

PM Romans 16:2-3

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[0 : 00] So the apostles in Acts chapter 18, because this is where they are mentioned the most. So, hear the word of God. Hear the word of God. Acts chapter 18.

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.

And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked, for they were tent makers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus.

And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, Your blood be on your own heads. I am innocent.

[1 : 11] From now on, I will go to the Gentiles. And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titus, Justus, a worshiper of God.

His house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians heard Paul, hearing Paul, believed, and were baptized.

Just head down to a few verses in verse 18 to the end. After this, Paul stayed many days longer, and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Quilla.

At Sancria, he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there. But he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

And when they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. But on taking leave of them, he said, I will return to you, if God wills.

[2 : 22] And he set sail for Ephesus. When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch.

After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next, through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the scriptures.

He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus. though he knew only the baptism of John.

He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

[3 : 22] And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had belief, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that Christ was Jesus.

And just heading down to Romans chapter 16, that's the first four verses. I command to you, our sister Phoebe, the servant of the church in St. Crea, that you may welcome her in the Lord, in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you.

For she has been a patron of many, and of myself as well. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.

Amen. And may the Lord add his blessing to the public reading of his holy and inspired word. Well, please turn with me this evening to Paul's letter to the Romans, Romans chapter 16.

And the two verses we'll be considering can be found in verses 3 and 4. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus.

[5 : 02] My fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.

This evening we'll be looking at this cover, like a biography of this couple, but to draw lessons from them.

And specifically in the context of Christian service. In the context of Christian service. What can we learn from Prisca and Aquila in regards to Christian service within the Church of Jesus Christ?

Well, to set the scene, Paul wrote a letter of Romans from Corinth before his journey to Jerusalem, round about AD 56 to 58, in his third missionary journey.

You can read all that in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 20. He wrote this letter from Corinth, and at that time, the host of Paul was a man named Gaius of Corinth.

[6 : 19] You can read his name in this roll call of faithful men and women in Romans 16. You can see his name appearing in verse 23, which goes, Gaius, my host and of the whole church, saluteth you.

So this was a man who hosted him. Paul had baptised him in the past. If you can flip the next page, you see it in 1 Corinthians, chapter 1.

I thank God that I baptised none of you but Crispus and Gaius. Presumably the same Gaius, the one who hosted him in this particular chapter. Now, this particular church, church in Rome, is not one that is planted by Paul.

But he had this great desire to see them. He knew a lot about them, evidently, because he had a whole list of names here to greet.

But we read in chapter 15 that he had this great desire to see them. And in chapter 15, verse 22, he says, For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you, but now having no more place in this part and having a great desire, these many years to come unto you, whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you, for I trust to see you in my journey and to be brought on my way hitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company.

[8 : 00] So he was designed to see them and so on. And this church is likely to be started from all the various Jewish converts from Rome who gathered in Jerusalem during Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 and who have now come, after they have returned to their homes, some went back to Rome and they formed a church.

And so this is one of those churches which is a mixed church, mixed in the sense that there are Jews and Gentiles in the church in Rome.

In one sense, it kind of fulfilled the great commission that the church of Jesus Christ is going to be an international church. It's not going to be a church that is demarcated by racial boundaries or ethnic boundaries, but it's going to be one that is open up to Jews and Gentiles alike.

One writer, the late John Murray, wrote, where faith is, it seeks the fellowship of the saints. Where faith is, it seeks the fellowship of the saints.

And it's evident that this group of people who are meeting in Rome formed this church because they were of like mind. They believe the Lord Jesus Christ to be their saviour, their lord, and their friend.

[9 : 31] And so they desire to gather around his word and to worship God in this new, reformed church in Rome. Now the letter that was handed, is a letter from, delivered to them by Phoebe, from this place called Sancia, a port in Corinth.

Now, there's much that we can say about Phoebe. We see that in verse 1. I commend unto you, Phoebe, our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Sancia. Now a lot can be said about her, but perhaps it's for another occasion.

But what's remarkable about this letter, Paul's letter to the Romans, is the contents of it. Okay, we know first 11 chapters is about doctrine, and then chapters 12 to 15 is the practical outworkings of the doctrine that is being outlined in, or described in great detail in the first 11 chapters.

