

Greetings and Thanks

By Louis Rushmore

Question: Dear Brother Rushmore, As we are Biblical Church, when we meet and greet one another, we are saying as “Good Morning or Good evening”. How did the first century Christian greet one another when they met? In the book of Mark 9:15 the people began running to greet Jesus. How did they greet Him? In Ephesians 5:1-4 Paul says here in the 4th verse “and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.” To whom the Christian must say this thank? Whether to God or to one another? The word “Praise” is equal to the word “Thanks” in Tamil Bible. Tamil is one of the south-Indian languages. The word “Sthothiram” used for praise and thanks in Tamil language. When we meet one another and to greet one another we use the word “Sthothiram” i.e. praise or thanks. Is it right or Biblical? If it is wrong and what we must say when we greet one another? The Ephesian 5:4 says to thank. Is it right? Tell me please. But the words “Good Morning”, “Good afternoon” and “Good Evening” are not in the Bible. But we use them when we meet one another. We are not using the word as “I greet you brother” rather when we write letter we are using the word “I greet you”. So, I need your right and Biblical answer, what word we must use and greet one Christian to another Christian? Please write me as early as possible. I am expecting your reply. Church of Christ salute you, Yours Brother in Christ, G. David. Church of Christ, Chennai, India.

Answer: Sometimes we humans try too hard to conform to God’s Word, while usually we humans do not try hard enough to implement the Word of God in our lives. Further, regarding the former disposition, sometimes we, with good intentions, nevertheless attempt to reduce some biblical principles to a formula or recipe for exact duplication, when that was not the intention of Scripture in a certain instance. (Of course, there are many biblical references where exact duplication is exactly what Scripture demands of Christians in every generation.) Let me illustrate.

John 13:4-17 records Jesus washing the feet of His apostles, which in verse 15 our Lord refers to that occasion as “an example.” The only reason to wash feet then or now is because they become dirty; however, the willingness to wash the feet of another when they are dirty demonstrates humility, which is what Jesus was teaching His apostles in John 13. The apostles were contentious with each other over who was the greatest among the followers of Jesus (Matthew 18:1; Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46; 22:24), and hence, (1) no one on the occasion of John 13 had washed either his own dirty feet, (2) the dirty feet of a fellow apostle or (3) the soiled feet of the Master, Jesus Christ. Our Lord never intended Christians to wash each other’s feet as a church function, but He intended that when He washed the feet of the apostles for that activity to serve as a lesson on humility. Whether serving another person by washing dirty feet or in some other way, Christians ought to demonstrate humility rather than arrogance and haughtiness. Therefore, when Bible believers elevate washing feet to a church function, they try too hard (go beyond the purpose of John 13:4-17) and miss the point of the “example” of humility (which humility may and should be demonstrated in several ways in our lives).

The same *trying too hard* and missing the purpose could be said regarding the well-intentioned question before us just now. The typical, first century greeting in the Roman world of which Palestine was a part included a kiss on the cheek. “Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you” (Romans 16:16). That was a culturally appropriate greeting among friends and brethren in the first century Roman world, and it remains a culturally appropriate greeting in some societies today. However, most societies today do not practice the “holy kiss,” but rather in many contemporary societies, the culturally appropriate greeting includes a handshake.

The Bible does not codify or legislate either a particular physical greeting or a prescribed formula of words obligatory upon Christians to use when meeting one another. Christianity is difficult enough without Christians, even with the best of intentions, making Christianity even more difficult to practice.

Regarding Ephesians 5:4, the word “thanks” means “gratitude; actively, grateful language (to God, as an act of worship)” (*Biblesoft’s New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*). “Thanks” in the context of Ephesians 5:4 pertains to prayers of thanksgiving directed toward God the Father.