

“With a Holy Kiss”
Romans 16:16
(Preached at Trinity, March 4, 2012)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we come to **Verse 16** we find a passage that sounds strange to our ears today.
Romans 16:16 NAU - "Greet one another with a holy kiss."
2. We find this charge 5 times in the NT with a slight variation in **1 Peter 5**
Rom. 16:16; I Cor. 16:20; II Cor. 13:12; I Thess. 5:26; and I Peter 5:14
1 Peter 5:14 NAU - "Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ."
3. It is given in the imperative which should cause us to give particular attention. This opens the question of how do we know which of the Biblical directives are cultural and only applicable to the original readers and which ones transcend time and are still binding upon us today. There are many such examples—foot washings, head coverings, and the important issue of the role of women in the church.
4. Some are easy to interpret by simply examining the context.
 - A. The foot washing issue was simply a matter of hygiene during a time when sandals were the common footwear and one's feet became quite dirty. Of course, the issue of washing feet was used to symbolize humility since it was normally a duty of slaves.
 - B. We can settle the head covering issue also by examining the context. There was an underlying issue of submission that transcended the material covering placed on the head. I realize that this doesn't solve the issue for some, but it should be a matter of liberty and forbearance when there is disagreement.
1 Corinthians 11:3 NAU - "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ."
1 Corinthians 11:7-10 NAU - "For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. ¹⁰ Therefore the woman ought to have *a symbol of authority* on her head, because of the angels."
But then Paul seems to stress that the woman's hair is her covering:
1 Corinthians 11:14-15 KJV - "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? ¹⁵ But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for *her* hair is given her for a covering."

- C. What about the holy kiss? Is this an obligation that rests upon all Christians in all ages to perform one to another?
Should we follow this command and greet one another with a kiss?
Or are there cultural considerations at that time in history which help us to understand this obligation given by the apostle Paul to the churches at Rome, Corinth, and Thessalonica?
5. The answer is the kiss was very much a cultural practice and it was not particular to the church. A kiss on the cheek during the first century was the cultural equivalent of a handshake today.
- A. There are many cultures today that still practice cheek kissing – Parts of Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America.
- B. The people of the first century were very comfortable with expressing feelings for one another with a kiss.
As Paul was about to depart from Ephesus all of the elders kissed him.
Acts 20:36-37 NAU - "When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they *began* to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him,"
- C. Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus with a kiss
Matthew 26:48 NAU - "Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him."
We shouldn't see this as anything more than a greeting.
- D. We shouldn't try to artificially export it to our Western world of the 21st century. And we shouldn't see it as binding upon us today.
6. We shouldn't try to bring every first century cultural expression into practice today. It almost always results in a new practice totally foreign to both their culture and ours. For example:
1 Timothy 2:8 NAU - "Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension."
1. This was the posture of prayer in the 1st century. It represented clean hands held out as an expression of openness and honesty before God. It was an expression that the person praying was not trying to conceal anything.
 2. For example, the custom today is to pray with eyes closed and hands folded. The idea is to close the eyes to shut out distracting thoughts to the mind and close the hands as a symbol of respect and of pleading.
 3. People have read this lifting up holy hands passage and now they think they should sing with their hands lifted up and waving in the air. Thus they've created a new cultural expression that is completely foreign to the practice found in Scripture.
7. Although the practice was cultural there are two aspects to this kiss that we shouldn't dismiss.
- A. It stresses the moral principle of Christian love. While the culture at large may have practiced kissing as a form of greeting Paul called it a "holy kiss."
Peter called it "a kiss of love."
1 Peter 5:14 NAU - " Greet one another with a kiss of love."
Romans 13:8 NAS - " Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law."
1. Whatever the practice of the 1st century culture Christianity added a different dimension.
This is true of every aspect of life. Christianity changes it all.

2. Paul is speaking of greetings but these were greetings of love.
3. We must not only love one another, we must express our love in our actions. The holy kiss was an expression of love.
Jesus taught this regarding Simon the Pharisee –
Luke 7:45 NAS - ""You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet."