When we come to chapter 16, it's a slightly different, very different in its approach, very different in its content. It's what one wrote as the greetings and closing doxology of the letter.

It's the greetings and closing doxology of the letter. There are many, there's many commendations and salutations. Sadly, this is one of those chapters that seems to be glossed over by many people because it's all just a load of names.

[11 : 10] It's generally, I wouldn't say it's generally ignored, but it's kind of glossed over. We'll read it, we'll recognize all the names, sometimes we use the names to name our children, and that's about it.

But, it's not just a list of names. You must remember, it's not just a list of names. These are, these are, these are people who, the Apostle Paul, who hasn't been to the church in Rome, yet he knew about them.

He knew about them. He knew these people by name. He knew what they did. He knew the issues in their lives. He knew the joys that they faced and the struggles that they faced.

He knew about them. That's why he wrote a whole chapter with all their names on this particular chapter. Interestingly, Peter, the Apostle Peter's name is not on it.

Peter was meant to be the first Pope of Rome. his name wasn't even mentioned in there. Which makes you wonder, was he even there in the first place? Who was the minister in this particular, in this particular church in Rome?

[12 : 21] What's more important is not the absence of Peter, the alleged first Pope of Rome. What's more important is who these people are. Who are these people?

These people were not, not all of them, you know, elders and ministers and deacons and so on. These are people who were, in the eyes of Paul, these are people who have laboured with him.

These are people who have helped him in his ministry in, perhaps in the past and now they've all gone to Rome. Perhaps, perhaps he knew them from the past. We don't know.

But now they're actively involved in the church in Rome. you know, this is, we're talking about pre-internet age, pre-social media age. The apostle Paul knew them, he had very, his heart is moved to write this particular chapter.

His heart is moved because he, he, he had this warm, there's a certain warm personal touch to this particular chapter. to a very doctrinal letter, there comes this certain level of warmth towards named people.

[13 : 36] There's a deep, deep, rich love of Paul towards his brethren. And it's characteristic of the Christian faith, or it should be characteristic of the Christian faith.

Well, perhaps you can ask yourself, what about us? What about us? If we were to ask the average person on the street, you know, what can you say about the Christians who meet in Dumfries Free Church?

What would they say about us? What would they say about all, all of you who are sitting here this, this evening? What do you think people would say of this church?

What would people say of the church in Dumfries? We've heard, certainly we've heard in Dumfries where some people have said, oh, I didn't know that was a church, I thought it was a museum. I'm sure you've heard that before.

I've heard that before in our previous church in the West Midlands, where people have walked past thinking that was a museum, only to realize, oh no, it's actually a church. People do go in and out on a Monday, on a Wednesday, on a Sunday, morning, evening.

[14 : 43] But what can they, what would they say about us? Will people know us in the way Paul knew about these lists of names in Romans 16?

Do we pray for one another, for other churches in our local community, those that are preaching the gospel? Do we pray for them? Do we show concern and help each other out for other churches who are perhaps struggling?

Do we pray for them? Do we think about them? Do we help each other out? Paul. Evidently, Paul knew these people very well. He thought about them and he felt moved to write Romans chapter 16.

Now, I read in our reading this evening, in Acts 18, the Apostle Paul met this couple, Priscilla and Aquila, in Corinth.

you can read, if you want to have a full picture of Priscilla and Aquila, you can read, apart from Acts 18, they appear once again in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 verse 19, and then in 2 Timothy 4 verse 19, and of course in Romans 16 verses 3 and 4.

[16 : 03] So, you know, give you a well, all-rounder picture of this lovely couple. Now, the reason why he met them is very interesting.

Well, we read in the reading earlier that Claudius, the emperor of the Roman Empire, he had problems with the rising number of Jews in Rome, and some of these Jews had evidently rebelled against the Romans, and so he decided the best thing to do was to deport the whole lot of them.

And sadly, even those who are law-abiding Jews or even converted Jews, Jewish Christians, regardless of whatever, you know, they may be law-abiding people, they were all deported.

And so Priscilla and Aquila came from Rome to Corinth to look for work. And they were self-employed tent makers, just like Paul.

And that's where they met Paul. You remember that Paul moved from Athens to Corinth, you remember in Acts chapter 17, when he was waiting for Timothy and Silas, he saw the he preached that sermon on Mars Hill about the unknown God.

