THE QUESTION

What is a holy kiss?

Asked by a THF member on May 18, 2026 · published November 9, 2026, updated November 11, 2026 · 7 numbered quotations · the 17 early Christian passages and 83 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-is-a-holy-kiss

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

A holy kiss was a real kiss of greeting early Christians shared as a sign of peace and love. Early writers quote the call to greet one another with a holy kiss, and a second-century writer places it after common prayer, before Communion. Early writers warned it must be sincere and pure, never a show or a cover for lust.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
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POINT 1 OF 5

Christians kissed after prayer, before Communion

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Justin Martyr, writing in the second century, describes how the church gathers after a baptism. When the shared prayers end, the believers greet one another with a kiss, and then the bread and the cup are brought to the leader. This places the kiss inside worship, between prayer and the Lord's Supper.

1 “After finishing the prayers, we greet one another with a kiss. Then, bread and a cup of wine mixed with water are brought to the leader of the brethren.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 6, page 5** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 5

Tertullian calls it the seal of prayer

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian names it the kiss of peace and says it seals prayer made together with other believers. He pushes back on people who skipped it while fasting, asking whether any prayer is complete without it.

2 “Those who are fasting withhold the kiss of peace, which is the seal of prayer, after prayer made with brothers.”

later in the same passage

“What prayer is complete if it is separated from the holy kiss?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Prayer* 18 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 11, page 5** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 5

Early writers repeated the holy kiss greeting

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Ignatius ends a letter by quoting the words 'Greet one another with a holy kiss' and greets both men and women in Christ. A liturgy that carries St. James's name has the people say the same words in worship. Both treat the greeting as something Christians still did.

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3 “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” I greet you all, both men and women, who are in Christ.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistles of Ignatius* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 1, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

4 “Let us greet one another with a holy kiss. Let us bow our heads to the Lord.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Early Liturgies,** *Divine Liturgy of St. James* 1 (c. 200–400 AD) **Source 14, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 5

The kiss is not the same as love

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement of Alexandria warns that some people fill the churches with kissing but have no love inside. He says love is shown by kind feeling, and he warns of an unholy kiss that only pretends to be holy and can carry sexual sin. The outward sign must match a loving heart.

5 “And if we are called to the kingdom of God, let us live in a way that is worthy of the kingdom, loving God and our neighbor. But love is not proven by a kiss, but by kind feeling. Yet there are some who do nothing but make the churches ring with kissing, while not having love itself within them.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.11 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 8, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

6 “But there is another unholy kiss, full of poison, pretending to be holy. Do you not know that spiders, simply by touching the mouth, cause people pain? And often kisses also put in the poison of sexual sin. So it is very clear to us that a kiss is not love.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 3.11 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 9, page 5** Read it in the library ›
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POINT 5 OF 5

Holy means pure and without hypocrisy

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

A prayer in the liturgy that carries St. Mark's name asks God for a pure heart and a good conscience, so the kiss is given without hypocrisy or hostile purpose. It ties the kiss to peace, love and being one body in one faith. The passage does not give this liturgy's date.

7

> "Give us Your peace, Your help, and Your love, and send us the gift of Your Holy Spirit, so that with a pure heart and a good conscience we may greet one another with a holy kiss, without hypocrisy and with no hostile purpose, but sincerely and purely in one spirit, in the bond of peace and love, one body and one spirit, in one faith, just as we have been called in one hope of our calling, so that we may all come together in the divine and boundless love, in Christ Jesus our Lord, with whom You are blessed."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Early Liturgies,** *Divine Liturgy of St. Mark* 1 (c. 200–400 AD) **Source 13, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**

THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don't tell us

- These passages do not say exactly how the kiss was given, such as on the cheek or the lips, or how often.
- They do not show that every church practiced it the same way or at every meeting.
- They do not settle whether churches today must keep the bodily kiss or may use another greeting.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 17 early Christian passages and 83 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–17, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 18–83, in Bible order), then 17 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**,

