

## Called to Explain

Ten-year-old Aiden was furiously working with paper and pencil when Stefanie, his mother, came into his room.

"It's time for dinner," she said coming closer. "What are you working on?"

"A flyer for Brother Ervan," said Aiden without lifting his head.

"What is it about?" Stefanie asked, sitting down on her son's bed.

"Brother Ervan said he likes preaching and telling people about Christ. And Pastor keeps saying he's good at it," the little boy said. "But Brother Ervan doesn't feel like he's really good at it. He wants to go to Jesus school, but doesn't have enough money."

"You mean Bible college or seminary," Stefanie said.

"Well, if we raise money to help Brother Ervan go to Jesus school, he can learn more, and be better in helping people."

From the mouths of babes, Stephanie thought as she looked over the flyer.

The next Sunday at church, Pastor Green asked Brother Ervan to stand. He explained how the young minister wanted to attend Bible college to be a better-equipped minister of God. He also asked Aiden to stand. The pastor told the congregation about the 10-year-old boy's idea for fundraisers to help pay the expenses.

The congregation broke out in applause.

"That sounds like a yes!" said Pastor Green. "We will begin organizing now to raise funds to help send Brother Ervan to Bible college."

- 1.** *What are some of the advantages of working together?*
- 2.** *Why do we often avoid working with others?*
- 3.** *Why should we work together to spread the Gospel?*

## Paul Meets Priscilla and Aquila

*Acts 18:1-3, KJV*

1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;

2 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.

3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

*Acts 18:1-3, NIV*

<sup>1</sup>After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup>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, <sup>3</sup>and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

Acts 18 shows Paul's inclusive view of women in his interactions with the couple Priscilla and Aquila. Paul first met them in Corinth, where he worked bivocationally as a "tentmaker" (vs. 3) while starting a church in the city.

Priscilla and Aquila were in Corinth involuntarily because the Emperor Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome about A.D. 49. The frequent forced exile of the Jews became known as the *diaspora* (see Jas. 1:1, translated as "scattered"). Because of it, Jewish synagogues were established all over the Empire. When Paul visited a new city, he often went to the synagogue first to look for opportunities to preach the Gospel. As a visiting Pharisee, he would have been invited to read Scripture and expound upon it during the service.

When Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, he discovered they were also tentmakers, people who work with canvas, rope, and wooden tent supports. Besides working with Paul, the couple also opened their home to him, so he could have disciplined Priscilla and Aquila while they helped his ministry.

**4.** *Why were Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth?*

**5.** *What did Paul have in common with Priscilla and Aquila?*

## Priscilla and Aquila Join Paul

*Acts 18:18-21, KJV*

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 Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.

20 When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;

21 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.

*Acts 18:18-21, NIV*

<sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. <sup>20</sup>When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. <sup>21</sup>But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus.

After spending 18 months in Corinth, Paul set sail from the port of Cenchreae for Antioch of Syria, his "home" church that had sponsored his second missionary journey. When Paul left, he took Priscilla and Aquila with him. Obviously, the three had experienced a successful ministry together in Corinth, and Paul wanted the relationship to continue.

Luke adds an interesting comment about Paul's need to cut his hair off because of a vow he had taken. This would have been to indicate the conclusion of a temporary Nazarite vow, where Paul would have abstained from all forms of alcohol and not cut his hair. Paul would have taken this vow as an expression of solidarity with his Jewish countrymen, assuring them that he was not dismissing his Jewish heritage as no longer having any importance to him. The shaving of his head would have been a public event, and he would have

held on to the cut braids in order to eventually burn them at the temple in Jerusalem (as an act of gratitude to the Lord).

After leaving Antioch, Paul took Priscilla and Aquila to Ephesus to establish a church there. With a population of at least 250,000, Ephesus was one of the major cities of the eastern Roman Empire. Paul went to the synagogue in Ephesus, and as a Pharisee who was now a follower of Christ, he reasoned with the Jews about Him. Apparently his message resonated with people there—they asked him to remain. However, he felt he needed to go to Jerusalem (18:22). Clearly he had enough confidence in Priscilla and Aquila to nurture this flock after he left. He would come back, he said, “if it is God’s will,” and he did return on his third missionary journey to stay for two years and three months (19:8-10).

**6. Why did Paul cut off his hair?**

**7. What was Paul’s primary way of doing ministry in Ephesus and other cities?**

## Priscilla and Aquila Teach Apollos

*Acts 18:24-26, KJV*

24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

25 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.

