For testosterone-enriched men, besides the issue of masturbation, there's no bigger question than where the line is drawn on physical contact in a dating relationship. It's usually asked just that way: “Where do you draw the line?” with the inference that if I’m not thrilled with your answer, I'll get a second opinion. In most books on the issue, authors usually turn the question around. They tell their audience they shouldn’t be thinking about how close they can get to “the line” but rather they should think about how far they can get from it. Sound advice and certainly helpful, but we want to suggest an alternative focus. Take a look at the following verses:

“Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.” (Romans 16:16)

“All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.” (1 Corinthians 16:20)

“Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.” (1 Thessalonians 5:26)

THE HOLY KISS

We would suggest the “Holy Kiss” principle on the physical dimension of your dating relationships, provided your Bible doesn’t translate the word “holy” as “French.”

As infants, as children and as adults, physical contact is the primary way we show care, protection, affirmation, encouragement and love for each other. Where, after all, would sports be in America without the ubiquitous slap on the rear? This is the love language of athletic coaches. But I better keep writing and make my point before you stop reading and think you just got the green light to pat your girlfriend on the tush.

Ponder a moment the different ways physical contact expressed care to you when you were growing up. Here are a few of my ponderings:

When I was discouraged after a miserable athletic performance, my father would often put his arm around me. Walking through a dangerous area at night, I would feel his protecting hand on my shoulder. When I was real young, my dad and I would wrestle; Walking behind me at the dinner table, my mom would do this “rubbing-of-my-head-until-my-hair-looked-like-Don-King” thing. My list could go on, but I’ll stop. I imagine tears are now beginning to form in the corners of your eyes. My point is that touching was inseparable from my experience of affection.

When we think of a physical standard for dating, it might be helpful to consider how we related to a brother or sister within our family: expressing affection without it ever being sexual in nature (never aimed at causing sexual arousal). This, then, is the principle of the “Holy Kiss.” We should not avoid all physical contact, because it’s completely alien to our humanity. However, the goal of such contact should be to express affection without causing sexual arousal.
PRINCIPLES OF THE HOLY KISS

So, having said that, what are some principles by which we can judge our physical contact using the measurement of the “Holy Kiss”? They should be rather intuitive, which always makes for a good standard, but we’ll spell out some principles to avoid legal problems should someone use this standard to defend the owning and operating of a Christian brothel.

Your degree of physical contact should be appropriate for your level of relationships. Arms that constantly surround your partner show protection and a degree of ownership of one other. That is perfectly natural if it is a serious, exclusive relationship but quite inappropriate if it’s not.

Physical contact is meant to express affection, not to sexually arouse either you or your partner. You have to be honest about your motives. Guard your heart and your partner’s heart from lust. Whenever there is sexual arousal, you have transgressed the guideline of the “Holy Kiss” and have sinned in the use of your freedom to express physical closeness.

You must communicate your thoughts and standards to each other. When you rubbed her elbow, it began to sexually excite her? Who knew? Talk about stuff, have a heart-to-heart “This, but not that” discussion, and by the name of all that’s holy ... stay away from those seductive elbows! Think about your partner. In your communication, it’s critical to have a servant’s heart that is motivated to help your partner avoid sexual arousal. Don’t simply think what does and does not arouse you.

Think about your partner and what will arouse her. I saw one dating couple interacting before going into a social event. The woman was tucking in the front of the guy’s shirt. Four options: first, she knows she’s turning him on and is, therefore, sinning; second, this doesn’t turn him on, and therefore, the man is a eunuch; third, this turns him on, but he’s never communicated that it does; fourth, it was dark and I couldn’t tell that the woman was actually his mother. If it is a Christian relationship, I’m betting on the third option.

Both are responsible for setting standards, and the stricter of the standards becomes your standard. Judith and Jack Balswick, in their book Authentic Human Sexuality, add this principle and the one that follows. Prior to marriage, the man does not have the mantle of spiritual leadership for the couple. Both are responsible for standard setting, and it is critical that you don’t do anything to transgress either of your consciences. Your conscience, energized by the Holy Spirit, is a precious gift and guide and a protection to you. If, blunted, you’ve lost a major layer of protection between you and sexual immorality.

Remember the law of diminishing return. Arousal, like lust, always needs more to stimulate it. Set your standards high, for what expressed your feelings of affection yesterday may seem as bland as toothpaste tomorrow. Once you’ve moved down the road physically, it’s very difficult to step back.

The standard of the “Holy Kiss” is not a standard of “how far can I get,” or “how far can I steer away from physical contact,” but “what ways can I show physical affection that are appropriate to our level of commitment and do not cause sexual arousal?”