



FOCUS VERSE

Acts 18:26

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.

LESSON TEXT

Acts 18:1–3, 24–26

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.

.....

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.

Romans 16:3

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus.

I Corinthians 3:9

9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.



FOCUS THOUGHT

Maintaining a position of respect can be instrumental in leading hungry people to God.



CULTURE CONNECTION

The Role of Respect and Having an Effective Witness for Christ

Fundamental respect is possibly the first step toward effectiveness in reaching out to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others. It is easy for believers to disregard and disrespect the beliefs of others whose beliefs fail to align with those of the believer. However, before we can lead a person to embrace the truths of Scripture, we first have to understand where he or she is presently in their biblical understanding. Before we can understand where a person is with regard to his or her present beliefs, we have to respect that person as an individual, which includes respecting their current beliefs or lack of beliefs.

Everyone is on a personal journey through life, and God desires to lead each one to a

redemptive relationship—beginning where he or she is presently. To fail to extend basic respect and courtesy to others is a sure formula for failing to have influence in their lives.

Ron Moore wrote, “Respect comes from the realization that God is at work in people’s lives. Not one of us is a finished product. Respect allows a person to grow. Respect gives an individual room to grow and places them in a situation where they can grow. But the bottom line is this: We respect and value people because God values people” (www.ronmoore.org, “Respect: The Foundation of an Effective Team,” accessed February 26, 2015).

Aquila and Priscilla were able to effectively witness to Apollos because of their respect for him.

OUTLINE

- I. COMPANIONS IN THE GOSPEL**
 - A. Aquila, Priscilla, and Paul Were Tentmakers
 - B. Aquila and Priscilla Showed Hospitality to Paul
 - C. Aquila and Priscilla Helped Paul
- II. POSSESSED GREAT ABILITIES**
 - A. Apollos Was Talented
 - B. Apollos Was Mighty in the Scriptures
- III. TAUGHT THE WAYS OF THE LORD**
 - A. Apollos Was Fervent in Spirit
 - B. Apollos Had Limited Knowledge
 - C. Apollos Preached What He Knew
- IV. JOINED GODLY COMPANIONS**
 - A. Aquila and Priscilla Were Respectful
 - B. Aquila and Priscilla Taught Apollos
- V. RESPECTING OTHERS IN MINISTRY**
 - A. Be Teachable
 - B. Be Respectful
 - C. Be a Partner

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

The greatest friendships we will ever develop will be the friendships we make while working for Christ. These friendships can develop either as a result of working together for a common cause in the kingdom of God, or as the result of one individual leading another to Christ. Because of the shared goal, these friendships often last a lifetime. The attachment between companions of Christ may transcend even the attachments between members of one’s extended family.

But these relationships do not develop automatically and without great care. They are rather characterized by mutual respect, hospitality, and a common commitment to remaining faithful to the cause that was the original basis of the relationship.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. COMPANIONS IN THE GOSPEL

A. Aquila, Priscilla, and Paul Were Tentmakers

After leaving Athens, Paul went to Corinth where he met Aquila and Priscilla, refugees fleeing Rome after Emperor Claudius's edict expelling Jews. (See Acts 18:1–2.) Suetonius, an ancient Roman historian also mentioned this edict, but Suetonius added the detail that Claudius had expelled the Jews because they were constantly being instigated by someone named "Chrestus" (a Latin spelling of Christ) (*Claudius* 25.4). The Roman historian did not know enough about Christians to distinguish them from Jews. To outside observers, in the earliest years of the Christian movement, Jews and Christians were often regarded as one group. Thus if Suetonius's account is accurate, then Aquila and Priscilla may have been Christians who had already suffered persecution before Paul met them. Whatever the case, they came to Corinth and began to work at their trade—tentmaking.

The city of Corinth hosted the Isthmian Games in honor of the sea god Poseidon every two years. Travelers from all over the civilized world would come to Corinth either to witness or to participate in the games. Since they would need a place to stay once there, tents would have been in high demand at such times. Aquila and Priscilla may have come to Corinth at this time and set up shop in the marketplace because of a known demand for tents.