26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

*Acts 18:24-26, NIV*

<sup>24</sup>Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.

<sup>25</sup>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. <sup>26</sup>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.

*KJV*

*Romans 16:3-4*

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:

4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

*NIV*

*Romans 16:3-4*

<sup>3</sup>Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus.

<sup>4</sup>They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

Sometime after Paul left Ephesus, Apollos arrived. He was an eloquent speaker, apparently well-versed in the Scriptures, and would have recognized Jesus as the Deliverer described in the Old Testament prophecies. After coming to Christ, someone instructed Apollos in the ways of Jesus, so that he taught “accurately” and with passion (vs. 25).

However, there was a gap in his theology that needed to be filled. Apollo only understood the baptism of John, a baptism of repentance. When Priscilla and Aquila heard this, they took him aside and expanded his understanding of what baptism truly means now in light of the atoning work of Christ. From what we can tell from Paul’s frequent reference to Apollos in 1 Corinthians (1:12; 3:4-6, 22; 4:6; 16:12), this fervent minister of the Gospel took this correction to heart.

Much has been made of the order of Priscilla and Aquila’s names in the New Testament. They are referred to six times in the New Testament (Acts 18:2-3, 18, 26; Rom. 16:3-4; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19), five times as a couple. Four of those times in the Greek text Priscilla’s name is mentioned first, Aquila’s once. While we cannot say definitively from this fact who was leading in their relationship and who did the most teaching, we can infer that both Paul and Luke regarded them as having a powerful influence not only in Corinth and Ephesus, but according to Paul, in “all the churches of the Gentiles” (Rom. 16:3-4). they even “risked their lives” (vs. 4) for Paul, though he does not say when or how.

**8. *What characterized the teaching of Apollos?***

**9. *Why did Apollos need further instruction by Priscilla and Aquila?***

## A Three-Strand Cord

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says that “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. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

We often picture Paul as a lone missionary spreading the Gospel by himself around the Roman Empire. But that picture is inaccurate. Priscilla and Aquila are just two of the many associates Paul had in ministry. They taught Apollos and hosted a church in their house in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19). Paul mentions the couple in his second letter to Timothy, implying that the couple were still in Ephesus faithfully ministering there as Paul neared the end of his life. Further proof of Paul’s many associates is found in Romans 16, where he greets 29 people (including Priscilla and Aquila), many of whom were his friends and coworkers in ministry.

It is estimated that over 200 million people personally listened to the Rev. Billy Graham preach at live events. Many millions more heard him via radio and television. But he was not a one-man ministry. Teams of people organized, promoted, and set up his crusades, and many musicians shared the stage with him. Hundreds of counselors followed up with those who heard his message and gave their lives to Christ.

Spreading the Gospel is often done one on one, but reaching millions of people for Christ is a task best done by Christians working together.

**10.** *Did your church work as a team to help you come to Christ? If so, explain how that happened.*

**11.** *Why is sharing the load a good principle for evangelism?*

**12.** *How could your class become a team to spread the Gospel?*

## A Letter of Gratitude

The apostle Paul's heart was filled with gratitude when he wrote his letter to the Romans. One couple he thanked, Priscilla and Aquila, for faithfully assisting him in ministry. When we think about how we came to faith in Christ, we may also be filled with gratitude to several people who worked together to help us, and we are then challenged to do the same for others.

► *Write a letter of gratitude to those who assisted you finding faith in Christ. At the end of the letter, tell how you will try to be part of a team that will reach others with the Gospel and disciple people further in the faith.*

### KEY VERSE

Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

—Romans 16:3-4, KJV

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

—Romans 16:3-4, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of February 22 through February 28

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** 1 Peter 4:7-11—Don't Complain; Serve One Another.

**Tues.** Romans 12:9-19—Everyday Expressions of Hospitality.

**Wed.** Acts 16:35-40—Hospitality Practiced in Jail and Home.

**Thurs.** 1 Timothy 5:9-10; 3:2—Hospitality Practiced by Widow and Overseer.

**Fri.** 1 Corinthians 1:18-25—Christ, God's Power and Wisdom.

**Sat.** 1 Corinthians 2:1-5—Know Jesus Christ Crucified.

**Sun.** Acts 16:11-15, 40; 1 Corinthians 1:26-30—Lydia, Model of Hospitality Practice.