

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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THE NECESSITY OF SOLID CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Acts 18

August 29, 2021

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This message has four points:

- Paul lived and worked with tentmakers.
- Paul ministered with Timothy and Silas.
- Paul strengthened the church.
- Priscilla and Aquilla taught Apollos.

PAUL LIVED AND WORKED WITH TENTMAKERS

SCRIPTURE: Acts 18:1-4

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² 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 Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. ⁴ Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

EXPLANATION: Paul decided not to wait for Timothy and Silas and made the 53-mile excursion to Corinth alone. Once there, he connected with Jewish Christians named Aquila and Priscilla, who were also new to the area. This couple was expelled from Rome along with other Jews as a result of the conflict the Jews had created with Christians.

In terms of business interests, Corinth was a great place for the tentmakers to settle. Athens was the cultural seat of Greece, but Corinth was the political and commercial center. Their business would have thrived in a city filled with travelers and merchants. Spiritually speaking, however, Corinth was full of debauchery, so much so that the word “corinthianize” meant “to practice whoredom.” The term “Corinthian” denoted a person who was reckless and extravagant.

Priscilla and Aquila were probably like fish out of water. As Jews, they held a high regard for morality, but because of their faith in Christ, they no longer fit into the Jewish community. They were Christians, but were there other Christians in such a wicked city? Paul's arrival must have been an answer to prayer. It was equally so for Paul who connected with the couple not only in matters of faith but also in terms of their careers. Paul too was a tentmaker or, as the word also means, a leatherworker.

ILLUSTRATION: Zebras and ostriches are an unlikely team. Zebras have distinctive black and white stripes. Ostriches are heavy, enormously oversized, flightless birds. Zebras can hear well and have an acute sense of smell. Because of their height and keen vision, ostriches can see much better than most mammals. Despite their differences, the two animals have something very important in common. They are a favorite food source for larger and faster animals such as lions, leopards, and hyenas. For zebras and ostriches, offense is the best defense. The zebra homes in on the sounds and smells of predators, and the ostrich keeps an eye out. Early detection of a predator allows them to make a quick get-away. By hanging out together on the African planes, the animals double their chances of survival.

EXPLANATION: In the letter he later wrote to the Corinthians, Paul talked about how he came to them "in weakness and with great fear and trembling." The mission field had taken a toll on him. His boldness for the gospel had not waned, but his body had taken several beatings. A constant threat of violence hung over his head. The burden of the lost lay heavy on his soul. With no visible source of income and relying on the generosity of others, his funds were most likely running low. In Corinth, Paul hung out with Priscilla and Aquilla. They gave him a place to live and recuperate, and a means by which he could earn money to sustain himself and his ministry. His Sabbath-day preaching provided them with the spiritual nourishment they needed in an otherwise evil environment. Like the ostrich and zebra, Paul's relationship with Aquila and Priscilla was mutually beneficial.

PAUL MINISTERED WITH SILAS AND TIMOTHY

SCRIPTURE: Acts 18:5-11

When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. ⁶ But when they

opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”⁷ Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God.⁸ Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.⁹ One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent.¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”¹¹ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

EXPLANATION: By the time his old friends finally caught up with him, Paul was ready to jump back into full-time ministry. He set aside tentmaking and launched into his daily evangelical routine. As always, he longed for fellow Jews to come to know Christ. Unfortunately, the majority response was the same.

As we’ve talked about before, Jews considered the Gentiles evil, uncouth, and ill-bred. After traveling through a Gentile land, a Jew would go so far as to shake the dust from his sandals to symbolize his hatred for the Gentiles. In reaction to the Jewish rejection of the gospel, Paul repeated this action and, again announced his intent to take the message to the Gentiles. He did not have to go far. He found his new pulpit in the house next door to the synagogue. Paul’s efforts were not in vain. Many Corinthians came to know Christ, including one of the synagogue leaders.

