

Doctrine of Priscilla and Aquila

1. In Rom 16:3 Paul asks that the leaders in the Church at Rome provide a special greeting to two unsung heroes. The two are said in Rom 16:14 to have “risked their necks for him.”

2. They are also said to be deserving of a special gratitude “from all the churches of the Gentiles.”

Rom 16:3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.

Rom 16:4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

3. We are not told how Priscilla and Aquila risked their lives for Paul or why the Gentiles owed them a word of gratitude.

4. Let me give you a brief synopsis of these two heroes who had risked their lives helping Paul.

4.1 We are told that Aquila was a Jew. We are not told whether Priscilla was a Jewess or not. So far as her name is concerned, she may have been, and very probably was, a Roman, and, if so, we have in their case a “mixed marriage” such was not uncommon at that time. Timothy's parents give us another example of such a marriage.

4.2 Priscilla is sometimes called Prisca, which was her proper name, and sometimes Priscilla, an affectionate shortened form of Prisca. The two had been living in Rome, and had been banished under the decree of Emperor Claudius.

4.3 They came from Rome to Corinth where they met up with Paul; this meeting with the great apostle changed their whole lives. The association began in a purely commercial partnership. As they worked at their trade of tent-making, there would be many earnest talks about Jesus the Christ, and these talks resulted in both husband and wife becoming disciples.

4.4 The bond between them was too close to be easily severed, and so, when Paul sailed across the Aegean for Ephesus, so also did his two new friends. They remained with him during his somewhat lengthened stay in the great Asiatic city. We read in the first Epistle to the Corinthians which was written from Ephesus “greetings from “Priscilla and Aquila and the Church which is in their house.” It would seem that when Paul left Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla stayed behind.

4.5 About a year after the first Epistle to the Corinthians was sent from Ephesus, the Epistle to the Romans was written, and we find there the salutation to Priscilla and Aquila. So this wandering couple had again returned to Rome. It is conjectured our two heroes at some point left Rome and moved to Ephesus.

4.6 Once more we catch a glimpse of them in Paul's last letter written some seven or eight years later from his prison cell in Rome. The Apostle knows that death is near, and, at that supreme moment, his heart goes out to these two faithful companions. He sends them a parting token of his love in his last epistle written to Timothy.

4.7 There are only two messages to friends in the second pastoral epistle to Timothy, and one of these is to Prisca and Aquila. At the mouth of the valley of the shadow of death he remembered past events when two friends put their lives on the line for him.

5. Recall Paul, writing that second letter to Timothy, is in a Roman prison and Timothy is in Ephesus serving in Paul's place as the apostle of several churches located in and around the city. Clearly Paul is urging in this pastoral epistle that Timothy continue to teach the sound doctrine resident in his soul

6. Let's take a look at the New Testament passages where the two heroes are mentioned.

Acts 18:2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.

Acts 18:3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

Acts 18:4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.

Acts 18:18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

Acts 18:19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.

Acts 18:20 When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;

Acts 18:21 But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.

Acts 18:24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

Acts 18:25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

Acts 18:26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

1Co 16:19 The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

1Co 16:20 All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss.

1Co 16:21 The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand.

2Ti 4:19 Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.

2Ti 4:20 Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick.

2Ti 4:21 Do thy diligence to come before winter. Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brethren.

2Ti 4:22 The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.

7. Such is all we know of Priscilla and Aquila. Can we gather any lessons from these scattered notices found in Scripture? Let's give it a try.

8. The house of Prisca and Aquila was a product of Christianity. Their home served as a "tabernacle of righteousness." Not only wedded love prevailed, but they seemed to have a special love in which flowed the ennobling, calming and transfiguring witness demanded by the mind of Christ. After meeting Paul these two tent makers from Rome were transformed for service.

8.1 Notice that even in these scanty references to our two heroes, there twice appears the remarkable expression "the church that is in their house." Now, I suppose that gives us a little glimpse into the rudimentary condition of public worship in the early church. It was centuries after the time of Priscilla and Aquila before circumstances permitted Christians to have buildings devoted exclusively to public worship. Up to a very much later period covered by the New Testament, Christians gathered together wherever was most convenient. It would seem the home of Prisca and Aquila was spacious enough for Christians of the city to meet there.

8.2 We have here not only a glimpse into the manner of public worship in early times, but we may learn something of far more consequence. The book of Deuteronomy makes clear that every home should be permeated with a rarified atmosphere of what Col. Thieme called "occupation with Christ."