[17 : 35] So he moved from Athens to Corinth, and in Corinth, the two, Priscilla, Aquila, and Paul's lives met together in Corinth. But interestingly, that Paul, when he was struggling to see or burden in his souls to find this, the unbelief and the idolatry in a place like Athens and then in Corinth, he felt moved, probably not in a nice way, perhaps he was sad, and depressed to see the amount of idolatry around him.

And what did God do? What did God do for the Apostle Paul? did God appear to him in some supernatural way to lift up his spirit and to make him see that it's not all that bad, there's work to be done, you know, shake off your sadness and your burdens and get on with the ministry.

No, what God did was he sent friends. It may seem really, it may seem such a small, trivial matter. But we read in Acts 18 that he found Aquila and his wife Priscilla because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.

In a place like Corinth with all the idolatry going on, God sent him friends. Very simple lesson there for us.

Christian friends, are gold dust. I think you know what I'm talking about. Christian friends are gold dust. Do you have them? Well, if you have Christian friends, well, pray for them.

[19 : 36] Pray for them. Talk to them, pray for them, get in touch with them. These are the people who God has sovereignly put in your life to help you with your daily lives.

When you're feeling down, yes, turn to the Lord in prayer, yes, but friends, Christian friends are there for you. God put them in your life for a reason.

Just like God put Priscilla and Aquila in the life of the Apostle Paul for a good reason. For a very good reason. If you don't have Christian friends, well, seek them out prayerfully.

start with your own church. This is where you find Christian friends. Seek them out. Seek them out prayerfully.

Meet up for lunch, meet up for a cup of tea, meet up for coffee and cake, whatever. Start this friendship going. Christian friends, they're very important for us, for those of us who are Christians, they are very important.

[20 : 43] that's how the Apostle Paul is going to get spurred on in his ministry, as you see later on, that his life is going to be very much moved and blessed because of the labors of Priscilla and Aquila.

And there's something else that we can say about Priscilla and Aquila. Notice how they're always described as a pair. Well, they're a married couple, evidently. There's a certain joy of having a married couple in Christian service.

There's something wonderful about that. Christian marriage, when a man and woman who love the Lord, who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation, who are leaning upon Christ and pleading only about the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ as the only means for their entrance into heaven, husband and wife in Christian marriage, so much can be done.

So much can be done by a Christian couple. So much can be done by Priscilla and Aquila. And you're going to see they're mentioned, all the time they're mentioned as a couple.

Everything that they did, they did it together. not necessarily they're kind of glued to the hip, but in one sense they did work as a pair. For example, they're instrumental in the instruction of Apollos, which I read earlier in Acts 18, towards the end.

[22 : 23] Apollos, who knew about the baptism of John, but not aware of the events after, remember, Priscilla and Aquila spoke to Apollos, who was mighty in scriptures, but yet kind of didn't join the dots, if you want to put it this way, or a few loose ends that needed to be tied up.

The Lord brought Priscilla and Aquila to the life of Apollos and helped him to see the full picture of the Christian faith.

Or not only that, but Priscilla and Aquila opened their home for the church to meet. And you can see that in the 1 Corinthians 16, verse 19, the churches of Asia salute you, Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord with the church that is in their house.

So, they not only help people like Apollos, and I'm sure there are others as well, they not only help the Apostle Paul, but they open their house, for the church to meet in their home.

Now, I know in those days that's quite a common thing, but the main thing is they open their home, as a couple, they open their home for the church to meet. And you know very well that in those days, if they were to do that, it's not like a church building like this where they can just do it all in public.

[23 : 55] You know in the reading that in chapter 18 in Acts of the Apostles, that Paul got into a lot of trouble with just his preaching in the synagogues and even when he went out of it, the troubles followed him.

So for a church to meet in somebody's home, they could be inviting trouble. But they did it. They did it anyway. it's wonderful when a Christian marry another Christian.

There's the help and the support, they love one another, they support one another, they encourage one another, and they will strengthen the church. And for a Christian couple to be in the church, they ought to serve the Lord and to be an encouragement to the people around about them.

Of course there's a balance to be struck with, work, and with family, and with church. But, remembering all that things, but we still need to realize that, you know, there's the joys of Christian marriage, and the Christian service.

