

THE HOLY KISS

I. Description of the practice:

Kissing between friends and relatives, as an expression of welcome, farewell, affection or endearment, was and is a practice widely held among people in the Mideast, and other parts of the world (Asia and Europe). Mostly, it was practiced between those of the same sex, and the kissing was done on the cheek or neck.

Of course, kissing between the sexes as part of showing affection or love-making dates back to the earliest times.

Numerous Bible passages mention the practice. The following will be a consideration of a number of them.

II. Kissing as a romantic gesture between lovers.

Kissing was part of the love-making between King Solomon and his bride called a "Shulamite." Song of Solomon 1:2; 8:1. A young, foolish man is characterized as being kissed while being seduced by a prostitute. Prov. 7:10-13. But, since the Greek word "eros" (for sensual love) is not mentioned in the New Testament, there are no NT references to kissing during love-making.

III. Kissing as an affectionate expression of greeting/farewell between relatives.

Joseph in Egypt kissed his brothers following a tearful reunion after many years. Gen. 45:15. Moses and Aaron, brothers, kiss when meeting each other. Exodus 4:14, 27. Laban kissed his sons and daughters "goodbye" before leaving them (Gen. 31:55), as did Naomi and her two daughters-in-law. Ruth 1:8-9, 14.

In the new Testament, the father of the prodigal son kissed him upon his return from living a wayward life. Luke 15:20.

IV. Kissing as an expression of devotion, honor or respect.

Jacob kissed his father Isaac as he was about to receive a blessing from him. Gen. 27:22-27. Samuel kissed Saul when he anointed him to be king. I Sam. 10:1.

In the New Testament a sinful woman kissed Jesus' feet as a gesture of love. Luke 7:37-38.

V. Kissing as an expression of treachery or deception.

The two previous sentiments, expressed by kissing, were occasionally utilized when someone pretended friendship in order to gain advantage over someone. Absalom kissed people in order to win their favor. II Sam. 15:5-6. General Joab, David's nephew, kissed his rival Amasa in order to throw him off guard before killing him. II Sam. 20:9-10. (See also Prov. 26:7).

In the New Testament, the notorious betrayal of Jesus by Judas, was initiated by a kiss. Matt. 26:47-48 (Mark 14:45-46; Luke 22:47-48).

VI. Kissing as an expression of love and affection between Christians.

Justin Martyr (AD 150-200) wrote that people exchanged kisses following a time of prayer. Later writers say that Christians exchanged kisses prior to the communion service.

The New Testament letters contain encouragements for Christians to greet each other with a "holy kiss." (Rom. 16:16; I Cor. 16:20; II Cor. 13:12; I Thess. 5:26). Peter calls it a "kiss of love." (I Pet. 5:14). No doubt the qualification of "holy" was to make certain that sensuality was not involved and that it was not done out of deception.

VII. What about the "holy kiss" being used today?

In cultures where kissing is still a form of greeting, this would be appropriate. Our culture uses the "handshake" as the common expression of greeting/farewell, so that would be an appropriate gesture in our culture. However, "holy hugs" are also a common expression of love and affection between Christians in our culture (for some people who feel comfortable doing it).