

**Text: Acts 18:1-3 (Pew Bible pg.1098)**

**Title: “Partners”**

## **INTRODUCTION**

**ILLUSTRATION** – Nan and I had our wedding anniversary a few weeks ago, and we bought each other cards. What was interesting was that both of our cards mentioned something about the fact that a wife and a husband are “partners.” We later commented how as we both were picking out the cards that we almost didn’t buy that particular card simply because of the connotation of the word “partner” today. Unfortunately the word “partner” is often used to describe relationships that are something less than the biblical pattern for marriage. But we shouldn’t let the fact that the word is misused and abused when it comes to marriage keep us from celebrating the fact that a man and a woman in a biblical marriage are, indeed, partners.

We see that in a relationship between two famous lovers in the Bible ... Priscilla and Aquila. Open your Bibles to Acts 18:1-3. I’m sure that most of you got up this morning and thought, “I sure hope the pastor preaches on Aquila and Priscilla. I’ve just been aching to hear a good sermon on Aquila and Priscilla.” The fact is that if you know their names from reading your Bible, you may not know anything about them. They’re actually one of the most important couples in NT. And here in Acts 18 we’re introduced to them as we catch up with the Apostle Paul during what is called his Second Missionary Journey. Read Acts 18:1-2.

So here we are introduced to our next couple of famous lovers in the Bible, Aquila and Priscilla (Prisca, as she is sometimes called). We learn from these verses that they use to live in Rome, but due to severe persecution there they were forced to leave. Aquila was a Jew, but there is some speculation that Priscilla (Prisca) was actually from a wealthy Roman family. (There are records of a wealthy Roman family named Prisca.) If that is the case, then this was a beautiful love story of how an aristocratic Roman lady fell in love with a Jewish tentmaker. She would have converted to Judaism, and so when the persecution arose in Rome, she would leave the city with her husband to move to Corinth. And it is here that their lives intersect with the life of the Apostle Paul.

**Acts 18:3 - and because (Paul) was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.**

You see, whenever Paul came to a new city, he might walk through the marketplace looking for opportunities to talk about Jesus and the resurrection, but he would also look for work to support himself as he went about his missionary work. Because Paul was a tent-maker he would have probably looked for a local tent-making shop, and in God’s providence Paul connects up with this couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who would become life-long friends and partners in his ministry.

So let’s flip through pages of their biblical marriage album and see what lessons we learn from them as partners in marriage. Again, we’ll be looking at different passages in the NT, so keep your Bibles handy.

### **1. MARRIAGE PARTNERS EXPERIENCE LIFE TOGETHER**

The amazing thing about these famous lovers of the Bible is that never is one of them mentioned without the other. They are mentioned in six places in the NT and each time the names Aquila and Priscilla are together.

I’ve already mentioned the fact that Aquila and Priscilla experience their vocation life together. They are partners in their tent-making business. Part of experiencing life together is working together ... sharing the load. Few couples are actually business partners in the professional sense. But the work of living and raising a family and building a strong marriage and taking care of a household and providing for needs is a partnership.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Sometimes frustration comes to a marriage when either the husband or the wife doesn’t do their part. In our men’s study on Wednesday nights we have been studying 33 ~ The Series. It is a study based on the 33 years of Jesus’ earthly life and what men learn from that. One of the things we talk about is that men take responsibility and reject passivity.

Now you may have already picked up on this, but they experienced difficulties in life together. Remember they live in Corinth because they had been forced to leave Rome because of severe persecution.

**Acts 18:2b - Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.**

The text here doesn't give many details about this persecution. Whatever the case Aquila and Priscilla shared the painful experience of being forced to leave their home and their job.

**ILLUSTRATION** - Marriage partners sooner or later will experience the hardships of life together. Through the years as a pastor I have watched couples go through painful experiences together ... the death of a child ... the loss of a job ... the rebellion of a teenager. Those hardships can be the fires that strengthen the metal of your union, or they can drive you apart. It all depends on your determination to trust God for strength.