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Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *17 passages from 7 writers*

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 1–5*

1 *Epistles of Ignatius* **Quote 3, page 3** "where I am also writing to you, greet you. Philo, your deacon, to whom I also give thanks as one who has zealously served me in all things, greets you… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Epistles of Ignatius* (on point 3) "to him in the Lord. The whole Church of the Smyrnæans remembers you in their prayers to the Lord. Onesimus, the pastor of the Ephesians, sends his greetings. Damas, the… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Epistle to the Philadelphians* (on point 3) "I write boldly to your love, which is worthy of… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Epistles of Ignatius* (1885 English; on point 3) "salute the holy bishop Polycarp; I salute the holy bishop Vitalius, and the sacred presbytery, and my fellow-servants the deacons… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Epistles of Ignatius* (on point 2) the laborers, the exorcists, the confessors. I greet the keepers of the holy gates, the deaconesses in Christ. I greet the virgins betrothed to Christ, of whom may I have… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · source 6*

6 *First Apology* **Quote 1, page 2** "that we may offer heartfelt prayers together for ourselves, for the baptized person, and for everyone else everywhere. We pray that we may be deemed worthy, having learned the truth… [continues online] **read ›**

Athenagoras, *c. 170–190 AD · source 7*

7 *A Plea for the Christians* 32 (on point 5) "Therefore the kiss, or rather the salutation, should be given with the… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 8–10*

8 *Instructor* 3.11 **Quote 5, page 3** "this very thing, the shameless use of a kiss, which ought to… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Instructor* 3.11 **Quote 6, page 3** "there is another unholy kiss, full of poison, pretending to be holy. Do you not know that spiders, simply by touching the mouth, cause people pain? And often kisses also… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Instructor* 2.8 (on point 4) the Master with a kiss. For he was a hypocrite, giving a treacherous kiss, in imitation of another hypocrite from long ago. And He rebukes that people about whom it… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 11–12*

11 *On Prayer* 18 **Quote 2, page 2** "with their brother about their own peace. What prayer is complete if it is separated from the holy kiss? Whom does peace hinder when he is rendering service to his… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *To His Wife* 2.4 (1885 English; on point 2) "truly, to meet any one of the brethren to exchange the kiss… [continues online] **read ›**

Early Liturgies, *c. 200–400 AD · sources 13–14*

13 *Divine Liturgy of St. Mark* 1 **Quote 7, page 4** "us the gift of Your Holy Spirit, so that with a pure heart and a good conscience we may greet one another with a holy kiss, without hypocrisy and with… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Divine Liturgy of St. James* 1 **Quote 4, page 3** "us greet one another with a holy kiss. Let us bow our heads to the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 15–17*

15 *Apostolic Constitutions* his throne, in a place set apart for him among the rest of the bishops, they all giving him the kiss in the Lord. And after the reading of the… [continues online] **read ›**

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16 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 3) “one come in hypocrisy." Then let the men give the men, and the women give the women, the Lord's kiss. But let no one do it deceitfully, as Judas… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 3) “and forever and ever. Amen. After this let the deacon say, "Let us attend." And let the bishop greet the church and say, "The peace of God be with you… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *66 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

18 **Genesis 27:27** He came near and kissed him, and he smelled the smell of his garments. He blessed him and said, “Behold, the smell of my son is like the smell of a full field which the Lord has blessed. **read ›**

19 **Genesis 45:15** He kissed all his brothers and wept over them; and after these things his brothers talked with him. **read ›**

20 **Exodus 4:27** And the Lord said to Aaron, “Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” So he went and met him at the mountain of God, and they kissed each other. **read ›**

21 **Numbers 6:26** the Lord lift up his face upon you, and give you peace.”’ **read ›**

22 **Ruth 1:9** May the Lord grant you that each of you find rest in the house of her husband.” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voice and wept. **read ›**

