

Sermon Notes

Romans 16:16

"Holy Kiss"

A Sermon Series on Romans

June 2, 2018

Introduction

- 1) Today one verse, Romans 16:16.
- 2) Paul commands the Roman Christians to "*Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.*" – Rom 16:16
 - a) In one sense this is a very simple, direct verse.
 - b) Yet it offers a most difficult exegetical challenge.¹
 - c) Finally, it's implications are profoundly radical.

A Simple Command

- 1) Romans 15 is the theological conclusion of Paul's great epistle to the Romans where, as a means of introduction and blessing, he gives the most detailed description of the Gospel in the Bible. Rom 1:7,15-17
- 2) In Rom 16:3-15 Paul lists people he greets in the church in Rome.
- 3) In verse 16 the apostle then commands that all Christians greet each other and that all the churches greet the Roman church.
 - a) Each church is an individual congregation, Acts 20:17-31; 1Thes 1:1; 5:12-15;
with its own members and leaders. Heb 13:17; 1Pet 5:1-4; Rev 2-3
 - b) Yet each congregation is part of the catholic (literally "universal") church.² Eph 1:20-23
 - c) We in SCC should work a bit on having more fellowship with like-minded churches.
- 4) In Rom 16:16 the focus is not the theoretical big picture, but something much more intimate.
 - a) Besides this warm greeting from the other churches, Paul commands that the Christians greet each other in a friendly, kind, and generous way.
 - b) Paul, and also Peter, do this several times at the end of their epistles:
 - i) "*All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.*" – 1Cor 16:20
 - ii) "*Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.*" – 2Cor 13:12-13
 - iii) "*Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.*" – 1Thes 5:26
 - iv) "*Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ.*"
– 1Pet 5:14

¹ "Exegesis" is how one "explains, interprets, exposit a given biblical text."

² Historically, Protestants have had no problem with the term "catholic" (small "c") church, since it is a very biblical thing to believe in one universal church with Christ as her head. Our objection is to the "Roman" and the idea that a single man leading a bureaucracy in Rome could ever claim to be "vicar of Christ on earth."

- 5) The instruction is quite clear: We are to greet each other kindly because we are family.
- a) We are all brothers and sisters through the blood of Christ, **Rom 8:15-17**
made adopted children by Christ's work on the cross. Matt 12:48-50; Gal 4:4-7
 - b) Therefore we should greet and treat each member of this church as if they were family.
 - c) This also applies to all Christians, no matter their race, nationality, local church or denomination.
(This does not apply to heretical false believers, whom we shun.) 1Cor 5:11-13; 2Thes 3:6
 - d) Praise the Lord, He gives us real opportunities to weekly practice charity, kindness, and humility to real people around us, i.e. the members of a local church.
 - i) This should teach us to appreciate all our brothers & sisters in the catholic church.
 - ii) Which is good training to love everyone, even those who hate Christ's church.
 - iii) As Paul teaches, *"So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."* – Gal 6:10
- 6) Please note, this is a gracious work of charity, and by definition cannot be demanded
- a) To think you are entitled, and can demand to be greeted and treated warmly, is to miss the whole point.
 - b) To be offended by a minor slight means you fail to understand the full implications of the Gospel and what Christ has done for you.
 - c) If you perceive a brother or sister has slighted you it is an opportunity Matt 5:39
to practice turning the other cheek.³
- 7) So the larger meaning of this text isn't rocket science: We are to treat each other like family.
- 8) However, its wording gives a most interesting challenge.

Exegetically Challenging

- 1) We have been equating *"greet one another with a holy kiss"* as meaning *"treat each other as family."*
- 2) As good Protestants who strive to take the Bible literally, shouldn't we do that with this verse?
- 3) Imagine an atheist asking you the following . . .
 - Atheist:* So you believe the Bible is authoritative and that you obey all that it teaches, especially the commands from the New Covenant?
 - Christian:* Yes, all devout Christians do.
 - Atheist:* The New Testament commands that church members kiss each other, why doesn't your church follow this clear NT command?
- 4) How do you answer?
 - a) You might say "that was just an ancient cultural thing, we don't have to do that."
 - b) But then how do you defend yourself against the charge that you are just picking & choosing what to follow?

³ If a brother or sister sins against you (beats you up, steals from you, slanders you, etc.) you can seek justice by taking the matter to the elders as per the teaching of Lord in Matt 18:15-20. However, first go read the whole chapter of Matt 18, which is about humility and forgiveness.

