

Greet One Another
Romans 16:3-16

We greet with hugs, handshakes, high fives, fist bumps, and yes, even with a kiss.

Every culture without exception has them. They vary from region to region and even within regions there are differences. Greetings are essential in every culture as a way of introduction or expression of friendship. They show respect, value friendship, acknowledgment.

A man wearing a hat may touch or tip the hat or remove it all together when greeting someone else. If he has no hat he may touch the corner of his head. King Louis XIV always tipped his hat to any women he encountered.

The Arabic custom is to greet others with a word of peace while touching their right hand to their heart before and after shaking hands.

The Chinese will place their right fist in their open left palm bowing as they do.

In India they press their palms together near their heart while they give a gentle bow.

Formal greetings in Europe among the upper class is for a man to take the extended hand with palm down, offered by a woman and kiss the back of the hand while bowing.

Some countries alternate kissing the cheek three times, other countries kiss the right then left cheek, while some only kiss the one cheek. Still others greet with a kiss on the lips.

In Oman the men will kiss one another on the nose after a handshake.

And it is a myth that Eskimos don't kiss on the lips because their mouths would freeze together. It is assumed that the reason they rub noses in what is commonly called the Eskimo kiss is because that is often the only thing exposed.

In the final message of our one another series, we are led to Romans 16 where in verse 16 we are told to "greet one another with a holy kiss." It is to Romans 16 that I invite you to turn this morning.

Greetings by and large are favorable. They may be simple in gesture but have profound meaning as we will discover in our passage.

A greeting is a sign of a relationship.

A greeting is a sign of fellowship and unity.

A greeting is a sign of respect.

For our time this morning I want us to see just two things in the importance of greeting one another.

A greeting is to be personal

A greeting is to be pure

I. A GREETING IS TO BE PERSONAL

Paul concludes his letter to the church in Rome with some personal greetings listing a number of people with whom he had come to know and love. It isn't just to fill space or in some way to gain favor or standing with them. He isn't name dropping as if to say "look who I have rubbed shoulders with." These are individuals with whom he served and people he had come to dearly love. It is a carefully scripted list of fellow believers, fellow soldiers of the cross, fellow workers for Christ. Even though they all knew one another Paul singles them for the role they played in his life and the life of the church at Rome. As you read through this list, it isn't just a list of names as if reading through sections of genealogies. We are able to glean some important truths from this list of faithful servants. Paul's purpose is to express his love for them.

John Phillips states "Love delights to single out its objects and recall them one by one."

I hope that in conversations with you in private or in public you get a strong sense that I love my wife. You would question that love for her if I never talked about her.

What you notice in reading verses 3-16 is that in 14 verses he uses the word “greet” 17 times. Ponder the implications of that for a moment. We can conclude in these closing remarks that there are three people involved. There is the writer Paul. There is the one reading the letter, conveying its contents and greetings to the recipients. Then there are the ones he is addressing individually.

As we read through these greetings we get a sense of Paul’s tone. Some he refers to as beloved or as dear friends – we them in verses 5, 8, 9 and 12. It isn’t just a casual relationship to say that “oh, I remember meeting them once in a church service. I took a copy of the church directory. Isn’t he the one with the pottery shop on 5th Avenue?” No, these are folks with whom there is a strong bond of friendship. “I love them.” And gives some reasons.

This greeting is more than just mere words. For Paul they conveyed the unsullied truth of his love and affection for them, for their unceasing work for the cause of Christ and for the relationship they shared because they were bound together in Christ.

If it was possible for Paul to be there in person he would have told them himself how much he loved them. He was asking the reader to convey that message of affection to them, to be his courier. As he thought about the church in Rome he couldn’t help but delight in remembering these individuals with whom he served and loved. He wanted his greeting to be the aroma of a sweet perfume that hung in the air when the bottle was opened.

Pastor John Piper writes “Whatever else we may learn or experience in reading these verses, let us not miss this most obvious and important experience: The preciousness of Christians in the

hearts of Christians.”

So dear friends, I ask you this morning: how precious is the remembrance of other Christians to you? We get that sense from Paul’s other letters as he begins by stating how often he thinks of them and consequently prays for them.

Is the warmth of Christian love conveyed to each other as you greet one another?