ILLUSTRATION: In the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, a runner named Derek Redmon was a favorite to win a medal for his home country of Britain. Midway through the 400 meter race, he tore his hamstring. He struggled to finish the competition despite his pain. In what would become an iconic Olympic moment, his father broke past security and ran onto the track. He wrapped his arms around his son and helped him complete the race.

EXPLANATION: With Timothy and Silas at his side, Paul too found the energy, enthusiasm, and opportunities to continue his ministry. This passage does not tell us exactly what Timothy and Silas did, but like Derek Redmon’s dad, I imagine they came along beside Paul, supporting and encouraging him as he tried to finish his race. As a result of their efforts and the work of the Holy Spirit, the church in Corinth grew to “many people,” and Paul was able to stay there for more than a year and a half.

PAUL STRENGTHENED THE CHURCH

SCRIPTURE: Acts 18:18-22

Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken. ¹⁹ They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. ²¹ But as he left, he promised, “I will come back if it is God’s will.” Then he set sail from Ephesus. ²² When he landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch. ²³ After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

EXPLANATION: The Lord told Paul that he would not be attacked or harmed, but that did not mean that everyone would love and accept him or God’s word. Verses 14-17 (which we did not read today) explain another incident that could have ended in violence and severe damage to the early church in Rome, but God intervened to protect Paul and his people. Finally, it was time for him to leave and continue his mission elsewhere.

As he embarked, Paul cut his hair as a visible demonstration of a vow he had taken. This Nazarite vow would have included three steps:

1. They let their hair grow for a certain length of time.
2. After the period of time had passed, they would cut their hair.
3. Finally, they would sacrifice their hair at the temple in Jerusalem as an offering of thanksgiving and praise.

I don’t have time to explain the Nazarite vow but you can look it up. Each step was to be completed within certain time parameters. This explains why Paul could not stay in Ephesus longer, even when the Jews invited him to do so. It also explains why Priscilla and Aquila did stay. Once Paul fulfilled his public and formal thanksgiving in Jerusalem, he continued to strengthen the churches he had established—teaching them, correcting them, and encouraging them in the way they should go.

PRISCILLA AND AQUILA TAUGHT APOLLOS

SCRIPTURE: Acts 18:24-28

²⁴ Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. ²⁵ 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 the baptism of John. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. ²⁸ For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

EXPLANATION: Because of Paul's vow and how it worked, he did not have a chance to answer all the questions that the Jewish Ephesians wanted to ask. So, God sent another evangelist named Apollos. Apollos was a gifted speaker, and he was well-versed in what we know as the Old Testament scriptures, but Apollos was not fully equipped to share the gospel message. He believed in Christ and had devoted his life to Him, but his knowledge was incomplete. As students and friends of Paul, Priscilla and Aquila picked up on the holes in his theology.

The couple could have publicly embarrassed Apollos. They could have called him out or tried to rebuke him when he spoke in the synagogue. Instead, they invited him into their home, and in a safe, comfortable atmosphere, they helped him understand the parts of the gospel message he had missed. An interesting side note here: In ancient culture, it was customary to use the husband's name first when discussing a couple. However, in four out of the five scriptural references regarding Priscilla and Aquila, Priscilla is mentioned first. This may have been an indication that she was a woman of higher social rank than her husband, but the more likely explanation is that she was the one who more prominently served within the church. Regardless, as a result of their teaching, Apollos was able to spread the gospel message even more effectively.

1. Paul lived and worked with Aquila and Priscilla.
2. Paul ministered with Timothy and Silas.
3. Paul strengthened the church.
4. Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos.

APPLICATION: Paul did not live, work, or minister in isolation. He needed other believers to encourage and help him. We do too. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.” When we work and minister together and strengthen and teach one another, we all grow closer to the Lord and each other. More importantly, we, like Paul, Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos, can multiply our efforts to share the gospel and reap a great harvest for God’s kingdom.

The title of this message was The Necessity of Solid Christian Fellowship. We all need it!

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