Paul was also a tentmaker by trade (Acts 18:3), and he used this business as a way of ensuring he was not overburdening a struggling congregation with further financial burdens. (See I Thessalonians 2:9; II Thessalonians 3:8.) Paul may have also set up a booth in the same marketplace at this time, and it seems likely it was in the marketplace—perhaps in neighboring booths—that the couple from Rome first met Paul.

B. Aquila and Priscilla Showed Hospitality to Paul

According to Acts 18:3, having already settled in Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla hosted

Paul when he traveled there. Having found Paul prepared to declare to the Jewish synagogue that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 18:5), the couple could have, in the interest of personal safety, decided to distance themselves from Paul. After all, they had just escaped Rome and its citizens' hatred and distrust for Christians. It would have been easy for them to settle down in anonymity, working quietly at a profitable trade in a new country far from the troubles that had threatened their lives. But they did not choose the quiet life; they chose to take up Paul's cause. His powerful enemies became their enemies; his few friends became their friends.

C. Aquila and Priscilla Helped Paul

The relationship between Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila grew over the years, and the next time we hear of them, they had moved from Corinth back to Rome (Romans 16:3). As they had opened their home to Paul in Corinth, so had they opened their home to host the congregation in Rome. Paul asked the Roman congregation to greet Aquila and Priscilla who, Paul said, "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 16:4). Paul affectionately called them "my helpers in Christ Jesus" (Romans 16:3). It can be difficult at this distance in time to appreciate how much affection and devotion these few words express. What memories must be behind them! Perhaps there was a particular moment when Aquila and Priscilla saved Paul's life while exposing themselves to great danger, or perhaps Paul's words refer to the day-to-day dangers of hosting him in their home.

II. POSSESSED GREAT ABILITIES

A. Apollos Was Talented

Once Luke finished discussing Peter's escape from prison and the death of Herod Agrippa in Acts 12, the Book of Acts rarely turned its attention away from Paul, who in spite of the many other great developments among other apostles and evangelists at the time, was quite central to Luke's narrative purposes. Luke did, however, take a few moments to turn from Paul's journeys to give us

a momentary, but telling, glimpse of Priscilla and Aquila's evangelistic success. In Acts 18:24–28, while Paul was visiting the churches of Galatia and Phrygia, Luke turned his attention to Ephesus, where Aquila and Priscilla met and instructed a certain man named Apollos.

Luke said Apollos “mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ” (Acts 18:28). This statement, in spite of its brevity, gives us a wealth of information about Apollos and the role he played in the early church.

Apollos was uniquely gifted as a public orator; he “mightily convinced” his Jewish hearers.

Once converted to Christ, he helped lay the foundation for the early church's use of the Old Testament in its defense of the claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the long hoped-for Messiah. His Jewish background and the Jewish context in which Apollos encountered Christ compelled Apollos to read the Old Testament in a new way. He developed a defense of Jesus as the Messiah not just from eyewitness and experiential proofs, but also from the proof of the Old Testament prophecies.

It appears that Apollos was able to convince the Jews of Jesus' messianic nature in ways Aquila and Priscilla could not. Apollos's method was so groundbreaking that Luke drew attention to the fact his evangelism “mightily convinced” his Jewish hearers. Furthermore, Luke wanted his readers to understand that Apollos's defense was a public defense. In other words, unlike Aquila and Priscilla, who had drawn Apollos aside privately to introduce him to Jesus (Acts 18:26), Apollos was uniquely gifted as a public orator.

In fact, he was such a forceful and convincing speaker that later it appears the Corinthian church had tried to form a faction that claimed

to follow and prefer the ministry of Apollos to that of Paul (I Corinthians 3:4). Paul may have been responding to this faction when he told the Corinthians he came preaching not “with excellency of speech” (I Corinthians 2:1).

This division speaks to the rapidity with which Apollos's charisma became a lightning rod for those looking for a more impressive leader than Paul. It seems Apollos did not incite these divisions himself; Paul never blamed him in any way. In fact, Apollos's knowledge of this situation may have been the reason he was unwilling to go back to Corinth at Paul's bidding (I Corinthians 16:12). He knew his presence would only aggravate an already factious atmosphere.