As we come to verse 16 we see this greeting to each of these believers mentioned in the passage blanketed with the desire, even delight, in greeting “one another with a holy kiss.”

This admonition surfaces in four other passages – three by Paul and once by Peter where he invokes us to offer a “kiss of love as we greet one another.”

I Corinthians 16:20

II Corinthians 13:12

I Thessalonians 5:26

I Peter 5:14

Paul is telling the reader, “Don’t just express my love for these dear friends of mine, kiss them for me.” He would have done it in person if he was there, but in his absence give them a kiss.

In that era and for that culture, and it’s still that way today, a kiss was a common form of greeting. It wasn’t just something that was done outside the church, but a custom that was carried on into the church.

Greeting others with a kiss was not restricted to gender in the culture of the New Testament. Men greeted men with a kiss. Women greeted women with a kiss. Both genders greeted one another with a kiss. The suggestion to separate the genders in the exchange of a kiss in greeting didn’t come until the second century and the reason was because non-Christians brought it up. Christians didn’t want to be a stumbling block so they stopped. A man might

greet another man with a kiss and a woman might kiss another woman, but never a kiss in greeting between a man and a woman. It wasn't appropriate. Non-Christians didn't like it.

By the fourth century this separation was carried to the laity and clergy. In western culture anyways, it's rarely done and there may be some legitimate reasons.

J. Vernon McGee suggests that it shouldn't be done at all because of the possible impropriety, and he may have a point, but I want to suggest that with guards and guidelines offered by Paul greeting one another with a holy kiss can be permissible even in our culture. Now this isn't to say that after the service today we pucker up and go on a kissing spree. Paul offers a key to its expression.

In the New Testament era love for each other was shown openly. Greeting with a kiss was a common custom. Even in our culture it is something that some Christians feel comfortable in expressing out of sincere love for each other.

There is a friend of mine who is the father of a classmate of David. We enjoy a good friendship and when we get together we greet each other with a big hug and he will kiss me on the cheek. I have to admit that at first it was a bit awkward on my part, but it's not a problem. He is a godly man and his intentions are to convey a gesture of fellowship and love that we share in Christ.

II Corinthians 13:11-12

Considering that passage we see that one of the components of expressing greetings through a holy kiss stems from unity in the body. When unity is strong, affection for one another is strong and it is openly expressed. If there is no unity in the body then any kind of greeting is hypocritical. William Newell has written "The simplicity and warmth of early Christian devotion, cannot be

brushed aside as an "Orientalism" by the colder hearts of formal and 'reserved' manners of the day. 'Behold how these Christians love one another' was a common remark of the day."

It was a common remark because there was unity. What do outsiders see today among Christians?

For Paul, unity was a result of love expressed in a greeting with a kiss that showed great fellowship between them.

It was a common greeting. On one occasion Jesus had been invited to the home of a Pharisee. We find it in Luke 7. It was not uncommon for others not invited to dine to stand around while the guests ate. One such uninvited guest was a former woman of the street. At some point in the depravity and despair of her life she realized she was a sinner and came to Christ. Her heart was transformed. To express her gratitude for such a change she showed up. Weeping out of love for Jesus she took a jar of perfume out of her purse; her tears were flowing and wetting the feet of Jesus. She dried them with her hair and then continually kissed his feet and poured the perfume on them.

The self-righteous Pharisee condemned Jesus for allowing such a woman to touch Him. Yet Jesus condemned the Pharisee for his lack of greeting but praised the woman who, out of love for the Lord, expressed it through acts that the Pharisees considered appalling in that day.

A kiss of greeting was common, that's why it didn't take anyone by surprise when Judas approached Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and gave Him a kiss on the cheek before His arrest.

Paul would suggest that a kiss that is personal is to be done out of respect for the other. If there is indeed unity, then the courteous thing to do is greet one another out of sincerity, whether it is by a handshake, a hug, a pat on the back, or even a kiss.

A greeting is an expression of respect.

A greeting is an expression of comfort. When you're going through a tough time, there is nothing more comforting than a greeting that conveys to the recipient that the other person is there for you. Such a gesture expresses empathy and evokes strength. When my Mom passed away the outpouring of love and support was a welcome relief through my grief as you came alongside and offered love through your hugs and handshakes. But they shouldn't be reserved just for when someone is going through tough times. They can be celebratory.

