

Series: Romans

Title: They Laid Down their Lives

Text: Rom 16: 3-5

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Romans 16: 3: Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: 4: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5: Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house. Salute my wellbeloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.

We find Priscilla and Aquila several times in scripture. Priscilla is a Gentile name used by Roman aristocrats. She likely was a Gentile of wealthy Italian descent who grew up in Rome. Aquila was no doubt a Jew, born in Pontus, Asia. The two had originally lived in Rome—probably where they met.

Paul says “*Greet*” them—give them a big hug and a kiss for me. He gives them a great commendation—“*my helpers in Christ Jesus.*” Truly they helped Paul in the ministry of Christ. They helped at Corinth, Ephesus, Rome and they ended up back at Ephesus helping Timothy. Wherever they lived we find they had a church in their house

Proposition: Paul says of Aquilla and Priscilla that they “have for my life laid down their own necks” meaning, by God’s grace, Aquilla and Priscilla were willing to lay down their lives for Paul and the rest of their brethren that Paul might be saved from danger.

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Divisions: 1) The sovereignty of God 2) The constraining love of Christ 3) The fruit of that love

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Acts 18: 1: After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; 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. 3: And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. 4: And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. 5: And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. 6: And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean, from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

7: And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. 8: And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. 9: Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: 10: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. 11: And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

12: And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, 13: Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. 14: And when Paul was now about

to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: 15: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. 16: And he drave them from the judgment seat. 17: Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.

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;...19: And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. 20: When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; 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.... 24: And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. 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. 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. 27: And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: 28: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

We see the sovereignty of God in the lives of these three. Aquilla and Priscilla originally lived at Rome. But in God's providence, he moved Emperor Claudius to expel the Jews from Rome. So Aquilla and Priscilla had to leave all: their home, their business, her family. That was a big inconvenience. But nothing happens in our life by chance. God moved them to Corinth on purpose. At the same time our Lord moved Paul from Athens to Corinth and crossed their paths.

In God's providence they were all tent makers. Therefore, they became quick friends and Paul lived with them and worked with them. It could be Aquilla and Priscilla were not believers yet. It could be because rather than "faith in Christ" being the common bond between them, it says it was because they were all tent makers. But them being tentmakers was also God's providence at work to give them that bond.

The place Christ led them all to at Corinth had a synagogue where Paul preached *to Jews and Greeks*. So both Aquilla, being a Jew, and Priscilla, who was likely a Greek, were able to hear Paul preach Christ and him crucified. That very well may be where the Spirit of God regenerated them and called them to faith in Christ.

But right after that is when Paul shook his raiment and turned to preaching to *the Gentiles at Achaia*. Achaia is where God called out his elect child "*Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.*" Paul mentions him along with Aquilla and Priscilla. So having first met in Achaia he ended up at Rome with Aquilla and Priscilla by the sovereign, ruling, directing hand of God in all of their lives. It was also here that God made them meet Timothy who they end up helping at Ephesus in the end.

Then they travel with Paul to Ephesus. There God crossed their path with a preacher named, Apollos. They were used of God to inform Apollos that Christ had come and the Holy Spirit had been poured out so he began preaching the gospel of Christ. They were among the brethren that sent commendation of Apollos to Achaia.

By the time of our text, Paul was writing from Corinth but God had brought Aquilla and Priscilla back to Rome. Then later, when Nero burned Rome, they left their home and business again and ended up at Ephesus with Timothy, who they first met through Paul.

God's providential hand in bringing his people together under the gospel is amazing grace. It was a big inconvenience to their flesh, no doubt, to have to move that first time. But what grace for God to use that to cross their path with the apostle Paul and the gospel of Christ crucified. It is especially amazing if Paul was the one God used to call them out of darkness into his light. And God used them to help brethren as well as provide a building for a church to assemble in several places where they went. By God's sovereign hand, by God's grace, to the praise of God's glory, they truly were Paul's "*helpers in Christ Jesus*". All of that was by the sovereign hand and sovereign grace of our God.

Proverbs 16: 33: The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.

1 Corinthians 3: 5: Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even AS THE LORD GAVE to every man? 6: I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. 7: So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

THE CONSTRAINING LOVE OF CHRIST

Romans 16:4: Who have for my life laid down their own necks:

We do not know where or what they did for Paul but it involved great danger to themselves. Possibly it was in Achaia where they accused Paul of preaching against the law and beat the chief ruler. Or possibly it was in Asia when Paul said they feared they were about to die.

Wherever it was the fact is it was a great sacrifice which involved great danger. They laid down their necks for Paul. The picture is of Paul's head on the chopping block. He was charged and apprehended by religious leaders who were convinced Paul was guilty. He was not but when men have in their minds someone is guilty they do what they do, they think, for the glory of God even if it means harming one of the ambassador's Christ himself has sent. The law of the land apprehended Paul many times. But when Paul's head was on the chopping block, Aquilla and Priscilla stepped in, putting their lives in danger, so Paul could go free.

Do you see the constraining love of Christ that made them do that for Paul? That is what Christ did for his people. You and I, believer, were guilty of the whole law of God. Think of yourself apprehended by the law of God like Paul was apprehended. Your head was on the chopping block the same as mine. Paul was innocent most of the time. **BUT WE WERE GUILTY OF ALL CHARGES.** The ax of God's justice was justly about to fall on our necks and take off our heads. But our innocent Lord Jesus stepped in. He took our sins and laid down his neck in your room and stead, believer.