- 5) One of the core exegetical heresies of theological liberalism is to relegate biblical teachings we moderns don't like to merely "cultural things" which can be ignored.
- a) Such as the virgin birth of Christ, hell, homosexuality, male headship, abortion, etc.
 - b) These things are just dismissed as "cultural".
 - i) If we can just pick and choose what we like then anything goes, such as loving your neighbor.
 - ii) This is a clear violation of the first four of the Ten Commandments. Ex 20:3-11
 - iii) It is simple idolatry and rebellion against God, and is a soft form of atheism.
- 6) So, should we start kissing each other as part of the liturgy on the Lord's Day?⁴
- a) No, but how do we deal with this verse?
 - b) Answer: We have to know our Bible and think biblically in a systematic way, i.e. theology.
- 7) First, this command to kiss is clearly cultural.
- a) The Bible rarely speaks about romantic kissing. Prov 7:13; SoS 1:2; 8:1
(Though it isn't against it, in its proper place.)
 - b) The most common type of kiss is between family members, which is still the norm for people in the Mediterranean and Middle East. Gen 29:11-13; Ex 4:27; Ruth 1:9, 14; Acts 20:37
 - c) It was also given to friends and people close to you, like a beloved teacher (think of Judas's betrayal of Christ with a kiss.) 1Sam 20:41; 2Sam 19:39; Luke 22:47-48
- 8) Clearly, Paul's & Peter's command is that Christians should greet each other like family, NOT instituting a new ceremonial law for the church to obey.
- a) Because this is the clear teaching of the Scripture, especially the Book of Romans!
 - b) Paul just taught, "*but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.*" – Rom 9:31-32a
 - c) And that in Christ we are freed from all Law, as he writes, "*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*" – Rom 10:4
 - d) Such critical things as OT holidays (Rom 14:5-6) and the OT food laws (Rom 14:15-21) have been fulfilled in Christ.
 - e) Remember Paul's great conclusion in Rom 8:1-4 – "*Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*"

⁴ It is interesting to note the early church did institutionalize kissing as part of the liturgy! They later had to limit the obvious abuses that followed from such a practice. By the Middle Ages that part of the liturgy died out. See: Justin Martyr, First Apology, chap 65 – Administration of the Sacraments. Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor (Paedagogus), 3.11.81. Hippolytus of Rome, The Apostolic Tradition, 2.18. Apostolic Constitutions, Section 7 – On Assembling in the Church, 2.7.57. Apostolic Constitutions, Section 2.11 – The Form of Prayer for the Faithful, 8.2.11. Tertullian, 3, On Prayer, 18, ANF 3.

- 9) With such fundamental teachings, do you really think at the end of the letter Paul would be adding a new ceremonial law to the New Covenant? Gal 3:2; 5:18
- a) The only rituals we have in the New Covenant are those commanded by Christ Himself, the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Matt 28:19
Matt 26:26-29
- b) This command to kiss one another is a cultural reference, in which we should follow the spirit of that "law" and not necessarily the "letter" because that would contradict the clear teaching of Scripture!
- c) Note where we start in understanding this passage!
- i) Thinking theologically, submitting to the whole teaching of Scripture.
 - ii) Trying to think how the Bible thinks, which is by the Holy Spirit.
 - iii) We do not start our thinking with our worldly desires or traditions.
 - iv) We should never, ever, "get with the times", i.e. the "world" which is going to hell.
 - v) Though we should always challenge our traditions by Scripture.
 - vi) And if they are contrary to clear teaching, then we should change them.
- d) So the response to the atheist is, "*We don't have institutional ceremonial kissing in church because that would violate the clearing teaching of Romans 8-14!*"

Conclusion – Radical Implication

- 1) So Romans 16:16 is basically a simple text: We are to greet and treat each other as family.
- 2) Yes there is an exegetical challenge, which is a good thing, because it forces us to know our Bibles and to put together that biblical teaching, i.e. theology.
 - a) Theology, simply thinking about God, is done by everyone.
 - b) The only question is whether you do it correctly or poorly.
- 3) Finally, do not miss the radical implications of this text.
 - a) Because of the Gospel, the most important group you identify with must be the church!
 - b) So being a "Christian," and being part of Christ's church, is more important than your biological family, race, citizenship, gender, etc.
 - c) Because church is the only social institution that is eternal.
 - d) In the end, there will only be one relationship in heaven: We will all be brothers and sisters, because of Christ.
 - e) If we know this, how can we not greet each fellow Christian here in this world as the family they are.
- 4) As our Lord taught, "*Jesus said to them, 'The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now He is not the God of the dead but of the living; for all live to Him.'*" – Luke 20:34-38