



ZWTF

Zapping You Whenever Thoughts Flow

Volume 7, Issue 1

ROMANS ^{Part 137}

Chapter 16:3-5

Priscilla & Aquila, Part 2



Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus 4 (who, for the sake of my soul, jeopardize their own necks, whom not only I am thanking, but all the ecclesias of the nations also) 5 and the ecclesia at their house.

Dear Readers, I'm sorry about last weekend. I tried to write a serious article, I really did, but the resolve lasted only two and a half minutes. I then started feeling sorry for myself and threw a literary tantrum, pouting on the page, resulting in last Sunday's ZWTF.

Every Sunday for three years now (apart from several landmark sidetracks) I've been writing on Romans, but I hardly hear from anyone about it. I mail to over 900

people, and I might hear from two, three or four. This usually doesn't bother me because I do my work "as unto the Lord and not to humans" (Colossians 3:23). This was Paul's advice to anyone doing anything in this world, and I see how vital this mindset is, seeing as there is potentially so little satisfaction/affirmation from the great pool of blood and flesh known as humanity. So the discouragement ganged up on me last weekend and I felt as though I were writing from a mountaintop into a void in the Alps where one's voice echoes back after bouncing off of mountains, goats, and the bell towers of abbeys. The result was that I said, "Let's just see if anyone's paying attention," so I cut loose with six or seven acres of literary nonsense—having some good fun in the process—much like a wife who wonders if her husband is paying attention to her and so purposely derails her own stream of coherence with baloney such as, "...and then I made love to the Sheik and ran off with his sommelier. And then I bought a Greek island with your retirement account and I now raise ostriches and star in porn movies, I hope you don't mind"—and the guy just continues to nod and says, "...yeah, uh huh, fine, uh huh, yeah..."

But *you're* not like that because I heard from about nine of you after last week's edition! So now I am refreshed and confident, buoyed like a great white shark about to eat a tuna. Therefore, let's dive back into the first part of the last chapter of Romans and talk about two people who were very important to Paul and who are now very important to me, namely, the great husband and wife evangelistic team of Priscilla and Aquila—in that order.

THAT SURE IS DIFFERENT

I like that Priscilla and Aquila were husband and wife. I wonder if this happens anymore, that is, that husbands and wives get along so well and do things



together. I don't know of many cases of it, not that I don't look for it. There may be an outbreak here and there. It is rare for God to cobble together two people in a marriage who pull together for anything, let alone the evangel of the grace of God. In fact, He seems so dead set against the aforementioned cobbling that I'm convinced He purposefully mismatches as many people as is practically possible so that we can all hate this life and want to move on to greener, more celestial pastures. I talk to so many people who are either nominally or miserably married that I have given up on the institution myself. The whole enterprise is shot; the era is too wicked for it, I believe; people are too damaged, and I am unfortunately now among them. (I must confess, however, that I will never say never.) It reminds me of a Three Stooges routine where the stooges take a part-time gig (*all* of their gigs were part-time) as census takers. Moe knocks on a door, a woman answers, and Moe says, "Good afternoon, ma'am. I'm a census-taker. Tell me: are you married, or happy?"

HOW AQUILA LANDED IN CORINTH

In 52 A.D. the Roman emperor Claudius told all Jews to get the heck out of Rome. Well, Claudius didn't like Jews. He was what we call anti-Semitic. But this

worked for good, as all things touched by Christ (and all things *are* touched by Christ) tend to do. Aquila was one of these Jews forced to leave Rome to save his own skin. The man had come to Rome via Pontus (the Pontus on the Black Sea—*that* Pontus), but got wind from Claudius that he wasn't wanted, so he jumped ship and sailed off for the great metropolis of Corinth.

How fortuitous for him—and eventually for Paul, and by extension for us. (Take *that*, Claudius). Satan's plots to discourage and destroy always backfire, ending up furthering God's plans rather than scuttling them.

Aquila ventured to Corinth, but not without his beautiful wife Priscilla. I am assuming Priscilla's beauty, basing this only upon the arrangement of the consonants in her name (speaking of the double l's now), and the fact that her name ends in the most feminine vowel available to humanity, namely, "a." She was certainly beautiful in that she stuck with her husband through thick and thin, even risking her neck with Aquila for the sake of Paul. These two, apparently, did everything together. In Scripture, Aquila is never mentioned apart from Priscilla, and vice-versa. Rumor has it that they even had sex together. I am not about to verify this, as it sounds too fantastic to be true.

