV, NASB, ESV, NRS, ASV, etc. However, the variant that contains “mercy” has impacted a good number of English translations such as KJV, NKJV, HNV, JB, Third Millennium Bible, Tyndale, The Webster Bible, World English Bible, etc. All English translations convey similar wording with slight variations.

Assessing the overall situation, Thomas Long alludes that “grace and peace” is an abbreviated version of Paul’s greetings (grace, mercy, and peace) found in both letters sent to Timothy (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2).³ Corroborating this view, Bruce Metzger states, “The typically Pauline epistolary salutation, *cavri~ kaiV ejrhvnh*, [commonly found in other Pauline epistles outside Pastorals] is strongly supported by good representatives of both the Alexandrian and the Western types of text.”⁴ Furthermore, Gerald Bray agrees that the phrase “grace and peace” is a common phrase in Paul’s writings and other early Christian texts.⁵ David Lipscomb explains that the word, “grace” is “the favor and approbation of God, and peace, the consequence of this manifested favor of God, producing internal happiness, quietness, and assurance [which amount to peace].”⁶ Likewise, Ray Stedman sees “grace” as the “marvelous gift of God’s unmerited blessing toward us, including His forgiveness and acceptance of us, purchased at the cost of the blood of Jesus. Peace refers to the reconciliation we have with God the Father through Jesus. Because He suffered and died, we

have peace with God.”⁷ Titus therefore, being part of Pastoral Epistles as grouped by scholars, the “*cavri~ kaiV ejrhvnh*” seems to be shorter and the more difficult reading which should be preferred as original reading, since the tendency is for the scribes to expand a text rather than shorten it compare to what 1 and 2 Timothy presented (“grace, mercy and peace”) which impacted the reading of some English Bible translations.

Therefore, “the insertion of *ejvleo*” appears to be an improvement inspired by the triple salutation analogy found in the epistles to Timothy.⁸ Samuel Ngewa argues that Paul’s greetings to Titus, “grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior” (Titus 1:4b) is quite close to the salutations he wrote to Timothy, but it omits the word “mercy” from the list of the triple blessings, and refers to “Jesus as ‘our Savior’ rather than ‘our Lord.’”⁹ Ngewa insists that the minor variations in the text “may not be deliberate, given that both savior and Lord are appropriate titles for Jesus. However, Timothy certainly needed the Lord’s abundant mercy while he worked in Ephesus, a seemingly more difficult field than Crete, where Titus is.”¹⁰ Metzger again asserts, “other minor fluctuations [in the verse], such as the insertion of *ujmi~n* (33) or *soi* (*cop*^{sa}), are obviously scribal modifications.”¹¹

Literary and Theological Significance of the Salutation

The salutation in Titus 1:4 holds significant literary and theological weight as it establishes the foundational relationship between Paul and Titus, as well as the shared faith that unites them. Paul refers to Titus as “my true child in a common faith,” indicating a deep spiritual bond

3. Thomas G. Long, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 258.

4. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York, NY: Stuttgart, 2000), 584.

5. Gerald L. Bray, *The Pastoral Epistles: The International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2019), 473.

6. David Lipscomb, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles*, ed. J. W. Shepherd (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1976), 263.

7. Ray C. Stedman, *The Fight of Faith – Studies in the Pastoral Letters of Paul: I and II Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2009), 293.

8. Metzger, 584.

9. Samuel M. Ngewa, *African Bible Commentary Series: 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 334–35.

10. Ngewa, 334–35.

11. Metzger, 584.

likely rooted in Paul's role in Titus's conversion and discipleship. This phrase not only personalizes the letter but underscores the unity among believers regardless of ethnic or cultural differences, emphasizing the inclusive nature of the Christian faith that transcends Jewish-Gentile divisions prevalent in the early church.¹²

Theologically, the greeting "Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior" encapsulates key Christian doctrines. Paul's customary blessing first mentions grace—the unmerited favor of God—which is central to salvation and epitomized in Christ, followed by peace, which is the fruit of responding to that grace through faith. This sequence highlights that peace with God and inner spiritual tranquility come only after embracing God's grace through Jesus Christ. The explicit mention of both God the Father and Christ Jesus as the source of these blessings affirms the early Christian understanding of the divine nature of Christ and the Trinitarian relationship, reinforcing Jesus's role as Savior alongside the Father.¹³

Literarily, the salutation serves as a thematic and structural introduction to the epistle, framing its main concerns such as faith, truth, godliness, and service. Paul's detailed greeting authenticates the letter and sets the tone for the pastoral instructions that follow, particularly emphasizing the need for godly leadership and moral integrity in the Cretan church. By invoking grace and peace, Paul not only imparts a blessing but also implicitly prepares Titus for the challenging task ahead, encouraging reliance on divine assistance. Thus, the salutation functions as both a personal encouragement and a theological summary that grounds the epistle's exhortations in the shared faith and hope of eternal life promised by God.¹⁴

Conclusion

This paper posits that the inclusion or exclusion of the word *eivleo* in Titus does not change the

narrative and the message of the book. It does not in any way impact negatively to the reading or understanding of the English translations. The doctrinal and/or theological issues discussed in the epistle remained what they are. The variation "grace, mercy, and peace" in some English Bible translations especially KJV could have been influenced by the narratives presented in 1 and 2 Timothy since all the three epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) are in the same group among Paul's corpus. Based on this, it is natural to conclude that "grace and peace" which is shorter than "grace, mercy, and peace" should be preferred as being the initial reading that explains the origin of "grace, mercy, and peace" in Paul's prayer.

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