B. Apollos Was Mighty in the Scriptures

A Jew from Alexandria, Apollos was already familiar with the Scripture. He was actively looking for the Messiah and believing that He may well have been a present, and not merely a future, hope in the world. Apollos knew the “baptism of John” (Acts 18:25), and the baptism of John entailed a confession that the Messiah was about to come and baptize “with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matthew 3:11). As John the Baptist instructed people to prepare “the way of the Lord” (Matthew 3:3), so was Apollos “instructed in the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:25).

III. TAUGHT THE WAYS OF THE LORD

A. Apollos Was Fervent in Spirit

Apollos came to Ephesus, where he spoke in the synagogue (Acts 18:26). Whatever other business may have brought him this great distance from Alexandria to Ephesus, he went quickly to the synagogue and taught what he knew.

B. Apollos Had Limited Knowledge

It is often said John the Baptist was the last prophet of the Old Testament. He was the capstone of the prophets, bringing to an end the period of the prophets and ushering in the age of the Messiah. Indeed, he was the pivotal figure between the two Testaments; all four evangelists open their narratives with a discussion of John the Baptist, who often quoted the

ancient prophets in his sermons and taught his followers to look for the Christ in their own day.

By following the teachings of John, Apollos's knowledge of God was fully informed by the prophets; however, his knowledge was limited. His knowledge at this point amounted to the same knowledge that someone would have if he or she read and believed the entire Old Testament, but then came to Matthew's Gospel, skipped the first two chapters, started reading Matthew 3, and then stopped reading at the end of John the Baptist's message in Matthew 3:12. In other words, Apollos's heart was prepared by John's message for the Christ, but he had yet to learn that Jesus of Nazareth was this Messiah.

C. Apollos Preached What He Knew

Apollos taught what he knew in the synagogues. As Paul made a habit of visiting and speaking in synagogues, Aquila and Priscilla attended the synagogue, looking for evangelistic opportunities (Acts 18:26). On one visit, they heard Apollos speak mightily and boldly in the synagogue. Impressed by his conscientious preaching, they concluded that he was a preacher in search of the fullness of truth.

IV. JOINED GODLY COMPANIONS

A. Aquila and Priscilla Were Respectful

Something about Apollos's speech told the couple he was near a true and complete faith. In the safety of a private conversation, they introduced Apollos to Christ—the very hope his training under the tutelage of John the Baptist had taught Apollos to seek. It is significant that Aquila and Priscilla talked to Apollos in private; they did not interrupt his speech before the synagogue. They were respectful and prudently sought a more opportune time and place to explain further truth to him.

Their willingness to wait, and the respect they showed in spite of the limitations of his knowledge, may have made a difference in determining whether Apollos received the full gospel message.

B. Aquila and Priscilla Taught Apollos

The couple recognized that God's Spirit had already been at work laying the foundation of

Christianity in Apollos's heart. They did not reject everything he believed and start their explanation from the ground up; they looked for the truths he already possessed and built upon them. They took what he already knew and "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:26). In other words, they recognized that his beliefs were almost complete. Thus their mission was merely to explain more completely what John the Baptist had already taught.

If we are going to have lifelong friendships in Christ, we need to be aware that others may be able to teach us things we do not know.

V. RESPECTING OTHERS IN MINISTRY

A. Be Teachable

Apollos, in spite of his knowledge of the Scriptures and his obvious talent, listened to the teachings of Aquila and Priscilla. This talented man could have easily done what many talented people tend to do: mistake their talent for wisdom. However, having talent does not necessarily mean that one has wisdom and full knowledge. Talent should be an opportunity for greater learning and usefulness, not an obstacle to it.

If we are going to have lifelong friendships in Christ, we need to be aware that others, even people who do not seem to be fountains of knowledge, may be able to teach us things we do not know. How easy it would have been for Apollos to be proud of his skills. And how easy it would have been for him to go through the rest of his life with incomplete knowledge—knowledge that, but for the efforts of

Aquila and Priscilla, would have been tragically just shy of the full truth.

B. Be Respectful

How we handle situations in which we have knowledge of which others may be ignorant often becomes the standard by which those we inform teach others. In our teaching, we should always be respectful of those whom we teach. If people are living for God in the limited knowledge they have of the Scriptures, we should not begin our discussion by tearing down what they have learned so far. Rather, we should acknowledge the limited truth they do have and build on that.