Romans 5: 6: For when we were yet without strength, in due time **CHRIST DIED FOR THE UNGODLY.** 7: For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. 8: But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, **WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US.** 9: Much more then, being now **JUSTIFIED BY HIS BLOOD,** we shall be saved from wrath through

him. 10: For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God BY THE DEATH OF HIS SON, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. 11: And not only *so*, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

It is this love of Christ that moves a believer when you see how awful your sin is, how guilty you are, then you behold that Christ said, ‘Wait, don’t charge him!’ Christ knew he would have to be made the shameful sin of his people. He knew he would have to bear the unimaginable suffering of God’s wrath and justice in being separated from God. But for you, dear child of God, Christ said, “That’s one I love, I will lay down my neck for him.”

If I truly know what a sinner I am, if I truly know that Christ stepped in and took my place, that makes a believer do the same for his brother when his brother is guilty. He takes the burden off his brother. He stands between those throwing stones and their brethren like Christ stood between the woman caught in the very act of adultery and God-hating Pharisee’s that accused her. Then Christ turned and said, “Does no man condemn thee? Neither do I. Go and sin no more.” That is laying down our life for a brother. Fulfilling the law of Christ is walking in the law of love, constrained in heart by Christ’s love for us. That brother restores his guilty brother in the spirit of meekness. That is the love that covers a multitude of sins. He does it for his guilty brother because he considers himself and his guilt and how Christ did the same for him—and he considers how Christ continues daily, even hourly, showing us mercy and forgiveness in all our guilty transgressions.

Paul dealt with this at Galatia. The devil and false prophets were deceiving the Galatian church. So those that only knew Christ intellectually did not have love in their hearts. Though they were as great a sinners as their brethren, they saw themselves as better and their brethren worse in light of whatever sin they saw in their brethren. So they were taking each other to law. They were charging one another with sin. That is so wicked for a professing believer. It is so ungodly to refuse mercy when a brother has confessed his guilt and asked for forgiveness. It is Pharisee-ism to go on charging with the law and shaming another when God has granted them repentance and broken their heart and turned them from their sin. If I go beyond that then I do not want grace or mercy, I want vengeance. God promises that is exactly what I will receive from God. So Paul told the Galatians if you bite and devour one another then you will consume one another.

Paul said instead fulfill the law of Christ. Brothers and sisters think of this personally. Christ saw you guilty as charged, with no defense, and guilty! Before as yet you repented, before as yet you were made to mourn your sin. Christ is all-knowing God. He knew the utter hatred of your sin-nature for him. Yet, Christ stepped in and took your shameful sin itself. It was so shameful to him that he prayed to God not to let his brethren be ashamed for his sake. Christ became guilty in your place believer. Christ laid his neck on the chopping block and said take off my head instead of yours. If I know the love of Christ in my heart then I will do a similar thing for my brother. I will stand between him and his accuser and say pour out his punishment on me. *“Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”*

That is the law of Christ—*“bear ye one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* Priscilla and Aquila saw Paul about to be slain. They stuck out their necks, risked their reputations, lost their jobs, risked their lives, to take his burden off him onto themselves and save him.

That is what the effectual, constraining love of Christ causes a sinner saved by grace to do for brethren who are vile sinners. If after Christ forgave me so great a debt, I go out and choke my brother over a debt that is far smaller in comparison, not matter what it might be, then I prove I do not know the grace and love of God.

But what if he is guilty? What if you are? Is that even a question? Aren't you guilty? Aren't I as guilty of my brethren everyday of sins of thought, word and deed that are an abomination to God but for the blood of Christ? Yet, Christ took the guillotine for you, believer, so you go free. And for Christ's sake God continues to forgive you every day. That will make us merciful and forgiving. God says it is what his children do when we are born of the Spirit and the love of Christ abides in us.

1 John 3: 14: We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death. 15: Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. 16: Hereby perceive we the love *of God*, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. 17: But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels *of compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? 18: My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. 19: And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

THE FRUIT OF LOVE

Romans 16: 4...unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

Aquila and Priscilla could have stood by and let Paul be slain. But by what they did God continued to use Paul to call out many more his lost sheep.

Oh, when God gives me opportunity to lay down my life for a brother let me remember that by Christ laying down his life for his people, he redeemed us and sent the gospel to us and the fruit is that he gave us life and faith in him. He robed us in his righteousness. He did through giving us his gospel.

Aquila and Priscilla had great love for Paul because of how God used him to minister to them and give them the unsearchable riches of Christ. Therefore, nothing could make them leave Paul to his accusers. So by God giving Aquilla and Priscilla the love to lay down their necks for Paul, Paul was spared and used of God to preach Christ and call out his elect Gentiles throughout that land.

The love of Christ made Aquilla and Priscilla see that this was not about themselves. It made Paul see it was not about Paul. They saw it was about the glory of Christ and his gospel continuing to go forth for the calling out of God's elect throughout the Gentile world. They believed Christ when he said, "No man shall hurt thee. Fear not! Preach the gospel! I have much people in this city." So God made them true helpers in Christ. He made them see what Christ did for them so that they laid down their necks for Paul. Then Christ used it to produce much fruit through Paul's preaching among the Gentiles—and all those sheep that Christ called out glorified and thanked God for using Paul, Aquila and Priscilla in such a profound way. Do we want Christ to receive all the glory? What a motive to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgive one another even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us!

Amen!