

The Holy Kiss

Here are the N.T. verses which command the brethren to kiss:

(Rom 16:16) Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.

(1Co 16:20) All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss.

(2Co 13:12) Greet one another with an holy kiss.

(1Th 5:26) Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.

(1Pe 5:14) Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen.

There are two important terms to define:

kiss: A touch or pressure given with the lips (see kiss v. 1), in token of affection, greeting, or reverence; a salute or caress given with the lips.

holy: Kept or regarded as inviolate from ordinary use, and appropriated or set apart for religious use or observance; consecrated, dedicated, sacred.

There is nothing in the five “kiss” verses, nor by comparative study with other scriptures, that would imply that the kiss is only a figure of speech rather than an actual “touch or pressure given with the lips.” The key to understanding these commands is “holy.” As the definition sets forth, this particular kiss is special in that it is *kept inviolate from ordinary use*: it is not to be confused with other kisses. This is a matter of making a difference between the holy and profane after the manner of the following verses:

(Eze 22:26) Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: **they have put no difference between the holy and profane**, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.

(Eze 44:23) And they shall teach my people **the difference between the holy and profane**, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

(Exo 30:30) And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office.

(Exo 30:31) And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, This shall be an **holy anointing oil unto me** throughout your generations.

(Exo 30:32) Upon man's flesh shall it not be poured, neither shall ye make any other like it, after the composition of it: **it is holy, and it shall**

be holy unto you.

(Exo 30:33) Whosoever compoundeth any like it, or whosoever putteth any of it upon a stranger, shall even be cut off from his people.

Inasmuch as the “holy kiss” is commanded for brethren and not to be confused with other kissing, this apostolic command would forbid exploiting it for sensual purposes or not holding it in high regard as an ordained form of affectionate greeting between brethren. That it is an holy kiss also sets it in contrast to sinful use of the kiss, such as:

(2Sa 20:9) And Joab said to Amasa, Art thou in health, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him.

(2Sa 20:10) But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died. So Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri.

(Pro 7:10) And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart.

(Pro 7:11) (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house:

(Pro 7:12) Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.)

(Pro 7:13) So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him,

(Pro 27:6) Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

(Luk 22:48) But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?

Neither deceitful nor lascivious kisses could be considered *holy*, nor could they be considered “...of charity...” (1PE 5:14) since charity “...thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity...” (1CO 13:5-6). The rules of “holy” and “charity” exclude any corrupt intention foisted upon the kiss commanded by the apostles. Of special significance is the Judas kiss of betrayal: one should consider the awful condemnation of Judas (PSA 109:6-15 c/w ACT 1:20). The holy kiss implies just the opposite of Judas' kiss: it implies love and faithfulness.

Here is what we can know for a certainty from the five “kiss” verses:

1. It is commanded by the apostles for greeting or saluting (another word for greeting) *brethren*, not unbelievers. It is an *holy kiss* for the *holy brethren* (HEB 3:1; 1TH 5:27).
2. It is not to be confused with other forms of lawful kissing (Examples: romantic kisses between people of opposite sex who are free to lawfully do so, parent-child kisses, salutatory or congratulatory kisses of people in general, etc.).
3. It is not to be corrupted by evil intentions such as sexual enticement, deception or betrayal, etc.
4. To refuse to do it would be the breaking of a commandment of apostolic tradition (PHIL 4:9 c/w 2TH 3:6, 14).

Here is what is not clearly defined by the five “kiss” verses:

1. The part of a brother/sister to be kissed: lips, cheek, hand, feet (see LUK 7:38, 45) or any other part of the anatomy lawfully available for contact.
2. The frequency.
3. The setting: casual or the assembly of the saints.
4. That it is a church ordinance like baptism, communion or footwashing. I can think of no proof that a special time should be set aside for official saint-kissing. Further, to make it into a church ordinance would also require that all “one another” verses for Christian relating be made into church ordinances.

To make the commandment to *greet/salute one another with an holy kiss* into a rigid absolute which forbids any other form of greeting brethren would be a contradiction with the many cases where Jesus, the apostles or the brethren greeted brethren *without* kissing. Consider, for example, where Jesus appeared to His disciples in their midst and simply greeted them, “...Peace be unto you” (LUK 24:36). The N.T. has many examples like this, as when Paul's companions *saluted* the Roman saints *from a distance* (ROM 16:21). By the same token, whereas we are to be “...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...” (COL 3:16), this does not forbid other forms of teaching and admonishing one another (preaching, witnessing, etc.).

Further, to make the commandment to *greet/salute one another with an holy kiss* into a rigid absolute would make it sinful to *bid brethren goodbye with an holy kiss* (although it is not expressly called “holy kiss” in ACT 20:37, they did kiss the holy apostle Paul goodbye). It is interesting that the same Greek word (*aspazomai*, Strong's G782) which is commonly translated *greet* or *salute* (as in the “holy kiss” verses) is also translated in the context of *departure*:

(Act 20:1) And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced [*aspazomai*] them, and departed for to go into Macedonia.

(Act 21:6) And when we had taken our leave [*aspazomai*] one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again.

The point is that “Greet one another with an holy kiss” should be obeyed in the same manner that other “one another” commandments are obeyed---willingly, with some qualifications. There are some such verses which are general and universal (they should always be done towards all brethren):

(1Jn 3:11) For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

(Rom 12:10) Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

(Rom 15:7) Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

(Gal 5:13) For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

(Gal 5:26) Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

(Eph 4:32) And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. [Kindness is always required; Forgiveness is as required.]

