

Aquila and Priscilla

Part 1

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[00:00:01] Will you turn, please, to the book of Acts, chapter 18.

Acts 18, beginning at verse 1.

After these things Paul departed from Athens and came to Corinth, 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. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought, for by their occupation they [00:01:05] were tent-makers. Verse 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 Centuria, for he had a vow. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there, but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not, 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. Verse 24. And [00:02:06] a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. 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. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue, whom, when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expanded unto him the way of God more perfectly. 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, [00:03:03] for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures, that Jesus was Christ. I trust I shall be brief enough to allow for the scriptural patter that the speakers will be two, maybe three. Thinking about the earlier subject matter of 3 John, brings to mind again this very happy couple, Aquila and Priscilla. One very [00:04:09] commendable thing said about them, whenever they are referred to, they are together. A good start, isn't it? Like-minded in the faith, like-minded in their desire to serve the Lord. A very good start in a relationship, husband and wife. The text may explain that on the six occasions referred to, Aquila is mentioned first on three occasions, and the wife Priscilla is mentioned first on the other three occasions. I think this was mentioned the other day in passing in the reading. Without undue difficulty, it's reasonably easy to [00:05:09] see that when the matters considered are formal, objective, ecclesiastical, Aquila is mentioned first. Where the matters considered are domestic, informal, unofficial, the wife Priscilla is mentioned first. Some are easier to see than others. I propose, briefly, to look at the six occasions where they are referred to, and I've read the first three occasions from Acts 18. Accepting, and there's no reason why we shouldn't, accepting the dates at the top of most of our Bibles, what we are going to read about cover a span of about 12 years. So, again, these are

things which were consistently practised and lived out, walking in the truth, [00:06:10] for an extended period of about 12 years. In the opening of this chapter, which we've looked at, we read that certainly Aquila was a converted Jew, and it seems a reasonable assumption that Priscilla was also a converted Jew. They were tent makers, they had a trade, a craft, and because of this they had this identification with the Apostle Paul. Doesn't always happen, but there was this additional bond that they had a certain commonality in the way that they lived their lives. Now, I just propose to look at these occasions and to see some of the elements that come out, bearing in mind that whenever they are [00:07:04] addressed, they are seen to be together. Now, in the first three verses of chapter 18, a very simple thing, they were there, Paul landed on the scene, and Aquila and Priscilla were there, they were available to help, and they were willing to do so. Now, isn't that a good situation? Very simple, nothing to make a song and dance about, but they were there, they were able and in a position to provide hospitality, and they were willing to do so. It's said officially about the Deacon Stephen that he did a lesser job, a smaller job, in such a way that he was commended and willing and available to do something [00:08:04] more responsible. In simple terms, if we do for the Lord a simple little job within our capacity, the Lord will give us the enlarged capacity and the opportunity to take on more responsibility for him. Examples come to mind, but time doesn't permit. Let us leave it at that. Doing a little job well may well lead the Lord to assess us as being capable and giving us the capacity and the training to do something of more responsibility. I think I'll just leave that there and look at the second occasion from verses 18 to 21.

What Paul learned of them in their own home, bearing in mind that while in the meeting [00:09:11] and with others, we may well keep on a mask which seems to convey the impression that I'm very spiritual, if the mask slips, it slips at home, doesn't it? Temper, habits, conversation, if, well, it's at home that we show what we are really like. Well, Paul having spent some time in the home of Aquila and Priscilla, when the time comes for him to move on, he's happy to encourage them to go along with him as travelling companions.

If it had been me, if it had been my wife and me, and someone, one of the Lord's servants [00:10:06] was with us and got even a slight impression that we might make him suitable travelling companions in the work of the Lord, I wonder how long it would be before he found that we had irritating little habits, ways of doing things that interfered with his service for the Lord. Now, it would seem by the long association that Aquila and Priscilla had none of these defects which I suppose mark most of us. He deemed them to be suitable to go with him. They went along with him on the journey and they proved entirely suitable companions. Whether Aquila carried the bags, I don't know. Whether Priscilla helped in the cooking and helped a sister that they stayed with, bear in mind that if it was a [00:11:06] sister living on her own, it could well be that she wouldn't feel free to accept a single man, the Apostle Paul, on his own. But because there was a sister in the party, Priscilla, she may well have been easier in taking the three of them in. These are practical considerations, aren't they? Well, whatever. It certainly seemed there was nothing about Aquila and Priscilla that in the longer term proved themselves to be unsuitable for this major servant of the Lord. These are just little reminders, aren't they, that it may be the little things in life whereby we rub each other up the wrong way and interfere with the fellowship and the work of the Lord. Well, that wasn't true of them. And when [00:12:01] we get to verses 24 to 28, we come to a major consideration.

