

# PM Acts 18:18-28 Priscilla and Aquila

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Tonight is from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 18, continuing our studies on Paul's missionary journeys.

! Reading from chapter 18, verse 8, down to verse 28, the end of the chapter.

Paul stayed many days longer, and then took leave of the brothers, and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila.

At Cancria he had cut his hair, for he was under avow. And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. But on taking leave of them, he said, I will return to you, if God wills.

[ 1 : 18 ]     And he set sail from Ephesus. When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch.

After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next, through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples.

Now, a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the scriptures.

He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus.

Though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

[ 2 : 38 ]     And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed.

For he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Let's join together again now in prayer. Well, let's turn now to the Word of God and those verses that we read from Acts chapter 18.

We've been looking, whenever I've been preaching on Sunday evenings, at the missionary journeys of Paul.

And we read here of the end of his second journey, and the beginning of the third. Leaving Corinth, where he was in the first half of this chapter, he goes to Ephesus, he returns to Caesarea, goes up to Jerusalem, back to Antioch, and then out again, travelling through Asia, on what was to prove his final journey, before his arrest in Jerusalem.

[ 4 : 23 ]     But it's not all about Paul. In verse 18, another couple are mentioned, Priscilla and Aquila. who travel with him to Ephesus, where they have a remarkable ministry, teaching Apollos, the way of God.

Read in verse 26, when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, that is Apollos, they took him aside, and explained to him, the way of God, more accurately.

And Apollos went on to be a great preacher of the gospel. Here is a reminder that ordinary Christians can do extraordinary things in the church.

We'll look tonight, first at Paul's continuing ministry, and then Priscilla and Aquila's ministry to Apollos, and then Apollos himself, beginning his ministry.

[ 5 : 38 ] And I hope that we'll learn some useful lessons, not just about first century church history, but about what we ourselves can do.

So first, Paul's continuing ministry, in verses 18 to 23. Paul, you may remember, had been preaching in Corinth.

He'd stayed there for 18 months, and a church had been established. And encouraged by a vision, he had continued, in spite of all the violent opposition.

But now at last the time has come to move on. And in verse 18, he took leave of the brethren at Corinth, and he set sail for Syria, taking Priscilla and Aquila with them.

Priscilla and Aquila had been a great help to Paul. You may remember, we met them at the beginning of chapter 18, and they were husband and wife, or maybe I should say wife and husband, since they're mentioned in that order here.

[ 7 : 05 ] They'd come to Corinth, when the emperor Claudius had ordered all of the Jews, to leave Rome. They were Jewish by birth.

Christianity was regarded, just as a sect of Judaism. So they got caught up in that edict. They were tent makers like Paul, and he'd stayed with them.

And they had provided him with much needed fellowship. Now they travel on with him on the next stage of his journey.

First, though, there's the strange incident of the haircut. At Cancreia, he had cut his hair as he was under a vow.

Not quite clear whether that refers to Paul or to Aquila. I assume it was Paul.

[ 8 : 15 ] It's also not quite clear what it was. Maybe some kind of temporary Nazarite vow. We don't really know.

Calvin thinks that it was a concession to the Jews. All part of being all things to all men, that he might by all means save some.

Old Testament rituals are no longer necessary. But here is Paul submitting to what appears to be an Old Testament ritual as part of his ministry to the Jews.

What it does show, though, is that vows are still lawful for a Christian. I mention that because there are religious groups that deny that and say that we should never swear any kind of oath whatsoever.

That doesn't appear to be the teaching of Scripture. I don't know how well you know the Westminster Confession. It's the foundational document of our church.

[ 9 : 40 ] But there is a lesser known section of the Westminster Confession which is about oaths and vows. It says that they must be made carefully and they must be performed faithfully.

Do we make any vows today? Well, we do, don't we? The most obvious example which most of the adults here will have taken at some time is the marriage vow.

And I hope that if you've made such vows you always have and you always will remain faithful to those vows. But other vows are possible as we see here.

Psalms 116 says I will pay my vows in the presence of your people. And that seems to be what Paul is doing here.

So, haircut complete. They cross over the Aegean Sea to Ephesus. Which incidentally was quite a journey. And I gather it could take up to a week by sea.

[ 11 : 08 ] For Priscilla and Aquila that is journey's end. For now anyway. And for Paul himself it's only a short visit.

He goes into the synagogue as usual and he reasons with the Jews apparently with some success. Because later on in verse 27 he mentions the brothers implying that there had been some who had been converted.

They ask him to stay longer but Paul says no he has other plans. According to the authorised version he said I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem.

