
QUESTION:
The Bible tells us to greet one another with a holy kiss. What exactly does that mean?

In 1 Peter 5:14 (ESV), it says:

> *“Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.”*

Does this mean, for instance, that if a godly woman meets me, she should kiss me on the cheek as a greeting? Or if I meet your wife on the street, and since we’re both believers, I kiss her and say “Shalom” is that the kind of kiss the Bible refers to?

ANSWER:

To understand this properly, we need to consider both the biblical

text and its cultural-historical context.

The phrase *“holy kiss”* or *“kiss of love”* appears in several New Testament passages:

Romans 16:16 “Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.” (ESV)

1 Corinthians 16:20 “All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.” (ESV)

2 Corinthians 13:12 “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” (ESV)

1 Thessalonians 5:26 “Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.” (ESV)

These repeated instructions from the Apostle Paul and once from Peter show that this greeting was common among early Christians. But what exactly did it mean?

Historical and Cultural Background:

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, kissing on the cheek was a standard form of respectful greeting, not unlike shaking hands or hugging today. It was used:

As a sign of friendship

To show mutual respect

And as a way to affirm kinship or loyalty

In Jewish tradition as well, a kiss was often used between family members and close companions. It was not romantic but symbolic of affection, trust, and peace.

Therefore, the “holy kiss” in Scripture refers to a ritual gesture among believers meant to express Christian love (ἀγάπη / *agapē*), unity, and fellowship, not romantic or sexual affection (*eros*).

Spiritual Meaning:

The term “holy” (Greek: *hagios*) means set apart, pure, and sacred. So a *holy kiss* implies a sanctified gesture, free from

impure motives or social impropriety.

It stands in contrast to Judas Iscariot’s infamous kiss of betrayal:

> *Matthew 26:48–49 (ESV)*
> *“Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.’ And he came up to Jesus at once and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ And he kissed him.”*

Here, Judas uses a familiar greeting for sinister purposes. That kiss was anything but holy.

Paul, on the other hand, envisioned the holy kiss as an act that:

Promoted unity in the Body of Christ

Affirmed spiritual kinship

And symbolized the peace and love of God shared among believers

Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.”

Theological Perspective:

Paul’s instruction to greet one another with a holy kiss was not a doctrinal command or a permanent church ordinance (like baptism or communion). It was:

A cultural expression of genuine Christian affection

Not a universal requirement for all times and cultures

Subject to change based on cultural norms and sensitivity

In today’s world, physical gestures like kissing may carry very different implications, especially across genders or in certain regions. In many cultures today, kissing someone not related to you especially of the opposite sex could easily be misunderstood, making it counterproductive to its original intent.

Modern Application:

If Paul were writing to the church today, he might say:

Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.”

> *“Greet one another with a holy handshake” or “a godly embrace” whatever is culturally understood as pure and respectful.*

In today’s churches, acceptable alternatives to a holy kiss may include:

A warm handshake

A brief hug between same-gender believers

A verbal blessing or peaceful greeting (e.g., “Shalom,” “God bless you,” “Peace be with you”)

As long as the spirit behind the greeting is holy, the specific form doesn’t matter.

Guidelines for Today:

1. Avoid gestures that could be misinterpreted.
   A man kissing a woman who is not his wife or relative especially in public or

church may send the wrong message.

2. Let love be sincere and pure.
   Paul wrote in Romans 12:9 (ESV):

> *“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.”*

3. Preserve modesty and avoid offense.
   Paul also taught in 1 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV):

> *“But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.”*

So, if you meet a fellow believer who is a woman, simply offering a respectful handshake is more than enough. It conveys the same love and peace that the holy kiss symbolized without the risk of confusion or impropriety.

Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.”

Be blessed!

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