



ISSUE

25.46

November 12, 2023

Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN
OF THE
OLSEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

9:30 AM

10:30 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Patrick Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelists:

Austin Byers

Kyle Pope

“Greet One Another with a Holy Kiss”

By Kyle Pope

Paul ends his second epistle to the Corinthians in much the same way he ends many of his epistles, with personal greetings and words of encouragement. Of particular note is the command, **“Greet one another with a holy kiss”** (2 Cor 13:12, NKJV). What exactly is Paul commanding here? Is this command binding on us today? If not, how does this differ from other commands we are given?

Five times in the New Testament we find the command to **“greet”** with a **“kiss.”** In four of these it is called a **“holy kiss”** (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26) and once a **“kiss of love”** (1 Pet. 5:14). These instructions are general in nature, so they don’t appear only to apply to Rome, Corinth, or Thessalonica. In each of these instructions we find three elements. First, the command to **“greet”**—this is the action commanded. This is the function of the command. Members of the church are to **“greet”** one another. Second, it is with a **“kiss.”** This modifies the command. It is the manner of the greeting. It is how the greeting is to be done. The word translated **“kiss”** is the Greek word *philēma* derived from the fa-

miliar verb *phileō* which refers to the type of love and affection that one shows to a friend. In fact the word for “**friend**” (*philos*) is derived from *phileō* (cf. John 3:29). *Philēma* is always used in reference to touching the mouth to the cheek, mouth, hand, or even feet of another person—but its meaning is derived from friendship, not from a verb that refers to the mouth. It is an action of friendship and affection. The third element is that this kiss of greeting is to be “**holy**” or “**of love.**” This modifies the nature of the type of kiss. It is not an

action of lust, or deceit. It is an act of love, consideration, and acceptance of a brother or sister.

It is clear that in ancient times a kiss of greeting and affection was a common thing. In the family we see Jacob kisses Isaac in greeting him (Gen. 27:26-27). In friendship David and Jonathan kiss farewell (1 Sam. 20:41-42). A Sovereign is kissed to elicit mercy (Ps. 2:12) and a king may kiss his subject as a gesture of mercy (2 Sam. 14:33). A host might kiss a guest as a greeting (Luke 7:45). Simon did not offer Jesus a kiss of honor or greeting, but the sinful woman kissed Jesus’s feet in honor. Judas’s kiss was of false greeting (Luke 22:47-48). His kiss was the opposite of a “**holy kiss**” or a “**kiss of love.**”

Today there are still some cultures where kissing is practiced as it was in the Bible. When I went to Turkey some years ago a Turkish young woman my brother and I met on the plane explained to us that something we would see frequently (men kissing each other as a greeting) was not a homosexual gesture, but simply affection shown between friends. For better or worse, that is not the way it is in twenty-first century America. In our culture some families kiss as a gesture of affection but not all do. In our culture some friends greet one another this



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way—but only close female friends and never male friends. If it did happen, it would communicate a flirtatious or a homosexual overture. In our culture officials and citizens do not kiss each other. To do so in America would not communicate honor or merciful governance. In our culture kissing is never offered as a gesture of greeting between those who are unfamiliar with each other. To kiss a person who is not family, or a close friend would be seen as a romantic advance, not a **“greeting”** (as is commanded) nor could it be done in **“holiness”** with **“love.”** It would be taken as a violation of accepted decorum.

This leads us to ask, is this command binding on us today? Not all commands contained in Scripture are binding. Some are to specific people. Timothy is told to drink wine for his stomach (1 Tim. 5:23) and to bring cloaks and parchments to Paul (2 Tim. 4:13). These are specific instructions to a specific individual. Commands are binding when they are applied to believers in general. As we noted above, these commands are general. They are applied to several churches, so whatever the **“holy kiss”** command teaches it is binding for us today. However, sometimes even general commands address principles beyond the specifics to which they are applied. For example, when Jesus washed the disciples’ feet He commanded **“you should do as I have done to you”** (John 13:15), yet there is no indication that Jesus is commanding this as a ritual. *Washing feet* elsewhere appears to stand for service in general (1 Tim. 5:10). In the same way a “holy kiss” could be any gesture of friendship, love, and acceptance: a hug, a handshake, or a pat on the back—it does not

have to involve a touch of the lips to another person.

This raises a final question—is this a “substitution” in a thing commanded? We stress the danger and apostasy of making substitutions in things commanded. Sprinkling is an unauthorized substitution for immersion. Playing an instrument is an unauthorized substitution for singing. We must make certain that we are consistent to avoid substitutions. In this case, however, we have evidence that alternate forms of greetings are not substitutions. We see this in the example of one of the words used for worship. The word *proskuneō* comes from the verb *kuneō* meaning “to kiss” and *pros* meaning “towards.” It means literally “to kiss towards.” Although *kuneō* is not used in the New Testament, it is clear that the literal meaning of *proskuneō* was understood. When Matthew



28:9 describes the disciples falling down and holding Jesus by the feet and **“worshipping”** Him the sense of “kissing towards” the object of worship is literally carried out. Yet, elsewhere to **“worship”** had nothing to do with literally kissing in reverence. Jacob **“worshipped”** leaning on his staff (Heb. 11:21). The soldiers of-

ferred mock **“worship”** bowing the knee to Jesus (Mark 15:19). The visitor to the assembly who recognizes that **“God is truly among you”** will fall down on his face and **“worship”** (1 Cor. 14:25). What does this have to do with the **“holy kiss?”** If we can **“worship (proskuneō)”**—a word that literally refers to a gesture of the mouth, without literally kissing something, it is clear that we can express a holy **“kiss (philēma)”**—a word that refers to friendship not literally to a gesture of the mouth without literally kissing someone.



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