(1Th 5:11) Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. [We should edify others always by our example though we may not have opportunity to use words.]

(Eph 5:21) Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

(1Pe 5:5) Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

(1Co 12:25) That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

(Col 3:9) Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

(Heb 10:24) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

(Jas 4:11) Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

(Jas 5:9) Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

There are other “one another” commandments which are binding upon us as believers but are qualified by circumstances and/or by the rule, “As we have therefore opportunity...” (GAL 6:10 c/w PHIL 4:10):

(Gal 6:2) Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. [This commandment doesn't apply if another has no burden, or a burden which he should himself be bearing.]

(Eph 4:2) With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; [Forbearance (bearing with, putting up with) is as needed.]

(Col 3:13) Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. [Forbearing and forgiving are only to be done as needed.]

(1Th 4:18) Wherefore comfort one another with these words. [The Second Coming and the Resurrection are especially appropriate for the

grieving.]

(Heb 3:13) But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. [*Exhorting* (admonishing earnestly, urging by stimulating words to laudable conduct) implies at the very least an opportunity for doing it. If we are not in contact every day with our brethren so as to exhort them, are we violating this commandment? How would that be done before the advent of telecommunications?]

(Jas 5:16) Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. [Both the *confessing* and the *praying for healing* are obviously on an “as needed” basis.]

(1Pe 4:9) Use hospitality one to another without grudging. [*Hospitality* is the entertainment and reception of guests with liberality and goodwill. If no brother or sister comes to visit us, are we violating this commandment?]

(1Co 11:33) Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. [This commandment was to correct abuses of the Lord's Supper at Corinth, obviously situation-specific.]

1TH 5:26 says, “Greet **all the brethren** with an holy kiss.” First, it would obviously not be wrong to keep this *inclusively* according to the letter, especially if one's conscience was convicted about doing so. If circumstances such as distance, infirmity, sudden death or some other complication confounded one's intention to personally *greet all the brethren with an holy kiss*, remember that God accepts the willingness and weakness when the full performance is frustrated:

(2Co 8:12) For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.

(Mar 14:7) For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always.

(Mar 14:8) She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.

(Php 4:10) But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

Mind that keeping 1TH 5:26 towards all the brethren *inclusively* would be very difficult in a church with non-resident members at great distance or where a member was homebound, etc.

There is another sense in which 1TH 5:26 may be understood. Sometimes, general terms are to be understood with exceptions or in qualified applications. The “all the brethren” of 1TH 5:26 may simply be an order to not show partiality based upon false distinctions in gospel obedience towards one another in the church. All saints were all condemned sinners bought with the same price and indwelt

with the same spirit. That they are even called *brethren* is a miracle of grace. Consider what Jesus taught:

(Mat 23:8) But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and **all ye are brethren**.

Paul pointedly taught a parity in the church:

(Rom 12:5) So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

(Gal 3:28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

(Col 3:10) And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

(Col 3:11) Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

(Heb 13:24) Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you.

(1Ti 6:2) And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.

The greeting with the holy kiss is therefore appropriate to any member of the church and an obligation to perform by all members of the church. God is no respecter of persons (ROM 2:11), nor should we be such. The Jew cannot refuse the holy kiss of or to a Gentile (and vice-versa). The same rule applies to masters and servants, ministers and members.

But what about the “ick” factor? Some may be repulsed by this commandment. But how many other aspects of Christian duty could be rejected on the basis of it making one uncomfortable: baptism, footwashing, preaching, church discipline, etc.? Do you think Joshua might have felt a little squeamish about circumcising all Israel (JOS 5:2-3)? Do you think Isaiah might have felt a little squeamish about walking naked and barefoot (ISA 20:2-3)? What about Ezekiel with his bread (EZE 4:12)? Thank God we are under a New Testament!

Someone might object that it was just a cultural thing back then. The same flaccid argument has been vainly used to try to dispense with footwashing, husband rule, male clergy, etc. Mind that the churches were in different nations and cultures and Paul taught the same in all churches (1CO 4:17).

In summary,

1. Greeting brethren with an holy kiss is commanded and is not a metaphor. Therefore, known refusal to do it would be a breach of apostolic order and tradition and grounds for church judgment. At the very least, we should remember that God takes note of things which He gives which are not put to good

use (MAT 25:24-26).

2. The holy kiss is for the holy brethren and not to be confused with other kissing nor corrupted with evil intentions.
3. The setting for it is not stipulated and it is not a ceremony of the church. The setting is a matter of liberty.
4. The frequency of doing it is not stipulated and it is not the only acceptable form of greeting brethren. Personal liberty applies here also.
5. The gender of the object of the holy kiss is not stipulated but caution is a VERY big byword. Recall also David and Jonathan's pure relationship (1SAM 20:41).
6. The part of the anatomy to be kissed is not stipulated but it is limited to lawful connection.
7. What is more important to us: obeying God or not offending our sensibilities? If God had said, "Greet one another with a holy handshake," would there be any different level of obligation? Recall that we are warned against substituting our own tradition for God's commandments. MAR 7:9-13.
8. If we have been lax or loath to do this, why? We should delight in all God's commandments that apply to us (PSA 119:35; ROM 7:22). Let our obedience be from the heart. ROM 6:17.
9. The performance of this Christian responsibility requires willingness on the part of the giver and the receiver. Let us be cautious to not reject the sincere obedience of a fellow church member toward ourselves. Remember our Lord's example in LUK 7:36-50.

(Rom 15:7) Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.