So it's wonderful to see Priscilla and Aquila mentioned as a couple, in each occasion that their names are mentioned in the New Testament.

[25 : 18] they're always mentioned as a couple. And Christian service, another thing about Christian service, starts within the church, starts within the church. You look in Romans 16 and verse 3, greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus.

They are helpers of the Apostle Paul. Paul. They were fellow workers, fellow laborers of the Apostle Paul. They were not his assistants, they were not the yes men and the yes women of the Apostle Paul.

They were not assistants or helpers, they were fellow laborers, they were helpers of the Apostle Paul in the service of God.

And they were tent makers, like Paul. They were, they had to support their own, their own livelihood, so they had, they were, they were, they had their own self-employed as tent makers.

There's a question whether they live in the same house, very likely they could have. But notice this, he mentioned them and he said they were my helpers in Christ Jesus.

[26 : 38] And also they were described as tent makers, like Paul. And each time they were mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles in chapter 18, notice that Paul preached and he debated in the synagogue.

And Aquila and Priscilla counseled and thought and visited people like Apollos. There's this wonderful balance of the Apostles Paul and Aquila and Priscilla.

It's not that, you know, there's, you know, there's any problems with trying to, you know, overlap the work, but there is wonderful balance of one who is preaching and debating and another one, another couple would be counseling and talking to people.

A nice, lovely division of labor. labor. They didn't rely on third parties or other organizations to help with the ministry.

Between the three of them, they got everything sorted. They got everything sorted. Now, likewise, you can see it about us. We are all fellow workers in the gospel work of Jesus Christ.

[27 : 54] Whether a person is a minister, whether a person is an elder, a deacon, or even the humble church member within the church, or even adherents, long-term faithful adherents of the church.

Everyone has a role to play. Don't just rely on the one person, the minister, to do all the work. Everyone has a role to play. We don't just, the concept of church shouldn't be just about attending the services.

There's more to that than just attending the services. There's more to the life of the church than just attending the services. Whether it be just Sunday morning, Sunday evening, prayer meetings, there's more to it than that.

Yes, there's a ministry of the word from the pulpit. There's a ministry of the word in working amongst the children's work. Yes, there's that. And you have the drop-in sessions.

There's also a ministry there. You talk to people who are struggling with life. There's a need for that. Yes. And there's also the need for work even after this when there's coffees and teas.

[29 : 09] Somebody has to do it. work. And it's part of our Christian service. And perhaps the Lord builds up the work here.

You might be thinking more about the youth work. You might be thinking about ladies' Bible study or men's Bible study or men's prayer meeting or men's breakfast or working amongst care homes.

You'd be thinking about more of these things. You need to get everyone involved. Everyone needs to be involved. And there must be a nice division of labor as what we see in the Apostle Paul and Aquila and Priscilla.

It's wonderful. Christian service starts within the church as we see in the life of Priscilla and Aquila. But there's more to that.

There's more that we can say about this lovely couple. Christian service is sacrificial. Christian service is sacrificial. So, really in verse 4, that Priscilla and Aquila who have for my life laid down their own necks.

[30 : 19] They laid down their own necks. Shocking if you think about it. They laid down their own necks for the Apostle Paul.

The literal meaning is a picture of execution. obviously it's not literal because they're still alive when he's writing that. But they have evidently put their lives on the line for the Apostle Paul.

They put their lives on the line for the Apostle Paul. It's a very important point there. Now, when did this happen? It can be debatable. Acts of the Apostles in verse 6, for example, that when Paul was testifying to the Jews that Christ was Jesus and then they opposed him and reviled him.

Now, maybe at that point, Priscilla and Aquila helped him out. Or perhaps later on in verse 12, when Galileo was pro-council of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, this man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.

Who knows, maybe at that point, Priscilla and Aquila helped Paul. It was during a point where Paul's life was threatened and his life was in danger that Aquila and Priscilla stepped in, somehow, stepped in and rescued him.

[31 : 56] And now he's writing this letter and he's reflecting on what they did and he wrote, greet Priscilla Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus, who for my life laid down their own necks.

Laid down their own necks. You know, it's one thing to be able to give to the church, money, time, even energy, but it's quite a different thing to lay down your life for somebody in the church, in the church of Jesus Christ.

