

1 Thessalonians 5:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.

Analysis

Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss—aspasasthe tous adelphous pantas en philēmati hagiō (ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς πάντας ἐν φιλήματι ἀγίῳ). Aspasasthe (ἀσπάσασθε, 'greet') was standard letter-closing, but Paul specifies method: en philēmati hagiō (ἐν φιλήματι ἀγίῳ, 'with a holy kiss'). The holy kiss was early Christian greeting symbolizing familial love and spiritual unity. Hagios (ἅγιος, 'holy') distinguishes this from erotic or romantic kiss—it's sacred, pure, expressing philadelphia (brotherly love).

Paul commands greeting pantas (πάντας, 'all') the brethren—including those with whom they disagreed or felt tension. The holy kiss expressed reconciliation, love, and unity despite diversity or conflict. Cultural expressions vary (handshake, embrace, bow), but the principle remains: physically demonstrate spiritual unity and love. The command presumes corporate worship where believers gather and can greet each other. Isolated Christianity contradicts NT church life, which assumes face-to-face fellowship, mutual greeting, physical presence. Contemporary online 'church' fails this test—one can't greet with holy kiss via screens.

Historical Context

The holy kiss was universal early church practice (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Pet 5:14), eventually formalized as 'kiss of peace' in liturgy. Men kissed men, women kissed women—same-gender greeting avoiding sensuality. Cultural shifts led to modification (handshake, embrace) but the principle persists:

physically demonstrate Christian love and unity. The early church's affectionate greetings shocked Roman observers accustomed to formal social hierarchies; Christians greeted slaves as brothers, rich and poor kissing as equals. This visible unity attracted converts and still distinguishes authentic Christian community.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How do you physically demonstrate Christian affection and unity in culturally appropriate ways?
2. What does the command to greet 'all the brethren' teach about maintaining unity despite disagreements or tensions?
3. How does physical gathering for worship (enabling mutual greeting) differ essentially from online 'church' consumption?

Interlinear Text

Ἄσπάσασθε τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς πάντας ἐν φιλήματι ἀγίῳ
Greet G3588 the brethren all with kiss an holy
G782 G80 G3956 G1722 G5370 G40

Additional Cross-References

Romans 16:16 (Holy): Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.

1 Corinthians 16:20 (Holy): All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss.