

**Romans 16:3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5 Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. (NKJV)**

How many married couples can you name from the New Testament? You need both names.

These are the ones I know of.

Mary and Joseph

Zechariah and Elizabeth

Philemon and Apphia

Ananias and Sapphira

And Aquilla and Priscilla.

There may be more but these were obvious.

By even trying to answer this question you probably realized that there aren't all that many. There are a lot of people we knew were married, but we don't have the spouse's names. Most of Paul's letters address individuals or groups. He very rarely addresses a specific married couple. To me that would seem to say that there are very few marriages that are really dedicated to ministry. There are very few marriages that are truly a team working together for the sake of the kingdom. There may be a lot of individuals who happen to be married. But there are very few marriages where both spouses share the same mission.

Are you married? What about your marriage? Do you share the same mission with your spouse? Is it the mission of the kingdom?

Are you looking **to be** married? Does your potential spouse share the same mission?

What I want to do this morning is look at two couples. They are complete opposites. And they are probably the best known couples in the New Testament. They are the two that came to my mind when I asked the question.

Let's start with a bad example.

**Acts 5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. 2 And he kept back *part* of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself? 4 While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." 5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. 6 And the young**

men arose and wrapped him up, carried *him* out, and buried *him*. 7 Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much." 9 Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband *are* at the door, and they will carry you out." 10 Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying *her* out, buried *her* by her husband. (NKJV)

Here is a couple doing ministry. They are doing, by all appearances, a very good thing....a very generous thing. And they seemed to be agreed on how they would carry out this thing they are doing.

So what went wrong? What kept Ananias and Sapphira from being a Priscilla and Aquilla? As we see the story unfold we find that Ananias and Sapphira were a team. They were acting as a team. They were carrying out this plan together. But it was not **good** team work. They had agreed among themselves to keep their true actions and motives **covered**. They had agreed to present an image that was not true. They had agreed to look better than they were.

**Either one of them** could have simply told the truth about what was really going on in their family. Either one of them could have broken this game of duplicity. They could have revealed the sin. They could have revealed the evil motives. They could have revealed the stuff going on where the public was not invited. But neither one would do so. Why? They both had something to lose. They both wanted the spoils of their deception. They wanted to be thought of highly. And at the same time they wanted to carry out their selfishness.

You know there truly is nothing new under the sun. If we were to count the number of families that have gone down in flames because both spouses were guarding the family secrets, it would be beyond what we could count. In the world, play acting is often needed. It makes sense. It provides some degree of necessary protection. But in the church play acting and keeping up appearances only serves to cut us off from the help we really need. We don't have to pretend when we are among people we trust. We don't have to pour so much effort into appearances. We can be real and honest and get the help we need.

So why don't we? There are probably a lot of reasons. Sometimes we feel like we are being loyal to our spouse. Sometimes we might think we are honoring the other person by keeping their sin covered. But usually we have a selfish motive for keeping things hidden. There is something in it for us. Maybe it is a pride issue. Maybe keeping something hidden gives us an angle, it gives us power. It gives us something for our flesh. But it doesn't matter. Whether we do it out of

ignorance or evil motive, it can still be a very destructive thing to do when we are hiding a sin that won't go away and is not being dealt with.

Ananias and Sapphira would not go the route of exposing their selfish agenda. And the thing about it is, they could have. There was no rule saying that in order to be a Christian you must give 100% of the proceeds of your property sales to the church. No. This was to be a gift. They could have said, you know Peter, I really feel like I should have given the whole thing, but I just couldn't bring myself to do it. Sapphira and I wanted to keep some for ourselves. There are a few things we wanted to buy. I know that this doesn't make me look good, but this is how I am. You know what would have happened at that point? Fellowship would have happened. Ananias and Sapphira would have had unbroken fellowship. They would have been known for what they truly were. Peter would have known that while Ananias and his wife weren't the most generous people in the world, God is working on them. Odds are that Peter would have prayed for them. Honesty would have provided good things. But they would have none of that. What they wanted to create was an impression of goodness. They wanted to protect an image. Well an image of that kind is never worth protecting. It is better if those statues to our honor get pulled down by our own rope. It is better if we let the cat out of the bag ourselves.