23 **1 Samuel 20:41** When the boy had gone in, David rose up from the ergab and fell on his face, and bowed down to him three times; and they kissed one another and wept with one another, at great length. **read ›**

24 **2 Samuel 15:5** And when a man came near to bow down to him, he would stretch out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. **read ›**

25 **2 Samuel 20:9** Joab said to Amasa, “Are you well, my brother?” And Joab’s right hand took hold of Amasa’s beard to kiss him. **read ›**

26 **Psalms 5:9** For there is no truth in their mouth; their heart is vain; their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have dealt deceitfully. (Septuagint Psalm 5:10 (Psalm 5:9 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

27 **Psalms 7:6** Arise, O Lord, in your anger; be exalted in the borders of my enemies; awake, O Lord my God, according to the statute that you commanded, (Septuagint Psalm 7:7 (Psalm 7:6 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

28 **Psalms 85:10** Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed. (Septuagint Psalm 84:11 (Psalm 85:10 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

29 **Proverbs 10:18** Righteous lips cover hostility, but those who utter abuse are most foolish. **read ›**

30 **Proverbs 12:10** The righteous has compassion on the lives of his cattle, but the inward parts of the ungodly are unmerciful. **read ›**

31 **Proverbs 12:17** The righteous declares a faithfulness that is shown openly, but the witness of the unrighteous is deceitful. **read ›**

32 **Proverbs 24:26** and they will kiss lips that answer good words. **read ›**

33 **Ecclesiastes 1:1** The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king of Israel in Jerusalem. **read ›**

34 **Ecclesiastes 1:4** A generation goes, and a generation comes, and the earth stands forever. **read ›**

35 **Ecclesiastes 12:12** Beyond these, my son, be on your guard: of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. **read ›**

36 **Song of Solomon 1:2** Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your breasts are better than wine, **read ›**

37 **Song of Solomon 7:13** The mandrakes have given a fragrance, and at our doors are all choice fruits, new and old; my kinsman, I have kept them for you. (Septuagint Song of Solomon 7:14 (Song of Solomon 7:13 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

38 **Isaiah 13:8** The elders will be troubled, and pains will seize them like a woman in labor; and they will lament one to another and be astonished, and they will change their faces like a flame. **read ›**

39 **Isaiah 14:3** And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord will give you rest from your anguish and your anger, and from your hard slavery, in which you served them. **read ›**

40 **Daniel 9:5** we have done wrong, we have acted lawlessly, and we have departed and turned aside from your commandments and from your judgments, **read ›**

41 **Joel 1:2** Hear these things, you elders, and give ear, all you who dwell in the land. Has such a thing happened in our days, or in the days of your fathers? **read ›**

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42 **Habakkuk 2:16** You also, drink your fill of dishonor instead of glory; be shaken, O heart, and quake; the cup of the right hand of the Lord has come round upon you, and dishonor has gathered upon your glory. **read ›**

43 **1 Esdras 5:52** and after that, the continual offerings, and the sacrifices of the Sabbaths and of the new moons and of all the holy feasts. **read ›**

44 **Tobit 5:9** And he called him, and he came in, and they greeted one another. **read ›**

45 **Tobit 7:6** And Raguel sprang up and kissed him and wept, **read ›**

46 **Tobit 12:9** For alms delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin. Those who do acts of alms and righteous deeds will be filled with life; **read ›**

47 **Wisdom of Solomon 6:18** and love is the keeping of her laws, and attention to her laws is the assurance of incorruption, **read ›**

48 **Wisdom of Sirach 14:16** Give and take, and indulge your soul, for in Hades there is no seeking of luxury. **read ›**

49 **Wisdom of Sirach 17:25** Turn back to the Lord and forsake your sins; make your prayer before his face and lessen your offense. **read ›**

50 **Wisdom of Sirach 25:1** In three things I was made beautiful, and I stood up in beauty before the Lord and men: harmony among brothers, and friendship among neighbors, and a wife and husband who suit each other. **read ›**

