



Light from the Word

Greet One Another

Editor's Note: The Bible uses the term "one another" multiple times and it is clear God is very interested in our relationships. Jesus taught that the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. In 2018, we will look at several of the "one another's" in the Bible.

Theme verse: *Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.*¹

A young Mexican man grew up in a small farming village helping his father raise corn and edible beans on a tiny acreage. Rainfall is sparse in those high plains, more than 7000 feet above sea level, and many years there was little or no harvest. His family lived in a two-room adobe house with no running water. His mother was blind and suffered from advanced diabetes. This young man was willing to risk his life to get to America to find work to help his family. He knew it would be years until he could see them again. He went anyway.

The time came, years later, when he had opportunity to go home, traveling with an American family which had befriended him. As they pulled up in the courtyard of the adobe house, a small thin man was waiting. His dark, crevassed, weather-beaten face was crisscrossed with the hills and valleys of a difficult life and appeared to be much older than his seventy years. While his traveling companions watched, the son stiffly exited the vehicle and slowly advanced toward his now-widower father. His father stepped toward him and they embraced with an indescribable intensity. The father sobbed loudly, "*Mi hijo! Mi hijo!*" – "My son! My son!" His words were barely intelligible, but his passion and joy in seeing his son again was unforgettable.

Greetings speak volumes about how we feel about one another.

Whom do you greet with joy and passion?

In the days of the Apostles, persecution was understood to be the lot of most believers. When a soul repented and began to follow the way of Jesus, it was with the full knowledge that it could cost his life and often included ostracization from one's own family.² This shared risk cemented the bond between believers and prompted joyful and somber greetings when meeting another fellow-sufferer. For many believers, the church became their family, as they were rejected by their parents and siblings. We can sense these powerful links in Paul's extended list of greetings to the believers that he knew in the church at Rome.³ This was his family and he wanted to maintain that deep connection.

The word translated as "greet" or "salute" in the New Testament carries with it a sense of enfolding or embracing one another and intimates a meaningful greeting in and of itself. It's not just a physical embrace, but rather a heartfelt spiritual and emotional embrace that can be conveyed in Christians' greetings. It seems unlikely that the persecuted church greeted each other with a mere, "What's up?" Rather, the bond of love founded in the death and resurrection of Jesus recognized fellow believers as family and fellow pilgrims – willing to suffer for the name of Christ and willing to share all with their brethren.⁴ Inevitably, the shared bond of faith, hope, suffering, love, and joy fosters close relationships. And inevitably, we rejoice when we meet someone with whom we share a close relationship.^{5,6}

Is it different today? Although in our North American and Japanese churches we do not currently suffer the specter of death because of our faith, do we comprehend that such is our commitment? Do we understand and appreciate that commitment in each other? Are we fostering and investing in our

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relationships in the church? Isn't it reasonable to think that we would develop such close relationships if we would be engaged in one another's life? With a close relationship, greeting one another will not become a superficial event. Let's consider some aspects of what the Apostles were teaching when they taught the church to greet one another with a holy kiss.

As the Apostle Paul carried the gospel to the Gentiles, he covered a lot of territory and learned to know people of every station in life from dozens of distinct cultures. He recounts the equalizing force of Jesus, emphasizing that, "*there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.*"⁷ He could well have added, Albanian nor Spaniard, Italian nor Egyptian, and more. The miracle of salvation erased ethnic, gender, and social divisions and produced deep bonds of love that crossed all boundaries.

To all these cultures, both Peter and Paul encouraged believers to show their deep love and bond by the heartfelt greeting of a holy kiss.^{8 9 10 11} They wrote to the Romans (Italy),

the Corinthians (Greece), and the varied cultures across the Asia Minor peninsula (modern-day Turkey). The Apostles' encouragement to greet one another with a holy kiss crossed all kinds of unthinkable barriers and instituted one consistent cross-cultural form of greeting in the church. Slaves greeted their owners. The wealthy greeted the poor. Jewish believers greeted the "uncircumcised." It was then, and should be today, a grace-filled way to acknowledge the equalizing power of Christ.

Have you experienced the equalizing power of Christ? Do you feel yourself no lower and no higher than any other? Does your social standing prevent you from feeling close to other believers, which you may view as either higher or lower than you? Do you shy away from greeting a brother who may not exhibit the standards of cleanliness that you do?¹² Do you struggle feeling a bond with believers of other ethnicities or races ... or has He freed you from the bondage of human status and class? Have you been made free of sin? If so, Jesus affirms that He will make you free indeed¹³... genuinely free from fear of death, free from fear of rejection, free from the slavery of sin, and free from the need to live up to the false

human standards of race, class, culture, and status. Sharing in this redemption – bought by the blood of Jesus – we feel no barrier between us and our fellow believers.

The holiness of our greeting is not found in the routine keeping of a commandment but in the conscious awareness of the deep and abiding bond we have with our fellow-brethren in Christ.¹⁴ As we greet each other with this kiss of charity, let's contemplate our mutual willingness to die for Christ and to love one another in truth.¹⁵

Endnotes:

¹ 1 Peter 1:22

² Micah 7:6

³ Rom. 16

⁴ Acts 4:32

⁵ 3 John 1:3

⁶ 1 Peter 1:3-9

⁷ Col. 3:11

⁸ 1 Cor. 16:20

⁹ 1 Peter 5:14

¹⁰ 1 Thess. 5:26

¹¹ Rom. 16:16

¹² James 2:1

¹³ John 8:36

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:26

¹⁵ 1 Peter 1:22