Deu 6:6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

Deu 6:7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Deu 11:19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

8.3 Bible doctrine should not be confined to just what is learned in church but rather it should be lived by the family and the husband and the wife are responsible for establishing visible evidences of Christian living.

8.4 In our study of the life and times of Prisca and Aquila, we may find another object lesson as to the hallowing of common life, trade and travel. I think we can readily see evidence of God working to bring about His objectives for our two heroes.

8.4.1 It does not appear that, after their stay in Ephesus, Aquila and his wife did not become members of what we might call his “evangelistic staff” or “Pauline team.” They seem to have gone their own way, and as far as the scanty notices carry us, they did not meet Paul again, after their time together in Ephesus.

8.5 Their gypsy life was probably occasioned by Aquila's need to find work. Many have conjectured that he would work in Ephesus for a while and then move on somewhere else where he would work and witness for the Lord.

8.6 Thus he wandered about as a working man. Thus Paul calls them his “fellow workers in Christ Jesus.” Some might say a roving life of that sort is not generally conducive to a depth of spiritual life. But their wandering did not seem to hurt these two. They took their faith with them.

8.6.1 Whether they were in Corinth or Ephesus or Rome, Aquila and Priscilla took their Lord and Master with them, and while working on their beautiful tents, they were serving God, and God was directing every aspect of their lives. These two were in full-time Christian service like every born-again Christian.

8.7 Let's look back on that complicated chain of circumstances which brought them together. One end of God's chain was attached to Aquila and his beloved Prisca and the other to the young Pharisee in Jerusalem. It steadily drew them together until they met in Corinth.

8.7.1 Claudius, in the fullness of his absolute power, said, “Get all these wretched Jews out of my city. I will not have it polluted by them anymore. Get rid of them!” So our two heroes were uprooted, and drifted to Corinth. We do not know why they chose to go there. Perhaps they themselves did not know why; but God knew. And while they were traveling east to Corinth, Paul was prevented by the Spirit from speaking in Asia, and was instead called across the sea to Neapolis, where he was hounded out of Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea and turned away from Athens. And so at last Paul found himself in Corinth, face to face with two tentmakers from Rome.

8.8 Then one of the two men said, “Let us join partnership together, and set up here as tent-makers for a time.” What came out of this unintended and apparently chance meeting? The first thing was the conversion of Aquila and his wife; and the effects of that are being realized by them in heaven at this moment, and will go on to all eternity. So let us not fret over the infinite complexity of the events taking place in our lives, do not let us worry ourselves by forecasting, but let us faith rest and accept what God leads us to do.

8.9 It seems that we are somewhat like Peter in a Roman prison, sitting helplessly in the dark, painfully chained without hope when suddenly the doors of the prison are opened and those awful chains fall to the floor. A light then appears disclosing an open door to freedom and a sense of destiny suddenly pervades.

8.9.1 I think most of us, when we look back at the events in our lives, can see the hand of God closing and opening doors of destiny. We wonder if Prisca and Aquila ever sensed the hand of God leading when they traveled to Ephesus and met a young evangelist named Apollos.

8.10 When our two tent-makers reached Ephesus they formed another “chance” acquaintance in the person of a brilliant young Alexandrian, whose name was Apollos. They found that he had good intentions and a good heart, but a head very scantily furnished with the knowledge of the Gospel. So they took him in hand, just as Paul had them. If I may borrow a phrase, “they did not know how large a fish they had caught” but I do think the two were encouraged beyond measure for this “chance” meeting” and opportunity for further service.

8.11 They had no idea what a mighty power for Christ was lying dormant in that young man from Alexandria. They instructed Apollos, and Apollos became second only to Paul in the power of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. So the circle widens again. God's grace fructifies from one man to another, spreading onward and outward. And now perhaps, we better understand Paul's abstruse comment in Rom 16:4 “the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.” And all of Apollos' converts, and their converts, and theirs again, right away down the ages, may be traced back to another “chance meeting.”

8.12 Again, we do not know to what Paul is referring when he says “For my sake they laid down their own necks.” Perhaps he refers to the tumult in Ephesus, where he certainly was in danger. Perhaps it was at some perilous juncture of which we know nothing in which our two heroes had said, “Take us and let him go. We will put our heads on the block, that he may live.” What we do know is “That magnanimous self-surrender was a wonderful token of the passionate admiration and love which the Apostle inspired, but its deepest motive was a love of Christ.”

8.13 Long years after, the Apostle, on the edge of life, looked back over his life; and, while much had become dim, and some trusted friends had dropped away, he saw these two heroes of the faith, and waved to them his last greeting before he turned to the executioner and with great tribute said “Salute Prisca and Aquila.”