Though that entire sentence seems to be missing from the ASV. I don't know the reason why. But again Calvin explains that as another concession to the Jews.

He didn't have to keep Jewish festivals. But he wanted to be there with his own people during the festival. But he promises to return if God wills.

[ 12 : 27 ] All of our plans have to be qualified by that don't they? Not that we have to religiously say if God wills every time. But certainly that should be our attitude of heart.

that whatever plans we make are subject to the Lord's will. The Latin for that is Deo Valente and sometimes you see church events advertised as DV.

Deo Valente if the Lord wills. Paul now sails from Ephesus to Caesarea and then he went up and greeted the church.

It doesn't actually say but that almost certainly means the church in Jerusalem. Because that's the way it was always described that you went up to Jerusalem.

As in Psalm 122 Jerusalem is built as a city to which the tribes go up. Literally if you've been there you'll know that you do go up.

[ 13 : 40 ] It's situated up in the mountains. And spiritually you're going up. Up to the temple of God. Duty done in Jerusalem.

Goes back down to his home church in Antioch. Having spent some time there he begins his third missionary journey. traveling through Galatia and Phrygia strengthening the disciples.

No companions are mentioned here but from what we read later it would seem that Timothy was with him and maybe others. Paul very seldom traveled alone.

And we'll leave Paul there on his journeys with simple admiration for the sheer energy of the man.

He was a man who was full of zeal redeeming the time serving his master tirelessly.

[ 14 : 48 ] We'll come back to him later on next time. But for now we return to Ephesus and to this couple that he had left there Priscilla and Aquila and their ministry to Apollos in verses 24 to 27.

Priscilla and Aquila are among the unsung heroes of the Bible. Paul evidently thought very highly of them and he mentions them frequently in his greetings.

They seem to have traveled around quite a lot and we keep on meeting them in different places. In 1 Corinthians 16 verse 19 written probably from Ephesus when Paul returned there he writes Aquila and Prisca together with the church in their house send you hearty greetings in the Lord.

Prisca that's a kind of pet name for Priscilla rather as if she was called Elizabeth and he refers to her as Liz.

He knows them very very well. they seem to have then gone back to Rome because we read in Romans 16:3 his writing to Rome greet Prisca and Aquila my fellow workers in Christ Jesus who risk their necks for my life to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well.

[16:39] So there's a whole lot more here that we don't actually know about their lives. They risked their necks for Paul. They obviously did things that are not actually recorded in the New Testament but things that Paul had noted the churches of the Gentiles had noted and the Lord had noted.

Again in 2 Timothy 4:19 they seem to be back in Ephesus again. Greet Prisca and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. Well here in Acts 18 they're in Ephesus for the first time where Paul had left them.

And they're attending the synagogue no doubt regularly. And then one day Apollos turns up.

Now this wasn't just any old visiting preacher. this was a celebrity. Apollos we're told was a Jew from Alexandria in Egypt.

One of the greatest cities in the ancient world. It was a great center of learning. Had a famous library.

[18:04] Mentioned this morning my library of 6,000 books. Well they had a library of hundreds of thousands of scrolls. Ptolemy the ruler of Egypt had started it with the intention that it would contain all of human knowledge.

That was the background this man came from. They had the Pharos lighthouse there. One of the seven wonders of the world. There had been a Jewish community there for centuries.

Indeed it was in Alexandria that the Septuagint which I mentioned this morning the Greek translation of the Old Testament the Bible that was used by Paul it was there in Alexandria that it was actually translated.

So here is Apollos coming from this intellectual powerhouse of a city Alexandria and he's quite a preacher.

It says here he was an eloquent man competent in the scriptures. Authorized version says he was mighty in the scriptures. A great preacher who knew his Bible.

[19:29] inside out. Furthermore he had been instructed in the ways of the Lord. He knew about Christ and he was fervent in spirit.

This wasn't just some dry academic. This wasn't just the librarian from Alexandria come to tell them about the history of the Septuagint.

This was a powerful preacher preacher who was preaching to them the glory of God. God's great deeds for his people in times past and the glory of the Messiah.

Must have been quite exciting to hear such a man. God's God's And as far as it went what he said was right.

He spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus. And there was no lack of courage in him either. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue.

[20:41] How exciting it must have been for Priscilla and Aquila when Apollos arrived. This couple seems to have always been in the right place at the right time for visiting preachers.

They're there in Corinth when Paul turns up. They're here in Ephesus when Apollos turns up. Twice blessed. But there's something not quite right about this man.

And soon it becomes obvious what it is. He knew only the baptism of John. Now we might think that was just a technicality.

