

Are Christians to Greet Each Other with a Holy Kiss?

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An argument I have been given when trying to explain to people that the Bible teaches that women are to wear a head covering in meetings of the *ekklēsia* ("church" in the King James Version—see the article, "The Head Covering" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/headcovering1.html>) is that, if this is true, then we must also wash feet and greet each other with a holy kiss. I have already addressed washing feet in the article "Did Jesus Institute Washing Feet as a Church Ordinance or Ceremony?" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/footwashing.htm> In the present article, I intend to show from the Bible why I believe the holy kiss is not an ordinance or tradition God expects Christians to practice and how the instructions Paul and Peter give concerning the holy kiss differ greatly in structure and intent from those Paul gives concerning the head covering.

1. The instructions concerning the holy kiss contain no detailed information. The holy kiss is found in Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; and 1 Peter 5:14 ("kiss of charity"). Each instruction concerning the holy kiss is exactly one sentence. Each of these verses says basically the same thing, adding no further information. There is no explanation of what the holy kiss is, why it is to be done, how it is to be done, when it is to be done, who benefits from it, whether it should be done by both sexes, whether it should be done within the sexes or between the sexes, what biblical principle it is based on, or what it typifies or represents. It also does not give any sort of warning or show of authority to those who may not want to do it.

On the other hand, Paul's instructions concerning the head covering are fourteen verses long. They are detailed, they address the appropriate questions, and they give an authoritative warning to those who would be contentious (read "The Head Covering" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/headcovering1.html> for more information).

2. The context of the holy kiss instructions are vastly different from those of the head covering instructions. As I explain in my article, "The Head Covering," Paul's instructions concerning the head covering are given in the context of the topic of ordinances. In 1 Corinthians 10, he had addressed the propriety of eating meats that had been offered to idols, and, in that context, mentioned the Lord's

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Supper (verse 21). In 1 Corinthians 11:2, he specifically introduces the subject of ordinances or traditions. Then, for the next fourteen verses, he gives instructions concerning the head covering. After that, he immediately gives correction and instruction concerning the proper way to eat the Lord's Supper. This is all intense practical divinity concerning how the meetings of the *ekklēsia* are to be conducted.

Now contrast this with Paul's and Peter's instructions concerning the holy kiss. Without exception, the instructions concerning the holy kiss are found in the ending greetings of apostolic letters (epistles).

3. The holy kiss instructions are personal greetings. Not only are the holy kiss instructions in the context of personal greetings, they *are* personal greetings. The greetings at the end of epistles are personal greetings from the writer to brethren he knows, loves, is thinking about, and is praying for. They are entirely personal and not intended as general instructions for the church. Otherwise, we would have to "greet Mary" and "salute Andronicus and Junia" (Romans 16:6-7). But how can we do that? Paul and Peter are merely telling those who received their letters to pass on their greetings to others.

The English words "greet" and "salute" in the King James Version are both translated from the same Greek word, *aspazomai*. This word can also be translated "embrace" (see Acts 20:1 and Hebrews 11:13). It is a term of greeting and affection. So, the instructions concerning the holy kiss are entirely appropriate in this context. In many Middle Eastern cultures, people greet each other with a hug and a kiss. To ensure that this is understood to be a Christian greeting, Paul calls it a *holy* kiss. It is very similar to a mother ending a letter to her married daughter and son-in-law saying, "Give little Sally and Timmy hugs and kisses from Grandmom!" Paul is simply saying, Give everyone a warm greeting and holy kiss from me. These are not general instructions for everyone in the church for all ages.

Are Christians today to greet each other with a holy kiss? The Bible does not tell us to do so. It leaves how we are to greet each other up to us. Because there are no general instructions to the entire church concerning this, it is up to whatever is appropriate to our culture. If greeting with a kiss is common in your culture and would be understood as a brotherly, Christian greeting by the recipient, then, by all means, go ahead. But if not, then greet each other with a handshake or whatever else is common where you live.