So what was the penalty for this minor spin? This minor protection of an illusion? This little hiding of the family secrets? Death. We need to let that sink in. It is easy to think that our belittling of our faults is a small, insubstantial act. After all, shouldn't we put our best foot forward? Shouldn't we protect our image? The answer in this circumstance is clearly no. We should tell the truth. And when we start creating farces in the body of Christ we are verging on death penalty crimes. You see, the body of Christ is that big of a deal.

We can learn a lot from Ananias and Sapphira. But when we contrast their decisions to Aquila and Priscilla I think we learn that our teamwork to do ministry must be kept pure. It must be kept pure from selfish, self serving motives. It must be kept free from deception, whether that is self deception or deception of others. The fact that there are husband and wife teams is to double the chance that the errors or lies will be exposed and dealt with. It is not so there are double the people working on keeping the facts hidden.

I have a question for you this morning. If you are married, how is your marriage being used by you or your partner to keep unresolved habitual intentional sin hidden? What happens in your house that, if exposed, would require intervention by other body members? How is your family serving to make people more **comfortable with sin** rather than **more committed to godliness**? It isn't difficult to know what God thinks of that. Just look at Ananias and Sapphira. They spent a lot of time **after** this story **close to one another**. But there was no warmth. They

were buried next to each other. Is that the kind of ministry we want to have to those closest to us? The ministry of death?

Now let's turn the corner. We looked at a bad example, a bad team, a bad marriage. Now let's look at a good one.

I think this is one of the most encouraging couples in the whole New Testament. You want to know what a Christian marriage can be? This is it. You will not find one of their names used without the other. It is even a coins toss to determine which name will be listed first. Sometimes it is Aquila and Priscilla. Sometimes it is Priscilla and Aquila. There might be no better married team in scripture. And while we are not told a whole lot, we never see them going against each other or undermining each others ministry. We always see them **cooperating** in ministry. And as we consider the implications of their circumstances I think that will become more and more impressive.

Acts 18:1 is where we first hear mention of this couple.

**After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. 3 So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. 5 When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus is the Christ.* (NKJV)**

So Paul left Athens and travelled to Corinth. Now remember that Corinth was sin city. It was the Las Vegas of their day. We find that Aquila and Priscilla were there because they had to vamoose from Rome. They were Jews and Claudius, the emperor, had commanded all the Jews to get out of Rome. So we learn that Aquila and Priscilla were also Jews. So they took their business to another town. We have no way of knowing why they picked Corinth. But if they were going where business was good, Corinth would be a good choice.

Now think about this. They could have chosen a town that Paul never visited. And it is likely that we would have never heard about this ministry team if that were true. But God has plans. He fully intended for these countrymen to come to Christ and to serve with Paul. They were going to be used to disciple people across the Roman kingdom. We can always rely upon God. He has a plan and He will carry it out. We truly do not need to worry.

Evidently both Aquila and Priscilla were tent makers. That means one that made small portable tents, of leather or cloth of goats hair. So Paul was in that same trade. Now did Paul **work for** Aquila and Priscilla? It is highly likely.

So we find that Aquila and Priscilla were business people. They had a business. And this allowed them some freedom they may not have had if it were otherwise. It was that fact that probably provided employment for Paul.

OK, so now we know how Paul met Aquila and Priscilla. But we still don't know much about them. Paul trusted them enough to work with them and they evidently were gracious enough to offer Paul lodging with them. These people are going to hear the Gospel. There is no question about that. And at some time, either before or after meeting Paul they met Christ.

Ok, so what happens from there?

Paul leaves Corinth. But look who is in his entourage? Priscilla and Aquila. They travelled to Ephesus. Why? Why did Priscilla and Aquila travel to Ephesus? Did it just happen that they wanted to move to Ephesus and Paul happened to be going there at the same time? I seriously doubt that.