Those kinds of greetings are also important when things are going well. They are a reaffirmation of the bond of friendship shared between two people.

Whether it is a hug or a handshake or a kiss it affirms to me our fellowship in Christ. You all know I'm a hugger. I come from a family of huggers. It speaks of comfort and unity and strength in the family. So I hope you don't mind a hug, I certainly don't. I'm comfortable hugging guys and gals alike. But I want to offer three suggestions so that whether you greet with a hug or a handshake or a kiss it is not misused or misunderstood.

That's where Paul places the stipulation on greeting with a kiss especially among Christians. We need to be sincere. Express it with no ulterior motive, no ill intent either in gesture or in motive. It shouldn't be used to gain favor. We need to be sincere.

The second is that we need to be sensitive. Some people like their space and may be uncomfortable with a hug or any form of physical touch for that moment. As I said a moment ago you know I'm a hugger, but I also want to be sensitive to your comfort level. I was reminded of this in one church I served where a

husband took me aside before a service to let me know that his wife was uncomfortable being hugged. They loved the church and me as a pastor but she was not comfortable with that at all. He shared the reason with me after which I apologized and thanked him for bringing it to my attention. We can make an incorrect assumption so we need to be sensitive.

The third thing is that we need our greeting to be sacred. That's the clue to our greeting Paul brings up for us in the text.

A greeting is to be personal.
A greeting is to be pure.

II. A GREETING IS TO BE PURE

If there is a limitation on the greeting it is this: "greet one another with a *holy* kiss."

Now you might rightly ask how you differentiate between a regular old kiss and a holy kiss. Going back to the thought of J. Vernon McGee – he intones that it should just be avoided altogether that way there is no question about motive or misuse or misunderstanding.

On the other hand, John MacArthur writes "If practiced with sensible discretion, a loving embrace and a truly holy kiss that reflects genuine, heartfelt love between Christians should not be jettisoned simply because of possible misunderstanding or misuse."

One author writes "For Christians it must be a holy kiss, for all greetings should be purely and sincerely exchanged in Christ."

Again from the writings of John Piper "The ordinary kiss – and it is just an ordinary word for kiss (here) – should be made holy by the Christian church rather than being abandoned. The apostle is saying to 'take it from the world and sanctify it.

Make it holy. Devote it to God. Make it say something about the Holy One. Include God in your hearts and in your thoughts when you greet one another with this ordinary, culturally common greeting.”

Whatever means of greeting we employ with each other let it be genuine, born out of the common relationship we have in Jesus Christ. It must be sincere. It must be sensitive. It must be sacred. Take the common and make it holy. Take the ordinary and make it extraordinary as an expression of mutual love and commitment to one another because of the cross of Christ who has brought us together in a sacred union as part of His body, the church.

John Piper suggests that our greetings should be physical in some way because healthy families aren't afraid to show it. Healthy families are secure in their love and affection for one another. Let's demonstrate to the world a unity that is born out of love and demonstrated in how we greet each other.

I think what Paul is saying is that whatever is culturally appropriate, make that holy as you greet one another. Take a common greeting like a handshake or a kiss and make it holy. Take an ordinary gesture and make into an expression of love that stems from the common thread we share in Christ.

Once more from John Piper “The kiss of affection should not be sensual, or manipulative, or offensive or hypocritical or in any way pretending to express affection that is not really there. It shouldn't hide any sin in our lives.” That is how Judas approached Jesus in the garden. Let it speak of the unity shared in the body of Christ.

Greeting one another is a way for Christians to tell each other that there is nothing between us, no hatred, no ill feelings, no resentment, no bitterness. It demonstrates forgiveness, love, encouragement,

and grace, so on any given morning if I don't greet you in some way, it isn't because there is something between us, it's because I am otherwise preoccupied with getting things ready for the service. I assure you it isn't intentional.

Pastor Gene Getz states that “Whatever we do (in greeting one another), we must always reflect God's holy nature.”

Whatever the gesture may be, God wants His church to express love for each other in the greeting. He never intended it to be cold.

Many years ago, a prominent pastor was asked to preach in a downtown Church. It was one of those cold churches where the only movement they had experienced in years was the growth of the ivy on the outside walls. No one spoke to him before the service. When he preached, the people sat and stared icily. After the service everyone rushed to their cars. No one stayed for fellowship. It was as if they had paid their dues, done their time, and now were ready to hurry away.