It's quite challenging, isn't it? To be able to lay down your life for somebody in the church, somebody who's going through persecution. We have had several cases in this country, sadly, of pastors being arrested for preaching the gospel in the open air.

How many people would be willing to put their heads above the parapet and say, that is my pastor and I'm going to help him. That is my minister and I'm going to help him. Now, thankfully we are not in the country where Christianity is completely outlawed and it's illegal to have a meeting like this.

Thankfully we are not in this position yet. But are we ready to sacrifice our time, our energies, our resources for the gospel of Jesus Christ?

[33 : 31] Are we willing to do that? This couple was willing to lay down their lives, put their head, as it were, on a chopping board for the apostle Paul.

We are not in that position, thankfully. But are we willing to help the church of Jesus Christ? Serve the people of God, help in any way possible. Put our hands up and say, I'll help you with this, I'll help you with that.

Do you need any help with this? On the notice board there's a lot of rotas. Churches always love their rotas, don't we? We love our rotas. Sometimes there are rotas which I've seen, I've certainly seen rotas where it's practically blank.

Nobody wants to help. do we have that same spirit as Priscilla and Aquila? Saying, I will help this church, I will help the minister, the elders, or whatever, in this task.

Yes, it may mean, it will mean commitment, yes, yes, it will mean time and resources, but we do so unto the Lord. We do so because of what the Lord has done for us.

[34 : 42] Evidently, Priscilla and Aquila recognized that. They knew that. They knew that Christ was Lord. Jesus was their Lord and Savior. And to them, the Apostle Paul is God's herald, messenger of God with the Word of God.

To them, it's like, well, simple, we'll help Paul. That's what they did. That's what they did. Isn't it amazing? Isn't it amazing that this couple mentioned a few times in the New Testament?

Just a few times mentioned in the New Testament, was ready to do all that. But there's something else that we can say about them. Remember I mentioned about Apollos? That Priscilla and Aquila instructed Apollos.

He was already a learned man. He was a man, we read that he was mighty in the scriptures. So Apollos was not a lightweight. He was not an ignorant man.

He was one who knew about the gospel. He knew about the Christian faith. But perhaps like I said, there were some missing pieces in the jigsaw. He didn't join all the dots together, which can happen to any one of us, let's be honest.

[35 : 57] They knew Apollos. They could see there was something defective about his preaching. Now what they could have done, they could have just easily pushed Apollos aside and said, look man, you're not really there yet.

Let one of us be more experienced, take the pulpit, you stand to one side. Now they could have done that. They were after all under the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

What better recommendations than to have the Apostle Paul sign you off as one who can take the ministry of the word.

So they could have just told Apollos, stand to one side. We'll sort this out. But instead, we read that they chose to instruct Apollos, but not only instruct Apollos, but notice this, they disappeared after that.

They just disappeared after that. after they instruct Apollos, we read that Priscilla and Aquila heard him and they took him and explained the way of God more accurately.

[37 : 16] That was it. They disappeared into the background. I always found it really strange. They are not mentioned anymore. But in my mind, and I think it should come to your mind as well, that they deliberately chose to fade away in the background, to let Apollos get on the work of the ministry.

It shows what? Humility. It shows humility. Remember the John, the Baptist, said about Jesus, he must increase and I must decrease.

increase. What if I say Aquila and Priscilla say the same thing about Apollos? He must increase and we will decrease.

Isn't it wonderful? In the Christian faith, in Christian service, the Christian service is so different from any other business in the world.

is characterized by humility. It should be characterized by humility. We let others who are better equipped to do the job and we help them.

[38 : 38] If we can do it, yes, we put our hands up and say, we'll help you. We need to know our strengths and weaknesses, obviously. That's part of the duty of the church.

That's one of the beauties of the church, to train up people to gospel work. So if somebody is more bold to be able to do door-to-door work or speak to newcomers in the vestibule area, just do it.

And encourage them to do it. If somebody else is a bit more timid, a bit more shy, but they're good with children, well, get on with it.

Do it. Need a bit of help? Here's a book. Here's a booklet. Priscilla Aquila, they show such a great example of Christian service within Christian church.

And may we all learn some lessons there of Priscilla Aquila and the example that they set for us even this day, in this day and age that we live in.

[39 : 40] Well, may the Lord bless that word to our hearts. will conclude Thank you.