For example, if a person has been baptized but not according to the Scriptures, we can affirm the person's decision to be baptized and then go on to explain "the way of God more perfectly" by showing what the Scriptures say about baptism. In all of our conversations, we need to be respectful of other people's feelings. Our respect for the human beings we teach is more likely to result in their ability to make strong, healthy connections inside and outside the church.

In our teaching, we should always be respectful of those whom we teach.

C. Be a Partner

When Paul mentioned Priscilla (Prisca) and Aquila, he always mentioned the two together, with Priscilla's name often coming before her husband's (Acts 18:18; Romans 16:3; II Timothy 4:19). Perhaps she was more prominent in early Christian circles. But Paul could hardly think of one without thinking of the other. In fact, in Scripture one name is not found without the other.

Not only were Priscilla and Aquila marriage partners, but it appears they were partners in every aspect of life, including evangelism and witnessing. Their example shows that

partnerships in the gospel can be highly effective. Partners can pool their resources to assist and host a Paul or evangelize and instruct an Apollos.

Do not allow the bonds of friendship formed while working for God to cool by being indifferent. Strengthen these bonds. Be humble and put aside any obstacles that may arise in the friendship. These friendships will be among one's greatest treasures throughout life. Paul implored the divided Corinthians to value one another in the church and to unify: "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building" (I Corinthians 3:9).

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

The prophets of Israel could be quite direct, straightforward, and sometimes seemingly harsh. Their epic denunciations of fellow Israelites still carry a sting, undiminished by the passing of many centuries. Isaiah said: "Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah" (Isaiah 1:10). Amos called the people of Samaria "kine of Bashan" (Amos 4:1), which was a way of calling the Samaritans fat, overfed cows.

It is sometimes easy to assume the prophets' manner of addressing wayward Israel is the model Christians should use today when evangelizing the world. In some ways, the situation of the prophet and the situation of the modern Christian are parallel. However, the apostles' approach to evangelism should be our model for evangelism because there are also significant differences between the ancient prophets' situations and the one the apostles encountered. The world the apostles evangelized, in many ways, mirrors our own. Though there is a familiarity with the basic tenets of the Christian faith in our culture today, we, like the apostles, often deal with people who have not been raised with a devout Christian background.

Where the apostles—especially when evangelizing pagans or God-fearers who were ignorant of who Jesus of Nazareth was—sought to build upon what little knowledge of God their hearers had, the ancient Hebrew prophets were primarily addressing

apostate, backslidden communities of Israelites who had once followed, but now rejected, their covenant with God. The apostles were never shy in denouncing sin, but they worked from the assumption that ignorance of God had played a dominant role in bringing their hearers into their current sinful state. They generally reserved their harsher words for those who, after having received the fullness of the gospel's message, had rejected Christ.

We should therefore, like the apostles, be respectful in our tone toward the unsaved and assume that God's grace, in some form, has manifested itself in the morals and honorable ideals they do possess. Once we recognize the presence of God's present

grace in their lives, we should seek to build upon that grace and bring them kindly to the fullness of truth.

Above all, the apostles and saints of the New Testament constantly worked in concert with one another, developing and cultivating friendships throughout their lives. Paul had Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and Titus; James had John; Peter had Andrew and Mark; and Aquila had Priscilla. We must likewise do the hard, patient work of sustaining friendships within the church and cultivating a culture of respect to all with whom we come in contact. As Paul told the congregation in Galatia: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). ■

REFLECTIONS

- Have you ever had a friendship in the church that you considered a partnership? If so, have you done all you can do to maintain this partnership?
- In your evangelism, have you found yourself looking first to tear down false notions, or have you attempted to listen for what common truths you could build upon?
- This lesson has discussed the need to build upon the knowledge someone may already possess when bringing him or her to the full truth of the gospel. It would be helpful to consider Paul's speech to the Athenians in this context (Acts 17:15–34). Notice that he quotes their poets (Acts 17:28). Paul always carefully calculated what he had to say. Why do you suppose he quoted pagan poets when trying to identify the pagan Athenians' "unknown God"?