

“All Together, Now, Part 2:  
Kiss One Another”  
Psalm 85; 1 Corinthians 16:10-24

## Introduction

I had a Bible professor in seminary who liked to humble, and sometimes humiliate, his students---usually with trick questions. Once he asked: “Okay, which is a worse sin: punching a guy, or shooting a guy?” The whole class thought really hard about the answer. “Aren’t all sins equal in God’s eyes?” And then our professor shouted: “Come on! Shooting a guy! You’re going to be pastors? Even non-Christians know this stuff!”

Another time he started the class this way: “Do you believe the Bible?” (“Yes!” we answered.) “When it says to do something, are you supposed to do it?” (“Yes!”) “Okay, great. Now: greet one another with a holy kiss!”

We all looked at each other. “Well, let’s go!” he said.

I immediately thought: “someday I’m going to preach a sermon on greeting one another with a holy kiss.” I’ve waited 14 years for this day!

But I waited too long! I’m not in the USA, where people don’t really kiss to greet one another. I’m in Switzerland, where the questions are not, “should we kiss, since the Bible says so?” but, for me, anyway: “Which cheek do we start with? If I start with the wrong cheek and accidentally kiss your wife on the lips, will you punch me? Or shoot me? And, what if I’m not Swiss, and the person I’m greeting isn’t Swiss, either? Do we kiss because we’re in Switzerland?”

If I was in America, I might be asking: “Ok, if we’re not going to literally *kiss*, how *are* we going to be obedient to this command?”

But since we’re in the land of the greeting-kiss, our question is this: “What makes the holy kiss different than every other kiss? What makes it *holy*?”

We kiss one another as a way to celebrate

- The cost of one another’s holiness
- The gift of one another’s holiness
- The source of one another’s holiness

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**The cost of one another’s holiness**

**First, greet one another with a holy kiss to celebrate the cost of one another’s holiness.**

To be holy means to be set apart. To be reserved for a single ultimate purpose. And because you’re reserved for this one great purpose, you’re not going to offer your body, soul, mind, spirit, words, actions, attitudes to be used for anything that would take away from your one purpose.

That means there’s a cost. You’re reserved for one thing, so you can’t be used for another thing.

If you’re a young man and you want to marry a girl, all your money is set aside for a ring. You aren’t gambling with it, or buying video games, or going out with your buddies every night.

There’s an opportunity cost for being a disciple of Jesus. Resting or working, playing or exercising, parenting or out on a date: I’m my Master’s. I’m holy. His service is my single purpose.

When we greet one another with a holy kiss---whether we literally kiss, Swiss-style, or we hug or shake hands and warmly greet one another---we are recognizing and celebrating the *cost* of one another’s holiness.

Just before Paul tells the church to kiss each other, he tells them to greet and receive and celebrate Timothy when he comes to Corinth (10). Why? Because Timothy is a young man whose life is reserved for God’s service in the church. Timothy was not always honored (1 Cor 4; 1 Tim 4). Paul says: (10) “Corinth: don’t intimidate him; he shouldn’t be afraid to do ministry in your church!”; “you should respect his work just like you respect mine”; (11) “no one should despise him and dismiss him as worthless!”

Timothy is willing to be being disrespected, undervalued, and often dismissed in order to follow Jesus exclusively. Paul says: think of the cost he has paid to be holy, to be set apart like this. Greet him with a holy kiss!

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Later he mentions others (15ff). Stephanas and his family were the first in this whole region to set themselves apart for Jesus alone. Since they were first in their community, and since their devotion to Jesus was so complete, there was no social benefit to following Christ and serving the church. People like Fortunatus and Achaichus, too---they’re reserved for Jesus at great personal cost.

Paul is saying: “You’ve got to recognize and respect and celebrate people like that. When these folks show up, ready to serve you, don’t nod your head at them, or pass them quickly on the way to the coffee and gifili! *Greet them with a holy kiss!*”

And Paul himself deserves a holy kiss because of the cost of his own holiness. Verse 9: there are many who oppose him. Throughout this letter, he’s taken great risks to correct and challenge the *lack* of holiness of some of the people in the church at Corinth. He’s holy, so he speaks with tough love. They’re not, so they respond without love and humility. Still, at the end of this letter he says, “look, I love you” (24). Holiness at great cost!

In Paul’s day and in ours, people honor and celebrate a **man** based on how **successful** he is, and a **woman** based on how **beautiful** she is. Paul is saying that Christians honor and celebrate a woman or man based on their humble commitment to Jesus, even when it costs them.

Many of you have left your homes, your home countries, your home cultures, when Jesus called you to leave. Some of you have left secular culture behind in many ways by choosing to follow Jesus. In this way, you’re like Paul and the traveling Christians that he talks about. Your holiness has *cost* you. When you arrive at a place like IPC, you *need* a “holy kiss” to remind you that your holiness is worth the cost.

**The gift of one another’s holiness**

**Second, greet one another with a holy kiss to celebrate the gift of one another’s holiness.**

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Here’s another trick question: are some preachers better than others? Uhhhh, duh! Of course there are. That’s one of the reasons the church that Tim Keller started has 6,000 people and the church I started has 60.

