**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Cherished Friendships Of Paul (5): “Priscilla And Aquila; Double Blessing”**

**Acts 18:1-4; 18:24-26; Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19**

**September 24, 2023**

The last chapter of Romans is one of the most remarkable chapters in the Bible. In the first sixteen verses, Paul sends his greetings to at least twenty-four individuals by name, as well as two unnamed saints. He also closes with greetings from nine believers who were with him when he wrote the letter. That’s a lot of names, which reveals that Paul was “a friend-maker as well as a soul winner; he had friends in the Lord, and he appreciated them” (Wiersbe, Romans).

The first two names call for special attention: “*Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that is in their house*” (Rom. 16:3-5). We don’t know where or when they put their lives at risk for Paul, but this event remained entrenched in Paul’s mind, and it left him with a lasting sense of gratitude for his two devoted friends.

Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned six times in the New Testament – three times in Paul’s letters and three times in Acts. Each author, Paul and Luke, puts Priscilla before her husband in two out of the three times he mentions them. Perhaps the reason was spiritual (she may have been converted before he was or more involved in Christian service than he), or social (she may have been more prominent in the community), or due to her temperament (she may have been the dominant personality). Whatever the reason, both authors recognize her value and worth by placing her name before his, more often than not.

Paul’s friendship with them dates back to his initial visit to Corinth on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-17). Like Paul, they were Jews and tentmakers (Acts 18:2-3). Having moved to Corinth from Rome, they later accompanied Paul to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19), where they hosted a house church for several years before returning to Rome (1 Cor. 16:19). While in Rome they hosted another house church (Rom. 16:5), and by the end of Paul’s life they had apparently returned to Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:19). Their loyalty to the ministry of the gospel, and willingness to use their home as a means of Christian witness, offer a timely challenge to us today.

**A. Their Ministry Begins in Corinth (Acts 18:1-4).** “*After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome*. *Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks*.”

Aquila was born in Pontus, which was a large Roman province on the southern shore of the Black Sea. We are not told why or when he emigrated to Italy, or whether this move was before or after his marriage to Priscilla. But we do know that they left Rome for Corinth together, and the reason why.

In God’s providence, Aquila and Priscilla had been forced to leave Rome because of the Edict of Claudius (AD 49). According to a first century Roman historian, riots were breaking out in the Jewish community because Jewish Christians were preaching the Messiahship of Jesus. The Edict was a simple fix: all Jews must leave the city. For some unknown reason, Aquila and Priscilla fled as far as Corinth, where they were thrown into a close association with the Apostle Paul, who would arrive shortly thereafter.

Providentially as well, Aquila and Priscilla were both tentmakers, as was the Apostle Paul. When he found them, he also found needed employment with them (his funds were no doubt depleted). He also lived with them during his lengthy stay in Corinth, working at his trade on every weekday, and witnessing boldly in the synagogue on every Sabbath. A lifelong association with Aquila and Priscilla resulted, which included their fellowship in Christian ministry and their daily labors in the same trade.

The arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia (northern Greece) enabled Paul to devote more time to his ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:5; 2 Cor. 11:9), but he never broke off his business ties with Aquila. In the words of one author, “Tentmaking allowed Paul, during the year and a half that he remained in Corinth, to keep himself financially independent of the Corinthian Church (2 Cor. 11:9). Through their partnership with Paul, Aquila and Priscilla received a priceless spiritual boon and rendered the church a great service” (Hiebert, In Paul’s Shadow).

Were they already believers when they first met Paul? Neither Luke nor Paul ever suggest that they were Paul’s converts. Nor would it seem likely that they would have so readily accepted Paul as a business associate if they weren’t in the faith, knowing that he was a minister of the Gospel of Christ. In all likelihood they were converted to the Christian faith while in Rome, and their associations with Paul would have led them into a greater involvement within the Christian community, as we shall see. “*Every Christian church should be thankful for people like Aquila and Priscilla, people with hands, hearts, and homes dedicated to the Lord*” (Wiersbe). First comes the devoted heart, then the working hands, then the open home.

**B. Their Ministry Shifts to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-22):** “*Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila . . .They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. But as he left, he promised ‘I will come back if it’s God’s will.’ Then he set sail from Ephesus. When he landed at Caesarea he went up and greeted the church* (at Jerusalem) *and then went down to Antioch* (in Syria).”

It's important to note that when Paul left Corinth, his hosts left with him. After his brief stay Ephesus, he sailed to Caesarea, then “went up” to Jerusalem (some 65 miles southeast), and finally “down to” Antioch (300 miles north), reporting to and ministering in the church that had commissioned him to reach the Gentiles. But he left his two devoted friends in Ephesus. **Q.** Why would he leave them there? **A.** “Their presence in Ephesus would not only lay the groundwork for his intended work there but would also provide a means of livelihood for him while preaching in that city” (Hiebert, In Paul’s Shadow). As it turned out, they would remain there for four or five years, hosting a congregation of believers in their home. They were probably there during Demetrius’ riot (Acts 19:23-41), which may have been the occasion when they risked their lives to protect Paul.