Somewhere along the line I think Priscilla and Aquila caught the vision. I think that they were thinking like Paul thought. There is no sign that God told them to leave Corinth and go to Ephesus. But they understood God's will by this point. They knew what God cared about. And I believe Priscilla and Aquila simply prioritized those things that were most important to God. The truth is, if you have the right skill you can make money anywhere. You can buy a house anywhere. You can live anywhere. But they could not be in the middle of one of the most important ministries in history from just anywhere. They had to be where Paul was ministering. So they pulled up shop and moved their business location to Ephesus.

**Acts 18:18 So Paul still remained (in Corinth) a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had *his* hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. 19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. (NKJV)**

So Priscilla and Aquila re-settle in Ephesus. They moved their business. They pulled up whatever roots they may have had and left. Think about what you might have felt if you were them. Odds are one of them was likely to **like change** more than the other. One may have liked having things planned out. The other really didn't care. Naturally we don't know things like that. But we know how people are. What we know is that they made the right decision even if one of them may have liked the idea more than the other. Their lives continued being used in a very helpful way to the Kingdom and to Paul. This is not the last we hear of these two.

**Acts 18:24** Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. **25** This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. **26** So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. (NKJV)

So imagine a Ravi Zacharias or Billy Graham coming into town. And imagine that they are preaching accurately about how things **used to be**, but they are missing an important piece of the message. What do you do? How do you handle it?

Well here sit Aquila and Priscilla. They have spent a lot of time working alongside Paul. And what would you guess Paul might have been talking about during that time? The Bible? Maybe? I think that would be a safe bet.

So Paul has disciplined this couple into Bible scholars just by being with him. Now, they could have been full of self here. They could have stood up and defied Apollos to his face. They could have belittled him in public. They could have made themselves big shots by rebuking a big shot. That happens all the time. The internet is full of it. Or they could have preached sermons about him in their church. They could have taken pot shots at him and created enmity between him and them. But they didn't.

But that is not at all what they do. They took him aside, privately. There was no self in this. No selfishness. They simply lovingly correct him like we should correct anyone who is in error. And think of the effect that this simple ministry had. Think of the fruit it bore. Now the efforts of Aquila and Priscilla are bearing fruit in the travels of one of the greatest orators of that time. And how did that happen? By two simple business people doing the simple will of God. Nothing fancy, just faithful.

Paul was probably in Ephesus when he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians.

**1 Corinthians 16:19** The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. (NKJV)

Do you see what is happening here? Aquila and Priscilla had been disciplined well by Paul. They had paid their dues. They had learned about the Gospel. Maybe they had gone to Paul's school that he held during the heat of the day in Ephesus. Whatever the case, now they are pillars of a church. They have a church that meets in their house. And isn't it remarkable that he always mentions both of them.

Married couples, let this be an example to us. Let your ministry together be such that when people describe your ministry, they can't speak of one without the other. I see this as a goal, a target to shoot for. It is so easy for us to go our separate

ways, to live separate lives. It is easy for us to live together but not really know what each other is doing, what each other is striving for. Priscilla and Aquila- as it is stated some times, or Aquila and Priscilla, as it is stated other times, were a team. I wish we knew more. I have a feeling when we meet them in heaven they are just going to be normal hard working people. I would like to know how they maintained their tight teamwork. How did they work together so well? How did they keep each other in the loop? My guess is that they were both simply engrossed in the things that Christ cares about most. And they never lost sight of that. What they could accomplish for the kingdom was more important than what they could accomplish for themselves.

For certain they faced the same temptations we do that would pull us away from ministry. Surely they were tempted to make for themselves an easier life. They were likely tempted to put down roots and live a comfortable life. But what we gather is that both of them determined together that they would not allow that to be the priority. Maybe in most marriages one person is more spiritually interested than the other. Maybe one person is more concerned about ministry and the other is more concerned with something else. And certainly mothers and wives must carry out their motherly and wifely duties and fathers and husbands must carry out their fatherly and husbandly duties. Scripture certainly says as much. But it is wonderful when two people can share in the priorities of the kingdom in such a way where they are willing to accept the sacrifices that are necessary to be so involved in ministry, and with each other.