Apollos comes on the scene. I always get mixed up on this one, but it doesn't matter.

I can never remember whether Apollos was an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures, or whether he was a mighty man, eloquent in the Scriptures. I think it works both ways. Mighty man, spiritually, and

eloquent. He had the capacity. Now, everybody won't agree with me on this. I've said it lately somewhere else. I do not think that the Lord waits till [00:13:01] we are converted before he begins to form us for service. We know in his case the vessel began to be formed physically and in every way from his mother's womb, separated from his mother's womb. But in principle, I'm convinced of this. Whatever the Lord brings upon us, whether circumstances or experiences, without our knowing it, he is gradually forming us as a vessel for service. We don't know it at the time. You and I don't know what future service the Lord is fitting each one of us for. But if he leaves us here until his coming, there must be something that he wants us to do for him. As the little hymn [00:14:04] says, there's a work for Jesus none but you can do. Now, the Lord doesn't need to wait until we are converted. He doesn't need wait until the day before he wants us to take up some service for him. And I'm sure, built into this person, Apollos, there were personal qualities that meant when the time was right, the Lord could take him up and use him in the work of the Lord. An eloquent man, mighty in the scriptures. In his case, at that time, what we speak of as the Old Testament scriptures. He couldn't be mighty in the scriptures if he wasn't conversant with them. He wouldn't be conversant with the scriptures if he didn't [00:15:02] study them. He wouldn't be able to study them unless he read them and his mind was saturated in what the scriptures say, little by little, line upon line, precept upon precept, as the scripture says. And so, such a one as Apollos came to Ephesus, instructed in the way of the Lord. If we were studying Acts, we would say now there's a characteristic phrase, the way, the way of the Lord, that way. At least nine times that I've discovered, you get the way. Referring to the Christian way, the way of life that's produced in those to whom Christ is Lord. Well, he was instructed in the way of the Lord, being fervent in spirit. These were personal characteristics that made him suitable. He spoke and taught diligently, the authorised [00:16:06] says. If you look up the linguists, they will tell you he taught accurately the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. There were things he needed to know to make further spiritual progress in his own soul. He was only instructed up to the level of what the Old Testament scriptures presented to Jews. He'd responded to that, and he'd responded to John Baptist exhortation to repent and to cut himself off from a wayward generation, the unbelieving majority of the nation of Israel. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, [00:17:01] and, it says, Aquila and Priscilla took him to one side. Oh, what we hear in the meetings is wonderful, whether it's a conference or more locally or regionally. But often, the best things we hear, the sweetest things we learn, are outside of the meetings, in conversation, in going over the things of the Lord together. Happy are we if we don't limit our conversation about spiritual things to the meeting. It would be sad, wouldn't it, if in my home, my voice had never been heard either mentioning the scriptures or in audible prayer. If the only time my family had ever heard me either speaking of the scriptures or praying, if their only knowledge of that [00:18:02] was in the meetings, there's much to be done in encouraging one another outside of the meetings. It says they took him unto them and expounded unto him the way of God. Now, the language is choice, isn't it? He already knew the scriptures accurately, up to the level of his then understanding. He was accurate in his knowledge. But he needed to be brought up to date. He needed to see that, as we've said in the language of John's second and third epistles, the truth, there was more to the truth than he then knew. He had to be brought up from being a converted Jew, he had to be brought up to date with the truth of God concerning Christ the Son. And so we read that where he had known the way of God [00:19:03] accurately, they were able to expand unto him the way of God more accurately. And again, because while in the conversations they were talking over the things of the Lord, I would certainly not be surprised that in this connection Aquila is mentioned first. Having been used of God, conversationally if you like, to impart this more accurate knowledge of the interpretation and application of the then scriptures, the Old Testament scriptures, he was then equipped to be taken up in the work of the Lord, and we read he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, that the one of whom the scriptures presented as Messiah, he was able to identify him in Jesus the Christ. 1 Corinthians

chapter 16. [00:20:17] 1 Corinthians 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. Assemblies multiplied, very good. It wasn't always possible to have a large number of believers in the same area, with the limited transport that there available. Aquila and Priscilla didn't brood about it. [00:21:05] They said, well, we can't go out to a meeting, we'll have one in our house. The church that is in their house. They were able in their home, obviously they'd settled down by this time. I've read these scriptures in chronological sequence. By this time they must have settled down domestically, and we read that there was no other assembly to be identified with in the locality, so it was identified as being in the home of Aquila and Priscilla. In better days, how often we've been advised that in the last days, we may well get down to that again. The church that is in thy house. And in many parts, we are back to that level once again, aren't we? [00:22:05] It was good enough for Aquila and Priscilla. If necessary, it should be good enough for me. The church that is in thy house. Let us be encouraged that if it's absolutely necessary, the Lord will give us the grace to follow this excellent example of Aquila and Priscilla. Back to Romans 16. Comes before Corinthians in the Bible, but we understand it's about a year or 18 months later.