Okay, he was getting the words wrong when he did a baptism. easily put right. But actually no, this was quite a big issue.

John was indeed a prophet sent from God. He was sent to prepare the way of the Lord. But his baptism was a baptism of repentance awaiting the Messiah.

[ 22 : 05 ] The Messiah has now come. John himself had announced him. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

He has died. He has risen again. He has poured out his spirit. John himself had said, I baptize with water but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

and Christian baptism therefore is in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. But Apollos was missing all that out.

He would baptize a person simply because they repented. Perhaps he would baptize in the name of the Father maybe even the Son but certainly not the Holy Spirit.

He just hadn't grasped it. He only knew half the Gospel. That's why they have to teach him the way of God more accurately.

[ 23 : 22 ] It doesn't just say they taught him the correct words to speak at baptism. They taught him the way of God. This mistake over baptism it revealed a misunderstanding of the Gospel which had to be put right.

How could this have happened with such a great intellectual man? Well I think we have to try to think ourselves back into the situation in first century Alexandria.

you're a little bit cut off from events in Jerusalem. But John the baptism was an enormously popular preacher. He had disciples of his own and some of those disciples had obviously gone to Alexandria and Apollos had heard about him probably in the synagogue there.

But that is all he'd heard. The practical effects of this become obvious later in Acts 19 when Paul returns and he meets twelve disciples who are also disciples of John.

Maybe they were converts of Apollos or just fellow disciples of John we don't know. But Paul quickly realized with them as we will see next time that they didn't have the Holy Spirit.

[ 24 : 55 ] Indeed they'd never even heard of the Holy Spirit. And Priscilla and Aquila must have sensed something similar here. Something was missing and it had to be put right both for his sake and for the sake of the people he was preaching to.

And they rise to the occasion. In verse 26 they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

Now correcting people who are wrong is one of the most difficult ministries there is. But Priscilla and Aquila manage it here to perfection.

notice three things about their ministry to Aquila to Apollos. First their diplomacy or shall we call it their sensitivity.

They took him aside. They didn't just shout out at him in the synagogue. You know I've heard of that happening.

[ 26 : 19 ] A brother who disagreed with a preacher in a church stood up and shouted out the Bible does not say that. We might think that was very courageous but actually it just came across as very rude.

The man didn't receive the criticism and the brother that I've spoken of had to leave the church. Achieved nothing. But they don't do anything like that. They don't embarrass him in public.

They take him aside. Maybe to some quiet place in the synagogue or maybe they invited him to their own home. Secondly notice their patience.

They explained it to him. That implies going through it step by step. Making sure that he understood exactly what they were saying.

And thirdly their knowledge. They were able to do this because they understood the gospel perfectly. I would love to know what they said.

[ 27 : 27 ] I can somehow imagine them saying to him a great sermon Apollos. I loved what you said about Christ in the Psalms. But I'm just a little bit worried that you didn't mention the Holy Spirit.

And they could take it from there. Whatever they said they won over this great man. He accepted what they said and he went out a new man understanding the gospel for himself and ready and eager to preach it in all its fullness to others.

Now I think Apollos himself deserves some credit in this. It took wisdom, persuasion and tact on the part of Priscilla and Aquila but it also took humility on the part of Apollos.

for the great Apollos to be corrected by this unknown Jewish couple. That was quite something but he accepted it.

Didn't get on his high horse and object who are you to teach me? I've got a diploma from the University of Alexandria and you're just tent makers.

[ 28 : 52 ] no, no, he said nothing of that kind. Here was a man who loved the truth more than he loved himself, more than he loved his own reputation.

He accepted correction and he came out a better man for it. Now, we need that ministry of correction today.

We need to be able to correct others and we need to be willing to be corrected ourselves. Even great men get things wrong.

That is the point of this passage, isn't it? Even the great Apollos got things wrong. Sometimes it's through ignorance.

Sometimes it's through willfully rejecting the truth. Bishops, archbishops, theology professors, famous preachers, they're not infallible.

[ 30 : 04 ] Not enough for us just to complain about them. and criticize them behind their backs. We must be willing, if the Lord gives us opportunity, to correct them.

Indeed, we must be willing to correct anyone, great or small. In a sense, the ministry of the gospel itself is a ministry of correction, isn't it?

here are millions of people going their own way on the broad way that leads to destruction. Should we not at least try to redirect them into the right way?

If you see someone driving towards a cliff, would you not at least frantically wave at them to warn them? Or would you just shrug and say, stupid driver?

They may not like it. You're questioning their deepest beliefs. You're questioning their chosen lifestyle. But then again, they might thank you for it.