The Corinthians wanted to know one thing (12): When is Apollos coming? He’s their favorite preacher. But before Paul says anything about their Tim Keller, he tells them (10) about the Timothy they’re actually going to get.

He wants the Corinthians to plant their holy kiss on Timothy. Apollos isn’t coming right away. Apollos is gifted. But that doesn’t mean Timothy isn’t a *gift*.

See, having great gifts is *not* the same thing as having great holiness. Being able to get up front and speak and lead is not the same thing as being a gift to the church.

This doesn’t mean that you give anyone and everyone the pulpit or the lectern or the church credit card or the keys or a seat on the church council or a microphone or an electric guitar. Gifts are important in determining what kind of service and ministry you ought to do in the church.

But someone’s gifts are not the thing that makes them worthy of a holy kiss. The question is not whether they have great gifts, but whether they have made **themselves** a great gift. If someone shows up in humility to wash plastic cups after coffee hour, and you, on your way out the door, see them, scrubbing away, you owe them great honor. You shake my hand on your way out the door and thank me for preaching. Great. Now get your butt in the kitchen and greet them with a holy kiss and thank them for washing dishes.

We don’t always know how people are serving. So we don’t always know who to thank, and for what. But if we *do* see someone serving humbly, we get our holy kiss out and we honor them with it! They are serving us like Jesus, in Jesus’ place.

Want to know perhaps the greatest way that someone can make themselves a gift to you as a fellow Christian in your church? It’s when they’re willing to honestly, graciously, humbly, courageously **challenge** you to follow Jesus more closely.

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That means your pastors, of course. But it also means your elders. Your deacons. Your teachers. Your home group leaders. Your prayer group leaders. Your Bible study leaders. Your mentor. The person who listens to you at coffee hour, and then speaks grace and truth into your life.

Don't give anyone blind and brainless submission. But truth and grace are truth and grace whether you hear it eloquently from a pastor way up in a pulpit, or you hear it over a coffee and gipili from a trembling sister or brother who cares for you, and therefore has the guts to challenge you to be faithful to Jesus!

Do you assume that you can receive the gift of Jesus in and through any Christian who's willing to make themselves a gift to you---in their words or their actions? Then you'll be quick to greet them with a holy kiss, and celebrate the gift that they are to you; to the church.

**The source of one another's holiness**

**Finally, greet one another with a holy kiss to celebrate the source of one another's holiness.**

One more trick question. This kiss is holy. It is given from one holy person to another holy person. How do all these kissers get to be holy? Did we set ourselves apart for Jesus, or did he set us apart for himself? Answer: Yes!

But long before we set ourselves apart for Jesus, and before he reached into our lives and set us apart for himself, Jesus Christ set himself apart for *you*. Jesus' own holy kiss to us is the source not just of our holy kisses, but of our holiness itself.

Paul says here that Christian believers in churches must (14) have courage. We must stand strong, be on our guard. And we must do all this, and everything else we do, in love.

Who has done everything in love for us? Whose holy kiss is not just a mark of his tenderness, but of his courage to save us, his protection over us, his firm commitment to us?

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Who paid a great cost to set himself apart for you? Who left his home country? Who left all that he was familiar with for eternity? Who left the admiration of his Father and all of the angels? Who left all the praise of his hometown behind to devote himself to serving you? Who came to his own family: to Israel, where there was no holy kiss greeting him when he arrived?

Psalm 2 said “kiss the Son, so that God is not angry with you!” When the Son entered Simon the Pharisee’s home for a meal, Simon didn’t give him the greeting of a kiss. Instead, he got kisses that night on the feet, from a woman everyone labeled a “sinner.”

And the next time we hear about the Son getting a kiss, it’s from his disciple Judas Iscariot. It’s the most unholy kiss possible. A mockery of the holy kiss. Judas isn’t celebrating the gift that Jesus is. His kiss doesn’t recognize the cost Jesus was willing to pay to make Judas holy. His kiss was a sign telling the Roman soldiers, who came with swords and spears, which man they should arrest.

And then he enters the High Priest’s house to be tried in the middle of the night. Instead of being greeted with a kiss by the High Priest, the true High Priest, Jesus, was spit on and punched and condemned.

Worst of all, he went to the cross, and became a curse for us, bearing our sin. For the first time in all eternity, there was no kiss from his loving heavenly Father.

### **Conclusion**

This letter ends pretty dramatically. Paul’s secretary had been writing down his words. But then Paul picks up the pen himself (21). What’s he going to write?

First: a curse (22). Paul says: “Listen, church people. Jesus was the only one who completely set himself apart to love others with God’s own love. He *is* the holy kiss of heaven. If you’ve seen him do that, and you come into church, week after week, with no love for him, and therefore no genuine love for one another, you’re lost until Jesus’ love finds its way into your heart and you start *really* loving him back.

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And second, a blessing (23). The grace of Jesus---all of his undeserved, self-giving, loyal love; all of his saving perseverance, all the way to the end, for us---this *is* God’s holy kiss. It comes from his heart of love to our cheeks and into our hearts. And when it really does, we can’t help but honor everyone else who has received his holy kiss and has kissed the Son back---because we see them as the gift of Jesus.