

HOLY KISSING

Few things traumatize us real men any more than being kissed by another man. I vividly remember the first time it happened to me. The fellow was a transplant into our church from Ohio. Broad and bearded, he came forward after the service to introduce himself. I tried to shake his hand. Instead he kissed me on the cheek.

I could feel my face turn flaming red. I knew I ought to kiss him back. Five times the Bible says we should greet one another with a holy kiss. That's more times than it says we should be born again. But I couldn't. I just couldn't.

It took me weeks to recover. A month later, after doing my best to evade the man on Sunday, he kissed me again. But I simply could not pucker up in return.

Real men, I had been taught from childhood, don't kiss other men. They shake hands.

It was tough enough just learning how to hug.

I got my first exposure 23 years ago at a Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship convention in Washington, D.C. It was horrible, crammed into that hotel lobby with 4,000 hugging charismatics.

Two things stood out about that group. First, they were a people who vocalized their affection to God with unabashed shouting—even in public places. Second, they showed their affection to each other—by hugging. It was as if all charismatics had adopted a slogan: "No handshaking allowed." Even my own father didn't hug me. But these people hugged everyone. And worse, they pounded you on the back at the same time, shouting "Praise God!" to draw attention to their bizarre behavior.

Eventually, in self-defense, I too became a hugger. It was easier to throw my arms around everyone than it was to try to determine who was a handshaker and who was a hugger.

Then I ran across those verses about holy kissing.

I did everything I could to escape it. I checked all the different Bible translations, only to discover the Bible translators were as inhibited as I.

Kenneth Taylor, from Moody Bible Institute, translated 2 Corinthians 13:12: "Greet each other warmly in the Lord" (Living Bible).

Clarence Jordan, a Southern Baptist, used a

good Baptist phrase in his translation: "Extend to one another the hand of fellowship."

And J.B. Phillips, a proper Anglican, gave it a British twist: "A handshake all around, please!"

The Bible translators were tracking the culture, rather than translating the Word.

I opened my seldom-used Greek New Testament. In five instances we are told to greet each other with a kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14).

For centuries men have tried to get around this. In A.D. 1250 the Anglicans introduced the Pax (peace) Board so they could pass the "kiss of peace" without moral contamination. The clergy kissed the board then passed it to the congregation who in turn kissed it. The idea didn't last long. One sick priest could wipe out his entire congregation.

The Puritans—while allowing the kiss—translated "holy" to mean men should kiss men and women should kiss women. To enforce this they separated the men from the women in the church house, sometimes with a partition down the middle.

In our day, besides all the cultural and traditional hangups we have to overcome, holy kissing is said to encourage wierdos, child molesters and dirty old men.

"That's all my fornicating husband is looking for—a scriptural excuse," one angry wife told me after hearing a sermon on biblical kissing.

And what about the wierdos? My teenage daughters used to come home and talk about "that man" in the church. (Every church has its "that man.") "Daddy, that man hugs all the girls with a funny hug."

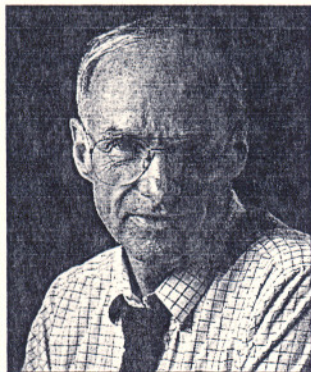
My reply: "When he does, rub your lipstick all over his shirt. Then let his wife straighten him out."

One stern-faced man warned me that kissing—like dancing, women wearing slacks and "mixed swimming"—would soon lead to sexual orgies, wife-swapping and child molestation.

But I'm tired of letting the devil steal all the good stuff. A holy kiss comes from a holy heart. We live in a loveless world. So many are never hugged, never kissed. Love is relegated to sex and silly greeting cards. How desperately we need to show—and receive—affection.

So watch out. The next time you see me you just might get kissed. ■

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