**Acts 18:3 - and because (Paul) was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade.**

So Paul came to work with this couple in their tent-making shop. Perhaps he may have even lived with them during his stay in Corinth. If they were not followers of Jesus before, then it would have been during this time of Paul working and living with them that he introduced them to Christ and they were saved. So this couple who lived together, worked together, and suffered hardship together, now came to know Jesus Christ together. And this is the single most important element in any marriage ... that you experience life in Christ together.

The Apostle Peter has some counsel for couples when it comes to experiencing spiritual life together in Christ. To the husbands Peter writes:

**1 Peter 3:7 - Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.**

Note: What this shows us is that husbands and wives have equal standing with God. But they have differing, complimentary roles. The wife is a weaker vessel only in the physical sense; and the husband must be understanding of his wife's uniqueness. But they are fellow heirs together of the grace of life. And it's important for this attitude to prevail so that they can pray together effectively.

So marriage partners experience life together, but also...

**2. MARRIAGE PARTNERS GROW TOGETHER.**

As we flip through the pages of this couple's biblical marriage album it's apparent that they grow in their relationship together and with the Lord. Imagine spending day and night with the great Apostle Paul. For eighteen months they lived and worked with the man who was in the process of writing a huge chunk of what we know today as the New Testament. What a rich experience it must have been for Aquila and Priscilla to sit at the feet of the great apostle and to grow in their faith.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Are you growing this way as a couple? Are you growing together in the Lord? Let me use this triangle to illustrate. The closer you grow upward to God, the closer you draw horizontally to one another. You can accomplish this in many ways. Some couples I know read and discuss a Scripture-based devotional book. Some read through a book of the Bible together. Some talk regularly about their own personal time in studying God's Word. The important thing is to grow together spiritually.

Aquila and Priscilla grew to where Paul saw them as great assets in his missionary activities. Later in Acts 18 it says...

**Acts 18:18 - After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila.**

Here's the next thing about marriage partners...

### **3. MARRIAGE PARTNERS ARE ON MISSION TOGETHER.**

Now look carefully at that verse:

**Acts 18:18 - After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila.**

Now there's something you need to notice here. When we are first introduced to this couple Aquila's name is mentioned first. Here the order is reversed. In fact in the six references to this couple, their names always appear together, but in four of the six references, Priscilla is listed first. This is very unusual in the NT world. Normally the man is mentioned first, and the wife, if she is mentioned at all, is mentioned second. Why? Scholars have different opinions about this: Maybe Priscilla came to Christ before Aquila. It could be because she was from an aristocratic, prominent family in Rome, or perhaps she was the more spiritually mature of the two.

Note: Guys, here's an important principle. For you to be the spiritual leader of your home doesn't mean that you are necessarily the most spiritually mature in your home. I know guys who came to Christ after their wives and do not have the years of experience of walking with God. They still take their spiritual leadership in the home seriously, but they realize that their wives may be way ahead of them in the knowledge of God and His Word.

Whatever the case, Priscilla and Aquila are on mission together. There are many purposes in marriage for followers of Christ: companionship and intimacy, procreation, but most importantly to be an advertisement for Christ and the Gospel. And that's literally what Aquila and Priscilla were. As a couple they were on mission together. So...

**Acts 18:19 - And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.**

Aquila and Priscilla had grown to the point where Paul could leave them alone in Ephesus while he went on about his missionary duties in other places. And that leads us to the next thing about marriage partners:

### **4. MARRIAGE PARTNERS MINISTER TOGETHER.**

So Paul set sail for other points on his missionary journey, and he leaves Priscilla and Aquila to minister together on their own.

A few years later Paul would return to Ephesus, where he would stay for three years. Paul wrote the book of I Corinthians while he was in Ephesus, where Aquila and Priscilla had established their home. Paul concludes I Corinthians by sending greetings from various believers in Ephesus.

**1 Corinthians 16:19 - The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.**

So you see that Aquila and Priscilla were growing in the Lord and growing in their ministry to where now the church in Ephesus actually met in their house. The earliest churches didn't have buildings as we do today so they were dependent upon the hospitality of prominent church members who furnished their homes for this purpose.