That is what we see with Priscilla and Aquila.

Let's learn some more.

## **2 Timothy 4:19 Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. (NKJV)**

When Paul writes to Timothy it is likely he is in Ephesus, ministering there, just like in I Timothy. And there are Priscilla and Aquila. Now the letter of II Timothy was written from Rome by Paul. So it was written **after** the book of Romans. So that means that this team moved from Ephesus to Rome and then moved from Rome to Ephesus. Why, we don't know. Maybe business. Maybe ministry.

And Paul says hello. These are clearly friends of Paul. They are endeared to Paul. He knows that they share his heart. They minister selflessly. And they are foundational in his ministry. How sweet it must have been to have these two on his team. From what we see of them, Paul probably wasn't worried about them splitting up. He wasn't worried they weren't getting along. Why? They were on a mission. And as long as the mission endured they had work to do, together.

Now to our text:

**Romans 16:3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5 Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house.**

Paul says- greet Priscilla and Aquila. And where are they now? They are in Rome. And why are they in Rome? Well they started in Rome before they were kicked out as Jews. They were from Rome before Paul met them. So maybe they were going back home. Maybe they had business interests there. It is difficult to know if the business they did was just the two of them or if they ended up having several “branches”. And it is just as likely that they are there because Paul sent them as an advance team to prepare the church for his visit. We simply don’t know.

How does Paul regard them? **My fellow workers in Christ.** He doesn’t address them as people he needs to minister to. He addresses them as those who are on his team. Those he can call on to do the tasks needing to be done. Like last week we see that it is partly their willingness to work that has endeared them to Paul. Never underestimate the value of work in our service to others. How good it must have been to have people like this he could just rely on to be there. Solid is good.

**who risked their own necks for my life**

These are gutsy people. Paul spent a lot of time in trouble. And during a lot of that time people would distance himself from Paul. Or at least they would not come and risk themselves for him. But Aquila and Priscilla did. They were willing to die serving and ministering to Paul. What Paul is likely referring to is the riot in Ephesus. We don’t know for sure. But aren’t those the friends you just love. These are people who are there for you. They don’t care what harassment that their **association with you** causes them. They will be loyal to you anyway. They love you. It is rare to find a better way to show your love than to continue to love, even when it puts your life or reputation at great risk.

On with our text:

**to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.**

Evidently this ministry team has a wide reputation. Maybe because Paul brags about them everywhere he goes. And everywhere he goes, everyone knows that it is ministry from people like this couple that really delivers the mail. It is couples like this that are doing the vital work on a day to day basis wherever they are needed. These people are sold out to Christ. Paul has the utmost confidence that when he sends them somewhere, it is as good as him going himself. They will do competent ministry.

And he finishes-



## **5 Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house.**

So what are Aquila and Priscilla doing at Rome? They are ministering to a church. Wow. What a surprise. Of course that is what they are doing. That is what team Aquila and Priscilla always does. They meet needs. They serve. They disciple. They evangelize. They see their purpose as being bigger than their marriage, bigger than their careers, bigger than their comfort. They live and breathe doing the things that are most important to Christ. So it doesn't matter where you find them. They are about the work of the master.

What a wonderful example to follow this morning.

Will we hold our lives and motivations up to theirs in comparison? What can we be counted on to do? How do we see our lives? What are they really for? How do our moments contradict what our mouths say? That is the real gist of it. Are our lives really being spent for anything more important than our pleasure and our obvious responsibilities that all families have? First do we really treat our families as discipleship and evangelism missions? And then secondly do we see our families as units to achieve ministry? How about our marriages?

The only thing to stop us from ministering like Aquila and Priscilla is us.