Romans 16 verse 3. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have for my life laid down their own neck, unto whom not only I give thanks, [00:23:04] but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise, greet the church that is in their house. Those with good hearing would notice the emphasis here.

My helpers in Christ Jesus, what marked them at the beginning? Remember, when we first read about them, Paul met them, went to stay with them, enjoyed their hospitality, and they demonstrated they were willing to help. Simple, but vital. Because of that, he took them with him on some of the journeys. They hadn't lost that. They hadn't been disillusioned. They hadn't been disappointed. They weren't distressed about the general condition of things. They said, as long as Paul needs helpers, we are here and we are willing to help. [00:24:12] Satan would discourage us to the point of giving up. Let us not let him have the victory. As long as we have strength, as long as we have breath, let us be encouraged to being available to help in the work of the Lord. And addressed here, greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus. Now again, where possible, Paul highlights Priscilla as being willing and going along with Aquila, both of them together once more, in making facilities available for the great Apostle Paul. Who have, for my life, laid down their own neck? We'll look at the negative example first. Well, we'll turn to it. Nehemiah 3. Well-known example.

[00:25:22] Nehemiah 3. The rebuilding of the walls, remember? Sword in one hand, trowel in the other. And every now and again, they're given a stint. They're given a job to do.

Every now and again, you read, and so-and-so did another bit, another portion, going beyond the minimum, the allocation, anxious to help. But when we come to verse 5, next unto them the Tequoites repaired, but their nobles put not their necks, plural, to the work of their Lord. [00:26:08] Could it be that because they were of high noble standing socially, so determined to retain their individuality, that they were a little more reticent in making themselves available in this concerted, unified work? Necks, plural.

They're so identified, not only both names mentioned wherever a reference is made, but they're so at one in what they do that it says here that who have, for my life, laid down their own neck. Whatever may be true of translation versus translation, easy to check up that this is the accurate translation of the text. Two people, one neck. In other words, they're so close together, they're so willing to be helpers of the Lord, [00:27:18] that they are drawn together and work together in the work the Lord

gives them to do. It's true physically, isn't it? If two of us are close to a third person, we are close to each other.

Surely it's evident from the scripture that a very good reason for Aquila and Priscilla being close together and acting as one was because as individuals they were close to the Lord. And being close to the Lord as individuals, there was no question of one individual asserting him or herself against the other one. Their work was done in complete agreement, in complete peace, it was a work for the Lord. [00:28:15] Happy to say this even in the minute text of Holy Scripture.

Verse 19. Salute Prisca and Aquila. That's all it says. But think of this. Paul, he knows he hasn't long. The time of my departure is at hand.

[00:29:09] No doubt feeling his age, feeling his weakness, feeling his restriction, his thoughts go back. And among other things that he thinks about, among other people that he thinks about, he thinks, oh yes, Aquila and Priscilla, weren't they good to me? Weren't they good for me? Hospitable, willing to help, always there, always together. What sweet memories he would have. He just says, give them my greetings. You and I know servants of the Lord who, when their time of service is over, the Lord has made it plain that their days of public service are over.

[00:30:12] Restricted to their homes, maybe even bedfast, maybe they've even lost the power to transmit their thoughts, to communicate with us the way they once did. We all know cases. But they have their thoughts. I wonder if those who've served us over the years so well, if now that they are laid aside and no longer available to us to help us in the way they once did, I wonder when they think about those who've encouraged them in their service, I wonder would they feel free to think about you and me? Paul did. While he waits for the Lord to take him, Paul wanted it both ways, you know. In one way, he said, Philippians 3 goes into it, he says, I'd like to die with my boots on, in active service, still engaged in the work of the Lord. [00:31:22] But on the other hand, he says, really, the normal Christian viewpoint is to be waiting for the coming of the Lord. But he says, if the Lord chooses to take me before then, I want to be active as long as I can. But even when that is over, he had his thoughts, he had his feelings, he had his appreciation. And it's happy to see, isn't it, that this couple who'd been so helpful to him, encouraged him in his major work for the Lord, when his time of service was over, he said, oh yes, Aquila and Priscilla, remember me to them. [00:32:04] I remember all they did for me, and I'm thankful to the Lord for it. I think, consistent with 2 and 3 John, these practical scriptures have a lot to help us with, and may the Lord help us to live them up.