But I do know that the couple worked together, "for they were tent-makers by trade" (Acts 18:3). Aquila's father

probably taught him tentmaking and I'm thinking that Aquila later taught it to his wife, who added the female touch to every canvas creation from that time forward. If there's anything I can't stand it's an over-masculinized canvas dwelling. Just because something is held down by ropes and stakes doesn't mean it has to have hair on its back and grunt. Tents were very popular back in the first century, especially among Jews who, whenever they cozied themselves up in such a temporary structure, were reminded of their ancestors' trek in the wilderness. There, the Jews not so much wandered as followed God whithersoever He went, at the same time holding so loosely to life's commodities that they lived in that day's version of the mobile home.

Not every couple can work together, but it's beautiful when it happens. Marriage, to me, is two people doing things together. Why get married if you don't want to be with the person that you married? Many couples tell me that their marriage survives only because they hardly see one another. This offends me. Such "couples" are merely a statistic. Priscilla and Aquila were not of this stripe. They lived, breathed and basked in one another's aura, each gaining power from the other.

I remember the days when my wife Marcia would come up to my downtown office in Greenwich, Ohio and help me answer mail or duplicate cassette tapes. This was in the mid '90's. We duplicated thousands of my cassette tape messages together from there. Marcia would come up after her secretary stint at the local middle school and she'd bring a package of grapes, wash them in the bathroom sink and put them in a Styrofoam bowl for us. I would brew coffee and we would make things happen, evangelistically, while eating grapes and drinking the product of the Maxwell House company. These were some of the happiest days of my life. I've longed for this kind of thing ever since, but God, in His inestimable wisdom (which I sometimes question but always end up acquiescing to—what choice do I have?), has kept it from me.

THE MARKETPLACE

Upon their arrival in Corinth, Priscilla and Aquila sought the social center of all communities then: the marketplace. There is nothing like buying bananas together—or grapes, or coffee—to bring a couple together, even a community.

While in Corinth, Priscilla and Aquila looked for a place to plant their tent business. And guess what? They found it! (God doesn't screw anyone, completely, forever; it

only seems that way.) God led the happy couple to a nice spot, probably next to a cashew vendor—although I have no Scriptural evidence for this; I'm merely relying on my instincts concerning first-century citizens and their lust for nuts.

ANOTHER TENTMAKER

One day shortly thereafter, another Jewish tent person, who was *also* harried by both government and religion and wandering about Earth trying to avoid violent death, arrived in Corinth hot off of an evangelistic tour of Athens, where he made a fool of himself in front of gaggles of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers gathered on Mars' Hill, but who also gained a couple of bold converts. This same man was probably also looking



for fresh Corinthian cashews; I speak of the apostle Paul.

It may comfort you to know that Paul was a lot like us in that he enjoyed regular habits. He liked his nuts *and* his ruts, that little Tarsusian. Finding comfort in routine, Paul would scour the marketplaces whenever he entered a new city, looking for those of like mind who would possibly have heard of Jesus, whom Paul was announcing, among all Jews, to be the Christ. It could be that Paul, besides seeking cashews and converts to the new faith, also sought an opportunity to vend his sewing skills. He partially bankrolled himself by this means so as to afford himself future missionary journeys/humiliations. Someone may have said, “There’s a couple from Pontus who have beat you to it, but if you want to talk to them they’re set up next to the nut stand over on Taluga Street,” and Paul, needing some nuts anyway—especially cashews—ventured over to suss out (this is charming British lingo for “investigate”) the competition.

After these things, departing from Athens, [Paul] came to Corinth. And, finding a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy, and Priscilla, his wife (because Claudius prescribed that all the Jews depart from Rome), he came to them, and, because of his being of a like trade, he remained with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade (Acts 18:1-3).

When Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, the trio bonded immediately. They were of like spirit. You know how it is when you meet a fellow member of the body of Christ. You instantly click because you share the common spirit—the spirit of God. This was the situation with Paul and his new friends. I’m not saying that Priscilla and Aquila had already heard and believed the evangel of the grace of God, because I don’t think they did. They *may* have known of Jesus (I think it’s likely), but Paul’s message had only then trickled down from God at the pace *of* God, and so not many had heard it, especially seeing as how the Internet was so slow back then. But Paul could tell that his fellow tentmakers had an antenna for being justified by faith apart from works of law and finally being able to eat broiled shrimp. As for Priscilla and Aquila, they could tell that Paul was a no-nonsense guy, an earnest man in whom no guile existed.

And so began a lasting friendship that was so true, so good, so vital and important (for you, for me and for a billion other people) that God inspired the holy spirit to record it as part of His declaration to humanity.

Aquila said to Paul, “What do you say we join forces?” Paul liked the idea (friends were hard to come by, especially for him) and so the apostle to the nations joined the Pontusians and not only worked with them, but occasionally lodged with them while in Corinth. If Priscilla and Aquila had not known of the grace of God before this, they got the saving dose now, for no one with even an inkling of a teachable spirit could resist Paul and his rosy view of the next life.