B. Second, Paul describes it as a “holy kiss.”

1. Again, Christianity adds an additional dimension to the cultural kiss. Holiness permeates every aspect of the Christian life. It marks us and defines us. Holiness is inseparable from our salvation.
Hebrews 12:14 NAS - "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."
KJV: “holiness” the word is ἁγιασμός which refers to consecration. The Christian’s life is set apart in service to Christ.
2. Unlike the kiss of Judas, it must be holy, sincere, genuine. The kiss of Judas was the kiss of hypocrisy.
Luke 22:48 NAU - "But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"
3. And it must be free from any sinful affection. It is important to understand the power of a kiss – the physical touch, particularly between people of the opposite sex. Caution must be exercised in all contact. It must be a holy kiss.
Clement of Alexandria spoke of people who “make the churches resound” with kissing; and points out the “shameless use of a kiss . . . occasions foul suspicions and evil reports.” (Leon Morris p. 537).
John Murray writes: “Paul characterizes the kiss as “holy” and thus distinguishes it from all that is erotic or sensual.”

7. All of that said, my main emphasis this morning will be directed to the second half of the verse.

Romans 16:16 NAS - "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you."

This holy greeting of love was extended by all the churches.

I. There was a universal love between churches missing today

- A. They were aware of each other; they were concerned about each other
1. We can see this demonstrated in collection for the church of Jerusalem. Most had probably never met any of the believers in Jerusalem; they were strangers, yet they still expressed their love in taking an offering
 2. In reality, there are no strangers in Christ. We are all a part of His body. We are all indwelled by His Spirit.
 3. Paul expressed over and over in his epistles:
Romans 12:4-5 NAS - "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Philippians 2:1-2 NAS - "If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."

Ephesians 4:1-7 NAU - "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."

- B. One of the great tragedies today is the disunity of Christ's church
1. There are thousands and thousands of churches today
 2. There are hundreds in Baton Rouge, almost 200 Baptist churches alone most having little contact with the others
 3. On one hand, this is wonderful – thousands of congregations worshipping God and reaching out to their communities.
 4. But what about the weakness brought by division—multitudes of churches fighting for existence, for prominence. Jealousy and envy develops. Why is it that it is so difficult for two like-minded churches to merge?
 5. And what negative effect does our disunity have? What negative effect does our absence of love have? What effect does it have that we are not united in our work of the Gospel?

II. Unity is never without a solid foundation

- A. Although we lament the great division of the church today, we don't want unity at any price – that is the nature of modern ecumenism
1. The church warned Luther that his actions would result in the fragmentation of the church. And they were right. But was it worth it?
YES
 2. Unity is impossible apart from doctrine
 3. Unity is impossible apart from genuine love
- B. The early church was united, but their unity had substance – there was the solid foundation of sound doctrine
1. There was consistent and consistent doctrine being taught
Acts 2:42 KJV - "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."
 2. Paul stressed that God had provided protection for the church by sending pastors – **See Ephesians 4:1-16**
 3. Paul told Timothy that the church would be the "pillar and ground of the truth."
And what is the basis of truth?
Psalms 119:160 NAU - "The sum of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting. "
John 17:17 NAU - "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

2 Timothy 3:16-17 NAU - "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

4. This should be our great goal – both doctrine and love
We need to serve each other in love and labor together in love.
But we must also speak the truth in love. Without unity in the Gospel there can be no true unity.
 5. It must always begin with our local church—keeping the unity of the Spirit within and then expressing it without - “speaking the truth in love”
MacArthur – “When God’s people are committed to pure doctrine and pure living, they are bonded together in love—as individuals and as congregations—even when separated by great distances and by great differences in culture and circumstances.”
- C. This is what is so wonderful about an association of churches
1. In our own association ARBCA we share the same confession of faith
We share the same basic fundamentals of operation.
 2. This doesn’t mean we are exactly the same. There is much diversity. But we are one in Christ, in doctrine, in love
 3. This is what Paul is reminding the church of Rome.
Matthew Poole writes: “You have been much troubled with dissensions, about meats and days; therefore I beseech you that, forgetting all former offenses, you would manifest for the future all signs of love and peace with one another.”

Conclusion:

1. We must never allow division to occur over petty issues. We must guard against a spirit of competition. We must guard against a spirit of harshness or critical talk. We must glory in those doctrines that exalt and magnify Christ and His Gospel. And we must guard against division over minor doctrinal differences.
2. We must guard against pride and a spirit of ownership over Christ’s church. Would not two small reformed churches be stronger if they came together as one? Should not the two senior pastors labor to work together? Should they not be willing to share the pulpit for the good of all?
3. We must remember the wonderful unity and love we share in Christ. We are the church of Christ. We are the body of Christ, the covenant community, fashioned in love.
4. And we must remember the great Gospel endeavor which is a shared work. We must avoid a spirit of independence, of pride, of selfishness.