So Aquila and Priscilla opened their home to the ministry of the Lord. And if your home is open to ministry, it is likely that everything else you have is opened to the Lord and His people, including their money and their time.

But their ministry in Ephesus goes even deeper. Back to Acts 18. One day, while attending the synagogue in Ephesus, they heard a Jewish man named Apollos preach. The Bible says that he was eloquent, passionate and mighty in the Scriptures, but his knowledge of Christ and the Gospel was incomplete.

**Acts 18:26 - 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.**

Now they could have gone home that day from the synagogue and had roast preacher for lunch. They saw the good in his message and in his ministry, but they realized the young man needed some coaching. So the text indicates that they took him aside, perhaps into their home, to encourage him. And they didn't say, "That was a stupid sermon, don't you know your Bible? Don't you know what happened after John the Baptist? Don't you know about Jesus?" No, they gently and lovingly "explained to him the way of God more accurately." Apollos didn't understand the Gospel, and Aquila and Priscilla saw the potential in this mighty preacher, and they helped him. And they made such a difference in this young man's life.

**ILLUSTRATION** – As a young couple Nan and I were so blessed to have older couples who loved us and took us under their wings to mentor and coach us. They were powerful examples to us. With so many young couples in our church who are training for ministry, maybe God has that in mind for you.

Now, we are not told if Aquila and Priscilla ever had any children. If they did, you know that they would have done this very thing for their own children. As married couples one of our great responsibilities is the spiritual development of our children. Don't make the mistake of thinking that the church is primarily responsible for your child's spiritual formation. You are primarily responsible to make disciples of your children. The church comes alongside you, supporting and equipping you, but you have the primary responsibility.

Well, let's turn another page or two in the biblical marriage album of this famous couple. Later in the book of Acts we learn that Paul returns to Corinth. Remember that's where he first met Aquila and Priscilla. While he was there Paul wrote the towering book of Romans. As he concludes that book we find another mention of Aquila and Priscilla. They now have moved back to Rome. Remember that they had been run out of that city many years before. Now they're back.

As Paul concludes the letter to Rome he adds this special word:

**Romans 16:3 - Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,**

Notice that Prisca (Priscilla) is mentioned first.

**Romans 16:4-5a - who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house.**

So we've tracked this mobile couple from Rome, to Corinth, to Ephesus, and then back to Rome. It's amazing that Aquila and Priscilla show up in three of the most important cities and churches in the New Testament world. And everywhere they are highly esteemed because of their sacrificial service to the Lord and His church.

Apparently Paul owed his life to this brave husband-wife team. It says that they risked their necks for Paul. It means they put their necks under the axe. It may have been that in one of those incidents where Paul was arrested or attacked because he was preaching the Gospel, Priscilla and Aquila said, "Paul, we've got your back." And Paul would be forever grateful.

Amazing! Arguably the most important leader in the NT church, aside from Jesus Himself, is the Apostle Paul. And he would come to say I could have never been successful in my ministry if it weren't for Priscilla and Aquila.

There's one more page in this couple's marriage album you need to see. Near the end of his life, while he is in a Roman prison, Paul writes to his protégé and preacher friend Timothy, who is now the pastor of the church back in

Ephesus. And guess who is there helping him out. You got it ... Aquila and Priscilla. At the conclusion of II Timothy Paul is again sending greetings:

**2 Timothy 4:19 - Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.**

Years later Aquila and Priscilla are still serving God together ... partners.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Something caught my eye the other day that illustrates this in a powerful way. I noticed a senior adult couple walking across the parking lot of our church. I knew they have been married for over fifty years. I knew this particular couple had been through some real heartache in the years of their marriage. But here they were so faithful ... partners still holding hands after fifty years. Young couples, that's the image I want you to have in your mind. Single adults, that's the goal I want you to have. Couples in the mid-season of life, don't lose sight of that goal. Fifty years together ... still holding hands.