

17. Learning to Greet One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to do what is good for one another and for all. Today, we will be focusing on the topic of greeting one another. At the conclusion of several of his letters to various churches, Paul instructed the Christians to greet one another. Peter did the same thing when he concluded the book of 1 Peter by saying in 1 Peter 5:14, “Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.”

The word that is translated “greet” is used 60 times in the New Testament. Twenty of these times are found in Romans 16. Paul used the word fourteen times as he greeted different individuals that were in the church in the city of Rome. He used the word several times to include greetings from those who were with him. However, Romans 16:16 says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.” In this verse, we see that the Christians are told to greet one another with a holy kiss.

To “greet” another person means *to welcome the other person and make that person feel accepted and comfortable by a kiss, a hug, a handshake or some other appropriate form of greeting*. The words that both Peter and Paul used in the verses mentioned above show that Christians are commanded to greet one another. A total of five verses show that this is a command for all Christians.

Notice in the verses given above, Peter says we are to greet one another with a kiss of love and Paul says we are to greet one another with a holy kiss. A third place where Christians are given this command is in 1 Thessalonians 5:26. That verse says, “Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.” The other two places where this is in the form of a command are in 1 and 2 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 16:20, we read, “All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.” Then, 2 Corinthians 13:12 says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” Both writers show that the kiss was to be a form of greeting but it was to be done in an appropriate way so that no one could misunderstand the meaning.

Peter used the phrase a “kiss of love” when he used the word. We need to be reminded that the Greeks had three words for love. The first “eros” spoke of physical love and many times was characterized by lust. The second “phileo” spoke of family love and was characterized by commitment. The third “agapao” spoke of God’s love for us and is characterized by sacrifice. The word that is translated love in “kiss of love” is the word that speaks of God’s love for us that caused Him to sacrifice His Son to make it possible for us to receive forgiveness of sins. It is the love that Christ showed by His death for us and commanded us to show to one another in the new commandment in John 13:34-35. We see that a kiss of love will make other Christians feel accepted and loved.

All four times that Paul commanded Christians to greet one another, he said this greeting was to be done with a holy kiss. In the culture of the New Testament, a kiss was a pure expression of Christian love between men with men and women with women so that there were no sexual

overtones. Paul used the phrase “a holy kiss” to make certain that no one misunderstood the meaning of the kiss. It was *a kiss that expressed acceptance as a part of the family of Christ*. This was very important because many of the early Christians were being rejected by their families when they became Christians and so it helped them to understand that they now had a new family in Christ.

However, the command to greet one another has a much greater meaning than just giving a “kiss of love” or a “holy kiss”. We see in many verses that Christians also sent greetings to one another by letters. Paul sent greetings to many individual Christians in Romans 16. Many of the individuals traveling with Paul also sent their greetings to the various churches. Here, we see that the Christians were choosing to express their love and acceptance for other Christians by written greetings when it was impossible for them to greet one another face to face. The key thing that they wanted to communicate was the love and acceptance of the family of Christ for others in the family of Christ.

In Acts 21:5-7, we read, “When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home. And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day.” In verse six, Paul and those with him expressed their love and acceptance of the Christians as they said goodbye. This farewell greeting included prayer for one another. In verse seven, we see that Paul and those with him expressed their love for the Christians in Ptolemais and the Christians there expressed their love for Paul and his companions.

In Acts 21:19, Paul combined a greeting to the leaders of the church at Jerusalem along with a report of what the Lord was doing among the Gentiles. That verse says, “When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.” Here, we see that greetings can also include sharing about the way that the Lord is working in other places. The response of the Christians to this greeting is seen in Acts 21:20a, “And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord.” Here, we see that greetings combined with a report of what the Lord is doing will bring glory to the Lord as people hear how the Lord is working.

In Romans 16:3-5a, Paul sent greetings to express his thanks for a couple that had risked their lives for his sake. Those verses say, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house.” In these verses, we see that the public expression of thanks to others for their ministries is another form of greeting because it publicly communicates the love and acceptance that we have for others because of the impact of their ministries on our lives as well as the lives of other Christians.

We see that this same list of greetings also expresses appreciation for the service and work for the Lord of several other Christians. Romans 16:12 says, “Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord.” These people and

many of the others mentioned in Romans 16 are unknown except for their mention in this chapter. Today, we have many Christians that quietly work for the Lord and no one even notices what they are doing to serve the Lord. Paul gives us an example here of the fact that we need to publicly express our appreciation for those whose work for the Lord often goes unnoticed. This is another form of greeting that expresses love and acceptance.

Romans 16:14-15 show that greetings can be extended to extended networks. Those verses say, “Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.” Here, we see that Paul knew some Christians that had reached others for Christ and so he also sent greetings to these other Christians. Even though Paul did not know their names and had never met them, he wanted them to know that they were accepted and loved in the family of Christ. We need to have this same concern for those that others are leading to Christ.

In Colossians 4:10, Paul took particular care to express his love and acceptance for Mark and encourage other Christians to do the same. That verse says, “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)...” As you remember, Mark had left Paul and Barnabas on their first extended ministry trip. Later, Paul and Barnabas divided into two teams because Paul did not think they should take Mark on their second trip. Here, Paul shows that he now realized that Mark had an important ministry and Paul wanted these Christians to accept and welcome him.

Paul expressed this love and acceptance of Mark even more fully when he wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:11, “Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.” In this case, Paul makes it clear that past disagreements should be resolved and we should show our love and acceptance by giving others new opportunities for ministry even when there was a problem in the past. True greetings and acceptance will cause us to help other Christians learn how to effectively use their spiritual gifts to serve the Lord.

Hebrews 13:24 teaches us two other lessons about greeting others to show our love and acceptance. That verse says, “Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.” First, we see that we are to greet and show acceptance to all of those who are godly spiritual leaders. There may be times when we may not agree with the way that they are exercising their leadership. However, we are to show love and acceptance and realize that they are accountable to the Lord and not to us. Second, we are to show that same love and acceptance to all true Christians. That would include both those who are weak and struggling as well as those who are strong.

We are to show love and acceptance by our greetings to every Christian. We are also to give our physical and spiritual children an example to follow as we greet other Christians and help them to feel love and acceptance. May the Lord richly bless you as you greet other Christians.