51 **Wisdom of Sirach 41:20** and of silence toward those who greet you; of looking at a prostitute; **read ›**

52 **Wisdom of Sirach 50:15** he stretched out his hand to the cup and poured a drink offering of the blood of the grape; he poured it out at the foundations of the altar, a pleasing aroma to the Most High, the King of all. **read ›**

53 **Baruch 1:14** And you shall read this book that we have sent to you, to make confession in the house of the Lord on the day of a feast and on the days of the appointed season. **read ›**

54 **1 Maccabees 7:29** And he came to Judas, and they greeted one another peacefully; but the enemy were ready to seize Judas. **read ›**

55 **1 Maccabees 10:18** “King Alexander to his brother Jonathan, greeting. **read ›**

56 **1 Maccabees 10:54** now therefore let us establish friendship with each other. Give me now your daughter as my wife, and I will make a marriage alliance with you, and I will give you and her gifts worthy of you.” **read ›**

57 **1 Maccabees 12:10** have tried to send word to renew our brotherhood and friendship with you, so that we may not become strangers to you; for much time has passed since you sent word to us. **read ›**

58 **1 Maccabees 12:17** We have commanded them to go to you also and to greet you and to deliver to you our letter about the renewal of our brotherhood. **read ›**

59 **2 Maccabees 1:1** To their brothers, the Jews throughout Egypt, greeting. Their brothers, the Jews in Jerusalem and those in the land of Judea, wish you good peace. **read ›**

60 **2 Maccabees 1:4** May he open your heart to his law and to his statutes, and may he make peace. **read ›**

61 **2 Maccabees 8:29** When they had done this, they made a common plea and begged the merciful Lord to be fully reconciled with his slaves. **read ›**

62 **2 Maccabees 11:26** You will do well, therefore, to send to them and give them right hands, so that, knowing our purpose, they may be of good cheer and gladly go on with the conduct of their own affairs.” **read ›**

63 **2 Maccabees 12:12** And Judas, thinking that they would indeed be useful in many things, agreed to keep peace with them; and when they had received right hands, they went off to their tents. **read ›**

64 **2 Maccabees 14:36** So now, O holy Lord of all holiness, keep undefiled forever this house that has so recently been purified.” **read ›**

65 **3 Maccabees 2:20** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

66 **3 Maccabees 7:13** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

67 **4 Maccabees 13:8** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

68 **4 Maccabees 14:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

69 **1 Enoch 63:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

70 **1 Enoch 71:15** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

71 **Mark 14:45** When he had come, immediately he came to him and said, “Rabbi! Rabbi!” and kissed him. **read ›**

72 **Luke 7:45** You gave me no kiss, but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss my feet. **read ›**

73 **Acts 6:7** The word of God increased and the number of the disciples greatly multiplied in Jerusalem. A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. **read ›**

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74 **Romans 16:16** Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you. **read ›**
75 **1 Corinthians 1:14** I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, **read ›**
76 **1 Corinthians 16:20** All the brothers greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. **read ›**
77 **2 Corinthians 13:12** Greet one another with a holy kiss. **read ›**
78 **2 Corinthians 13:13** All the saints greet you. **read ›**
79 **Ephesians 6:23** Peace be to the brothers, and love with faithfulness, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. **read ›**
80 **1 Thessalonians 5:26** Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. **read ›**
81 **Hebrews 13:24** Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you. **read ›**
82 **1 Peter 5:14** Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to all of you who are in Christ Jesus. Amen. **read ›**
83 **3 John 1:15** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *17 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Matthew 5:13 · 5:28 · 6:16 · 22:39 · 26:23

Mark 7:6

John 5:3 · 10:29 · 17:17

Acts 20:28

2 Corinthians 1:3

1 Timothy 5:10

Titus 2:14

1 Peter 1:19 · 2:9

2 Peter 3:9

1 John 5:3

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

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THE END OF THIS STUDY