During his absence, Priscilla and Aquila attended worship services in the Jewish synagogue, where a gifted teacher was preaching from the Old Testament Scriptures. Here’s Luke’s report:

“*Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only of the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately*”

(Acts 18:24-26).

Luke’s ordering of their names implies that *Priscilla* led in their ministry to Apollos, and not merely joined with her husband in his meetings with Apollos. But as one commentator notes well, “This personal and private ministry with her husband . . . in no way negates the teaching of the New Testament that excludes a woman from a public ministry of teaching and ruling a church (Cf. 1 Tim. 2:12)” (George W. Knight III, The Role Relationship of Men and Women).

It is also a lasting tribute to their tact and graciousness that such a learned scholar and noted rabbi would so readily have received their instruction. “The ministry that they rendered in the privacy of their home proved to be a great boon for the cause of Christ; for Apollos, having been fully illuminated concerning the gospel, became an effective worker. With the other believers in Christ who resided in Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila encouraged Apollos in his desire to carry his ministry to Achaia (Acts 18:27)” (Hiebert).

Later when Paul returned to Ephesus and wrote 1 Corinthians (see 16:8), Aquila and Priscilla sent them warm greetings, as former members of the Corinthian church: “*The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets in their house*” (1 Cor. 16:19). This provides us with an added glimpse into the ministry of this hospitable couple. Not only had they furnished Paul a home in Corinth, but they also opened their home as a regular meeting place for believers in Ephesus. Thus their home became a center for mutual help, Biblical instruction, and united worship.

**C. Their Ministry Continues in Rome.** While still in Ephesus, Paul made plans to pass through northern and southern Greece and then go on to Rome (Acts 19:21). Some months later, when he wrote the letter to the Romans from Corinth (Acts 20:1-3), he sent greetings to “*Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 16:3). Evidently, when Paul left his work in Ephesus after the Ephesian riot (Acts 20:1), they also decided to leave the city and return to Rome – undoubtedly in full agreement with Paul.

Their presence in Rome would assure Paul of a ready acceptance by the church when he arrived. It would also further the cooperation of the church in view of Paul’s plans for missionary work in Spain (Rom. 15:22-24). But in conveying his greetings to them, he adds, “*Greet also the church that meets at their house*” (Rom. 16:5). Once again, they had demonstrated their commitment to hospitality by opening their home for the saints in Rome to assemble. How would Paul have known that? He had already heard the good news, and he would *not* have been surprised! Their services to the cause of Christ far exceeded their assistance to him.

**D. Their Ministry Concludes in Ephesus.** The last Biblical reference to this remarkable couple is found in 2 Timothy 4:19, where Paul writes, “*Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus*.” Since Timothy was stationed in Ephesus when Paul wrote this letter, it seems obvious that Priscilla and Aquila were once again living in Ephesus. They would have been drawn back not only because of their business connections they had established there, but also because of their strong ties with the Ephesian church. This return to Ephesus may well have been their last move.

Paul had good reason for his high esteem of this remarkable couple. By calling them his “*fellow workers in Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 16:3), he placed them side by side with himself in the service of Christ. They had furnished him a home, and a means by which he could maintain his financial independence, and they shared in his aggressive efforts to spread the gospel wherever he went. He was also personally indebted to them for their brave intervention on his behalf, having “*risked their lives*” for him. In saving his life, all the Gentile churches were also indebted to them. And so are we!

Everyone agrees that Paul was a great apostle, and a dedicated missionary, and an exceptional teacher. But how much would he have accomplished *alone*? Friends like Priscilla and Aquila, along with Silas and Timothy and the generous believers in Macedonia, all made it possible for him to serve the Lord in the amazing ways that he did. Aquila and Priscilla, in particular, encouraged him at a time when he needed it the most.

Humanly speaking, there might not have been a church in Corinth were it not for Aquila and Priscilla; nor would Paul have survived his ministry had they not “risked their lives” to save his. Everyone needs friends like these to encourage them; and we should be encouraging others in the same way. The Christian life *is* a team effort. That’s the way God designed it.

Encouragement *is* something everyone can do. Encouragement is also something everyone must receive. If God’s greatest gift to us is His Son (John 3:16), then His second greatest gift to us is one another! Priscilla and Aquila, along with the rest of Paul’s friends, are constant reminders of how much we need one another. Why, then, would we even think about facing the challenges of the Christian life alone?