After the service the pastor took the guest to eat at a restaurant across the street. They were met by a friendly hostess who seemed delighted that they had come her way. She seated them at a table served by a warmhearted waitress, who took personal interest in them as she served them. This pastor remarked that if the church and the restaurant had given invitations that day, he would have joined the restaurant!

It is never God's will for a church to become cold. Jesus made clear that the mark of being a Christian was how we love one another and we demonstrate it in how we greet one another. Let it be said of us by outsiders “How they love one another.”

What makes such a greeting possible is the foundation on which we are built. The foundation of this affection toward each other is in the death of

Christ and the union we share through Him. Eight times in the text Paul refers to these friends as being in Christ or in the Lord.

Quite a few years ago I was invited by a friend who was part of a local volunteer fire department to come and watch them train in a live fire. They were going to purposely torch an abandoned house to go through firefighting exercises in a burning building. A number of friends and family members pulled out their lawn chairs and coolers and sat on the opposite side of the road away from the house and away from danger. It was a warm summer day as we sat in our t-shirts and shorts watching the training. We didn't know it at the time but even though we were quite a distance away the intensity of the heat caused a heat rash on exposed skin.

Now let's imagine for a moment that it was a real fire and there were real people in the house with you and I huddled together clutching one another in anticipation and hope of their rescue.

As the several family members are pulled away to safety from the clutches of a roaring fire what do you suppose would be the reaction of those waiting on the outside who were safe? There would be an overwhelming sense of joy, gratitude, and affection not only toward those who were rescued but for those standing around. Everyone would be hugging because they had been rescued.

That's the idea Paul is conveying here. They had all been pulled from the otherwise certain catastrophe of hell, pulled from the fire brands as it were to safety by and through Jesus Christ and Paul has great affection for them because they had all at one time stood guilty awaiting the wrath of God but now were all safe in Christ. No wonder there is such a deep affection for them with a desire to fondly greet them.

Notice some of the reasons Paul delights in them.

Priscilla and Aquila had risked their lives for the sake of Paul and the Gentile believers. They were his fellow workers.

Rufus was described as one chosen in the Lord.

Some he wanted to greet because they were the first converts in Asia.

Some had experienced prison with Paul. Someone has said that "the hardest times forge the deepest friendships." When you go through it together there is a bond forged that no matter the time or distance between when you come together there is strong affection.

*The white hot point of the welder's flame
Makes the strongest joint in the welded frame.*

Some had been saved longer than Paul, while he was still breathing threats against the church.

Some, both men and women, had joined him as workers in ministry. There was that partnership of sharing the gospel and encouraging the church to grow in faith. They were co-laborers.

So he says greet one another in some form of "holy kiss". This will keep it from being meaningless or superficial and misunderstood.

Paul had no problem expressing affection to his fellow Christians and neither should we.

In your greeting:

- Be social
- Be sincere
- Be sensitive
- Be sacred

How would an outsider describe us?

We say we are friendly, but are do we show it to the person who enters our doors.

A man wearing a big brimmed hat took his seat in the front row of the church. An usher approached him and asked if he would kindly remove his hat for the service. The man refused. Almost racing back to the usher's station, the first usher consorted with the head usher who then approached the man with the same request. The response was the same. No. Overhearing the commotion in the back the head of the women's church society firmly asked the man to remove his hat for the service about to begin. Once again he refused. Finally the head deacon took up the matter and got the same response. The man was dead set against taking off his hat.

The service began and as the congregation stood, so did the man who promptly removed his hat. Following the service he was met at the door by the entourage who had earlier attempted to get him to remove his hat. They stated that it was not customary for men to wear hats in church. The man responded that he did understand. He went on to say that he had been in the church regularly for the past two years and never met anyone, but on that day he met four people.

I want to suggest to you this morning that as we greet one another before services if we notice someone who is visiting, we ought to greet them warmly and sincerely offering to sit with them.

Let's show them that we "have passed from death into life, because we love the brothers." (I John 3:14)

We have all been rescued from that burning building by Christ through faith in His shed blood. For that there ought to be a great sense of wonder and relief as we express our gratitude as we greet one another with a "holy kiss" however that may look.