

Paul's Ministry at Corinth

Acts 18

Acts 18:1-17: *"After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. ³ So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.*

⁵ When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. ⁶ But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."⁷ And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸ Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

⁹ Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you or hurt you; for I have many people in this city."¹¹ And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

¹² When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, ¹³ saying, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."

¹⁴ And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. ¹⁵ But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters."¹⁶ And he drove them from the judgment seat. ¹⁷ Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things."

Background Notes

Paul left Athens and went to Corinth, a journey of about 50 miles. Paul settled in at Corinth, and stayed there for at least 18 months (v9-11). If the 18 months of verse 11 is measured from the time that Paul received his encouraging vision (v9-10), then his total time at Corinth would have been somewhat longer than 1 ½ years.

Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia to join Paul in Corinth. Remember, Paul had been waiting for them to join him in Athens after their ministry at Berea. Perhaps Silas and Timothy were delayed, or maybe Paul left Athens sooner than he expected. On the other hand, Silas and Timothy may have joined Paul in Athens, and then Paul sent them back on another mission to Macedonia. Timothy did return to Thessalonica some time during this time period, because Paul mentioned this in 1 Thessalonians, which was written while he was in Corinth.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:6 Paul wrote, "... *Timothy has come to us from you and brought us good news of your faith and love.*" As a result of this good news that was brought by Timothy from Thessalonica, Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians. Then, while Paul was still in Corinth, he wrote 2 Thessalonians. The date of this stay in Corinth (and thus the writing of 1 and 2 Thessalonians) was during the early 50s AD.

After Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth, Paul began devoting himself completely to the Word, or to "preaching the Word," as some translations put it. This doesn't mean that Paul suddenly became more dedicated to studying and teaching the Word, but rather that he probably no longer needed to support himself by making tents. Most likely Silas and Timothy brought a financial gift for him from the churches in Macedonia.

Doctrinal Points

1. The work of the Lord involves adapting to various situations.

In this chapter we see that Paul adapted to a number of different situations at Corinth. When he first arrived in Corinth, apparently he was low on funds. Have you ever been in that situation? I'm specifically referring to low funds in the ministry. What do you do when funds run low in a ministry that you believe the Lord has called you to do?

Well, you do what the apostle Paul did - ***you adapt and adjust to the situation***. That's what the Bible is teaching here. Paul adjusted by going out and getting a "secular" job. He knew the trade of tent making and he got a job with Priscilla and Aquila because they were tentmakers. "*And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. ³ So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers*" (v2-3).

Are you willing to adapt and adjust to a situation of need by "making tents"? Some years ago I was involved full time in a youth ministry, and funds ran low. There were five of us on staff. What did we do? Did we quit and assume God wanted to close down the ministry? No! We all got part-time jobs and kept the ministry going. The Lord blessed the ministry, and taught us all some great lessons about depending on Him.

As a result of making tents, Paul met Priscilla and Aquila. He may have won them to the Lord, although Priscilla and Aquila may have already been believers. In any case, through their relationship with Paul, Priscilla and Aquila become great servants of the Lord.

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul adapted to another situation. Apparently now he had enough funds to teach and preach full-time again, and so he did. He adapted to that situation, and devoted himself more exclusively to ministry.

Then, when the Jews at Corinth refused to believe and became abusive, Paul adapted to that situation. He left the synagogue, turned to teaching the Gentiles, and found a new place to preach and teach – right next door to the synagogue!

And of all things, Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, became a believer, along with his whole household. It appears that a man named Sosthenes replaced Crispus as ruler of the synagogue. When Gallio, the Roman proconsul, refused to hear the case of the unbelieving Jews against Paul, some anti-Jewish Greeks took this as an opportunity to beat up Sosthenes. The *bema*, or “judgment seat” at which this case was probably heard still exists today, and can be seen in the ruins of ancient Corinth.

As a result of all this, it appears that Sosthenes became a believer as well, and joined the apostle Paul. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians about five years later, Sosthenes was mentioned as a “brother in Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:1).

Paul adapted to changing situations. The work of the Lord involves adapting to different situations.

2. The work of the Lord involves assisting various saints.

Acts 18:18-28: “So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. ¹⁹ And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, ²¹ but took leave of them, saying, “I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.” And he sailed from Ephesus. ²² And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch. ²³ After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

²⁴ Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵ This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. ²⁷ And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; ²⁸ for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.”

What was the vow that Paul took? We don’t know, but cutting his hair was a sign that the time of this vow was over. (Read Numbers 6 in this connection.) Paul took Priscilla and Aquila with him to Ephesus, and left them there when he

went back to Antioch of Syria to complete his second missionary journey. Meanwhile, Priscilla and Aquila were busy laying the groundwork of the church at Ephesus, which Paul would visit on his third missionary journey (beginning in verse 23).

While Priscilla and Aquila were helping the believers in Ephesus, a powerful preacher named Apollos came to Ephesus and preached the Word boldly in the synagogue. Priscilla and Aquila heard him preach. Apollos was a learned man who knew the Scripture well. He knew the truth about Jesus as the Messiah, but he was only acquainted with the baptism of repentance of John the Baptist. Apparently, he did not yet know about the doctrine of the Church being the body of Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

So when Priscilla and Aquila realized that Apollos was not adequate in his doctrine, what did they do? Did they shun him, or call him a heretic? No! They assisted him! They helped him grow. They took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately (v26). They probably had him over to their home for coffee and dinner in order to share the truth with him.

Apollos listened, and learned. He then went on to Corinth, sound in doctrine, thanks to Aquila and Priscilla who assisted him. He was a big help to the new believers in Corinth, and he also debated vigorously with the unbelieving Jews, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

Aquila and Priscilla's help and instruction was extremely valuable in Apollos' life and ministry. The work of the Lord involves assisting various saints.

Practical Application

You can be a "Priscilla & Aquila couple."

This application is especially meant for married couples. When you follow Priscilla and Aquila through the New Testament, you find them at Corinth, at Ephesus, and at Rome. They moved around quite a bit - but everywhere they went, they always served the Lord.

1 Corinthians 16 mentions that a church met in their home in Ephesus. There's no doubt that Priscilla and Aquila sacrificed a lot of their personal time, and their material possessions, and their future security in order to be free and flexible and available to serve the Lord. And they were blessed together as a married couple.

You, too, can be blessed as a married couple if you are willing to sacrifice to serve the Lord. You can be a Priscilla & Aquila couple!