[ 31 : 13 ] They might know in their heart that they're lost and be glad of your help. Correction is one of the main purposes of the scriptures.

In 2 Timothy 3 16, all scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction. If we're going to teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, as we read this morning in Colossians, that must include correction according to his word.

Has to be done, though, in love and in gentleness. Paul says in Galatians, brothers, if anyone is caught in transgression, you who are spiritual should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.

Whether it's a moral fault or whether it's a doctrinal fault. Now, I know I'm a hostage to fortune here because you might want to correct me.

over the years, I've had many people who've wanted to correct me. Some, to be honest, have been wrong and have simply been wasting their time and mine.

[ 32 : 33 ] Some have been arrogant, absolutely convinced that their opinions must be right. Some have been proud, wanting to show off how much they know.

some have been petty, picking up on trivial matters. Some have been cruel, wanting to crush me.

But some have been right, and they've done it well, and I've listened. One incident will always stay in my memory.

Two young women who had led me to Christ. were once offended because I had spoken sarcastically about the church.

So they took me aside. They invited me for a meal. And for the first five minutes of that meal, there was absolute silence.

[ 33 : 34 ] And then they explained with tears in their eyes why they'd invited me. And I saw it straight away that I was wrong.

Sometimes, of course, there are just differences of opinion that can't be resolved. Though even there, loving discussion can be helpful.

Sometimes we may be wrong and need correcting ourselves. But it's always worth trying. James says, he who turns a sinner from the error of his ways saves a soul from death and covers a multitude of sins.

Correcting people is a difficult ministry. And often we prefer not to try. Priscilla and Aquila tried.

And they were successful. people. Let's learn from their example. Finally, let's notice the sequel. Apollos beginning his own ministry in verses 27 and 28.

[ 34 : 50 ] Presumably, Apollos continued to preach in the synagogue at Ephesus for a while. But the time came when he wanted to move on and the brethren in Ephesus encouraged him.

verse 27, when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. How good it is when we have the church behind us in what we do.

So important that we don't try to be lone rangers. So important that we share with our brothers and sisters what the Lord has led us to do so that they can pray with us and encourage us in all of the work of the Lord.

He went off to Achaia and it worked out well. He greatly helped those who believed for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

That would never have happened if it were not for Priscilla and Aquila. Later it's true problems arose.

[ 36 : 04 ] Apollos was so good that a sect in Corinth formed around him saying we are of Apollos whereas others were saying we are of Paul.

Paul has to correct them. In his letter to the Corinthians he says that all such divisions are sinful. We're part of the same team.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. There's no reason to think that Apollos encouraged that division and Paul continues to speak highly of him.

But all that lay in the future. For now the church could rejoice in another great preacher of the gospel. As we close I would simply ask you to consider how all this can apply to you.

Three brief thoughts. First, ordinary people can achieve great things. God didn't need to send Paul to deal with this problem of Apollos.

[ 37 : 19 ] Priscilla and Aquila could deal with it themselves. Maybe you think of yourself as a very ordinary person with limited gifts. You may be surprised at what God can do with you.

Especially where there's a husband and wife who can work together with the different complimentary gifts that a husband and wife will often have.

Need not be correcting people. Might be hospitality or befriending people or helping the elderly or the lonely or the unwell or people in some kind of trouble or it might be teaching young Christians.

There's so much you could do and twice as much if there are two of you. Indeed maybe more than twice as much because often a couple working together are more than the sum of their parts.

Jane and I always in the ministry tried to work together and we still do. Second we must be open to the possibility that we are wrong.

[ 38 : 44 ] There was a famous occasion in 1650 when Cromwell afraid that the Scots would invade England and put Charles II on the throne marched north with his army and from outside Edinburgh he wrote to the General Assembly with the immortal words think it possible brethren that you may be mistaken.

they didn't think it possible they fought and they lost and for the next nine years Scotland ceased to be an independent nation.

Always think it possible you may be mistaken. Especially tonight if you're not a Christian think it possible you may be mistaken and listen to the gospel or if you think you are a Christian but others have questioned it think it possible you may be mistaken maybe you're not converted after all consider that possibility but if you are a Christian listen to the word listen to other Christians even when it's painful to listen to some kind of criticism Apollos listened follow his example finally admire in all of this the wisdom and the love of God he didn't write

Apollos off because he'd got it wrong and if you and I are wrong about anything he doesn't write us off he'll send someone to put us right because as Peter said he wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth maybe God is looking with love upon someone here longing for them to come round to his way of thinking may the Lord give us ears to hear and hearts to receive whatever the Lord may say to us amen