The ensuing verse from Acts (18:4) finds Paul in the Corinthian synagogue every sabbath, persuading both Jews and Greeks that Jesus was the Christ. Not everyone got the same kick out of Paul. Some resisted. Others blasphemed. Others decided to throw the fruit of ovulating chickens at him. There were always a few, however (as in Athens), who grasped the message and wanted more. Whenever Paul did his thing at the synagogue and required either a quick exit or a beer—or both—he would head to a sympathetic home. He not only stayed with Priscilla and Aquila, but also with a believer named Titus Justus, who conveniently lived adjacent to the synagogue (Acts 18:7).



MAGIC IN THE MAKING

As soon as Paul met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth, good things began to happen. I'm not saying that good things would not have happened for Paul without the happy couple, but that God enjoys connecting like minds (marriage is usually the exception, but Priscilla and Aquila were exceptions to the exception) and then starting fires with the ensuing sparks. Think of the twelve disciples, who were devitalized when they lost Judas (they were only eleven then), but flashed back into the power as soon as Matthias joined their ranks. Think of the Beatles, who, when Richard Starkey joined the band as their new drummer ("Ringo" to you; he replaced the Beatles' first drummer, Pete Best), finally became the band of destiny. As Paul McCartney has famously said: "That is when we became the Beatles, when Ringo joined." (Honestly, "John, Paul, George and Pete" lacks that certain melodic rhythm.) As soon as Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, the apostle became a force in Corinth. It was the same in Philippi, the moment he met Lydia. God arranges these life-changing meetings. Nothing is left to chance. He controls the movements of all peoples, especially those in the body of Christ.

I'm not about to leave Titus Justus out—and I don't even really know the guy. Titus Justus, along with Paul,

Priscilla, Aquila and a precious few others, became a rag-tag fugitive fleet in Corinth, the heart of an ecclesia to which Paul would write two epic letters, unfolding such marvelous truths as the vivification of all humanity (1 Corinthians 15:21-28), the conciliation of the world (2 Corinthians 5:14-21), the role of Christ as the image of the invisible God (2 Corinthians 4:4), and the changing of our bodies from mortal to immortal (1 Corinthians 15:49-58).

To their contemporaries, these people were nothing but ordinary, working class folks. Yet to us, they are Bible heroes, forever immortalized in God's Word. Yet I would not have us forget their relative anonymity in their own day and the common and probably oftentimes depressing circumstances surrounding them. Was the tent business always good? No. Was the mood always congenial between the early believers? Of course not.

Do we not find ourselves in similar straits? Are we not struggling in the throes of anonymity and even ridicule as we walk among the chiefs of this eon, who all seem to thrive while we deteriorate? Yet here we are, carrying the same message as these founding members of Christ's body. They were the pioneers, but we carry on their work. They are gone, and now it is our turn upon the stage of life. It is our turn to believe, cling to,



and further this message as God gives us strength. Paul, Priscilla, Aquila and Titus Justus would be proud of us. They *will* be proud of us when they see us in the resurrection. They will be both delighted and amazed that we continued enduring and holding fast to same faith that they held fast to, even as we writhe in the most miserable days of the very apostasy predicted by Paul.

EPILOGUE

Whenever I read this final chapter of Romans, I tear up. I have read this list of names many times at conferences, and can never hold back my emotions. This is the Hall of Fame of Faith. These are my people; they are *our* people. They were ordinary human beings meeting in a living room with Paul. They went about their lives, unknown. Yet here they are, immortalized in God's Word. For what? For listening to Paul. For heeding the message. For opening up their homes. For supporting Paul's work. For being kind to one another. For holding fast to the faith. For not being blown about by strange winds of teaching. They were no different than we are; we just live in a distant time. They were the pioneers; we struggle at the tail end of the apostasy. Their challenge was no greater than ours, and vice versa—although I sometimes think that we face the tougher slog. Transported instantly to our world, the four of them would—to

a man and woman—suffer nervous breakdowns within thirty minutes. The complexity and the saturating evil of our world is fatally debilitating. We survive only because we are frogs boiling in the pot. We don't know any better.

* * *

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for supporting me and this work. Many of you have sent support over the past two months, apart from which I cannot survive. Not just this past two months, but from the inception of this calling. God separated me on October 1 of 1993 to do this work full time, and He has seen to it, Personally, that I have been taken care of ever since. Every month for twenty-four years has been a miracle, and for this He has used you. You, like me, are slaves of Christ and sons and daughters of the living God. You hear His voice, and you heed it. As I have told you many times, you're backing the right horse. I say this not from any platform of pride (how I wish, but God has taken it away and left me practically bankrupt in this department), but from simply knowing what God has called me to do and doing it.

My desire is to serve you more in 2018. I pray that this is our last New Year.

I do not and did not celebrate the New Year. It simply came. It is an arbitrary line. To live is Christ. The new series will begin tomorrow, January 8. It will be "Paul to the Galatians." In addition to this, I will continue to



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broadcast sporadically from the laundry room in a series called, “Return to Zender; Further Unfoldings From The Laundry Room,” which will be me telling you what I think on a myriad of topics that come into my head—whenever they come.

There will be at least eight new books in 2018.

People have told me, “I hope you have enjoyed your time off since the end of the Revelation Series. I hope you are recharged and refreshed.” I can only smile at this. It’s a nice thought, but there is no recharging *or* refreshing. Honestly, I can’t even imagine how that would feel. Such things are over for me. Every day, with few exceptions, is a drudgery both mental and physical. It’s a glorified drudgery, but still a slog through the mud of Eon 3. I have no such thing as “time off.” I have told you: *to live is Christ*. There is no time off from that. I wish there were. I wish I could find it, but I can’t. Even when I am away, I carry what I have. I take the burden with me.

The burden is constant, but so is the underlying joy. Joy is not happiness and happiness is not joy—as far as I can tell. As far as I can tell, I am not happy. I am resigned to soldierhood for the rest of my days. I am enlisted in a war that I cannot escape. Even if Christ opened the door for me, I would refuse to budge from this trench. Not until He comes for keeps will I go. Wild horses couldn’t budge me. (A wild woman could, yes, but not horses. And Satan knows that. Wild horses are worthless against me. And so may God protect me from the latter.) It would have to be the Coming of Christ. I am not about to take the easy way out now, not when the finish line is so near.

I want these people of Romans 16 to be proud of me. I don’t want to disappoint them. I don’t want to disappoint you. I don’t want to disappoint Christ. You may say, “Oh, you can’t disappoint Christ,” but I can. I speak relatively. I speak of allotment, not salvation. This is what the dais of Christ is about. I will not string my life on the hammock of the Consummation and rest with my hands behind my head until God becomes all in all. That is not what I am called to do. I am called to be pressed and broken for the immediate need—and there is much immediate need. It is both your need and mine. There is nothing for it except suffering

and work. Work is the only deliverance from it, really. And a writer is working even when he is looking out the window. A writer in Christ is working even when *thinking* of staring into the void.

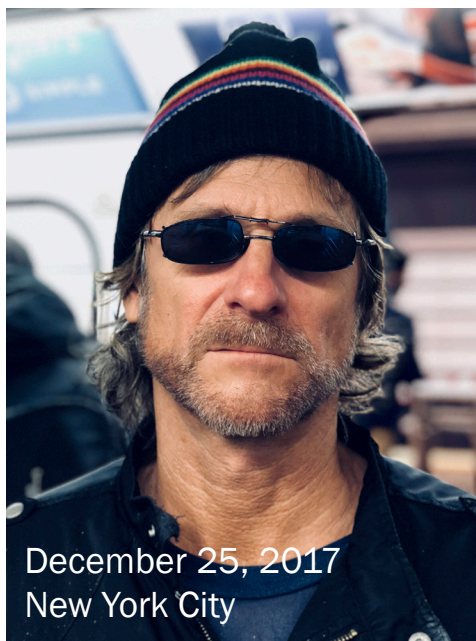
The celebrations of this life, including the New Year, become stranger and stranger to me. I walk among people who care about things that I no longer care about, or *can* care about. In most cases, I go through the motions. I show up. I do walk among the people, but I rarely laugh when they laugh. I rarely care about what they care and talk about. I care about *them*, but not about what they care or talk about. I can love them even while not being one of them.

No one gets it. I am surrounded by a subtle yet profound lack of faith and trust in the God of Scripture. I am surrounded by religion; I am surrounded by the enemies of the cross who dress, speak and walk as dispensers of righteousness and believers of truth, but who believe nothing but well-dressed lies. And yet they are good people and will come to the New Earth from the Great White Throne.

I am mainly silent among them. If they ask me about God, I will tell them. The dike will break, and the torrent of truth that is in me will come forth; I barely know where it comes from. But other than that, I’m silent. Silent before the shearers. How I wish that I had more in common with the people who love this world and this eon. But I am on a different path that is taking me to a different world and a different eon. And so I walk among

ghosts. I am a space alien. But even as all of this occurs, I remember you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, and I remember our brothers and sisters gone before, the Hall of Fame of Faith, the “nobodies” chronicled by our apostle in the final chapter of Romans. Without these, where would we be? We stand on shoulders both great and ordinary, of both women and men. And we do it together. Without you, where would I be? I pray that you can ask the same question about me.

I thank my God and Father for all of you. —MZ
(*To be continued.*)



December 25, 2017
New York City