



# ZWTF

Zapping You Whenever Thoughts Flow

Volume 7, Issue 2

## ROMANS <sup>Part 138</sup>

Chapter 16:3-5

### Priscilla & Aquila, Part 3



**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.**

As soon as Paul met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth, good times ensued. Corinth became an epicenter of the faith, and making tents together a great excuse to talk about Christ. Priscilla and Aquila became a sort of magical elixir for Paul, a catalyst from God to stir up Acts-worthy happenings.

I remind you that God (via Luke) begins the account of Paul's adventure in Corinth with him meeting this husband and wife tentmaking duo. (The moment that consequential people meet one another fascinates me. I'll never forget

standing on the front porch of a large stone house on 1st Street in Pass Christian, Mississippi, a stone's throw from the Gulf of Mexico, thinking, *This is where my mom first met my dad.*) Remember that Paul arrived in Corinth hot off a tour of Athens, where he faced the opposition of spiritual apathy and the philosophical arrogance of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. The saving grace of the Grecian engagement was that a handful of attendees approached Paul afterward and embraced his message. This was a harbinger of Corinth.

In spite of the last-minute Athenian success, I'm imagining that Paul couldn't wait to leave. The religiosity and apathy of the "city of wisdom" had to have weighed heavily upon him. At least the Corinthians made no pretensions to philosophical attainment, being much too busy shagging temple prostitutes.

Here's the end of Acts chapter 17 (when Paul is still in Athens), and the beginning of 18 (when he arrives in Corinth)—

Now, on hearing of the resurrection of the dead, these, indeed, jeered, yet those say, "We will hear you concerning this again also." Thus Paul came out of their midst. Yet some men, being joined to him, believe, among whom were Dionysius, the Areopagite, also, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them. After these things, departing from Athens, he 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 (Acts 17:32-18:2).

Concerning Paul's meeting of Priscilla and Aquila, I enjoy the wording, "he came to them." It's as though God had put a GPS signal-sending device in Priscilla's purse and gave Paul a receiver for it. I can just hear Paul's receiver beeping faster and faster (more like a metal-detector), the closer he gets to the couple and



their palpable thirst (witting or unwitting) for Christ.

Is this not how God unites fellow members of Christ's body? Yes, except that the GPS signal and the receiver are all products of the spirit of God. The "metal detector" detects spirituality; most believers have this built-in sensor. It's a dual receiver in that it can simultaneously detect religious hypocrisy—although these two elements (a spirit detector and a detector for religious hypocrisy) sometimes get sold separately. In the previously quoted passage, the holy spirit contrasts "he came to them" (referring to the tentmakers in Athens), with "thus Paul came *out* of their midst"—referring to his bidding adieu to the Athenians. God closes doors and opens windows. It's much more fun, I think, to squeeze through an unexpected window than to walk through a proper door.

Speaking of doors and windows, if today discourages you, tomorrow will be an open window; we will come out of the midst of *this* day and be squeezed by Christ into another day that, if not better, will at least be different. On a larger scale, we will eventually come out of

the midst of *this* eon and be pressed through the window of a celestial allotment. We will walk through the door of Adamic human companionship to dive through the narrowest of portals into the esteemed company of other immortal beings, including Christ Himself.

#### SILAS AND TIMOTHY WANT IN ON THE ACTION

Shortly after Paul came to Corinth and began hobnobbing with the tentmakers, Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia. There's a very human reason for this. First, here's the reference—

"...and, because of his being of a like trade, he remained with [Priscilla and Aquila] and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. Now he argued in the synagogue on every sabbath and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. Now, as both Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the word, certifying to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 18:3-5).

Silas and Timothy heard that God was making Corinth a hotbed of new belief. Corinth was to the faith of that day what Boston was to the thirteen American colonies; it was the place to be. On the other hand, what an unlikely place for a spiritual revival. Imagine telling your friends, “I’m going to Las Vegas for a spiritual retreat.” *What? You’re going to Sin City to find faith in God?* And yet this is what it meant for Silas and Timothy to go to Corinth.

God operates out of strange places; this is one of His big, fat, hairy, glorious predictable ruts. Many believers went to Rome to visit Paul. Where was Paul at the time? In jail. The friends of these people would have assumed that any visit to Rome would have to do—as today—with tourism. When the answer became, “No, there’s a man of great faith there,” the reaction would be one of predictable shock. Rome was basically the Los Angeles of its day. To Silas and Timothy, location was irrelevant. They didn’t question God. Like the Queen of Sheba, who traveled a great distance to see Solomon, these men obeyed an inherent spiritual instinct and ignored the AAA travel guides.



## WILLARD, OHIO

For thirteen years, believers came from all over the country and around the world attended an annual conference, organized by my wife and me, in Willard, Ohio. I’ve probably shared this before, but I love the whole concept

of it, let alone the improbable execution. Who had ever heard of Willard? Someone should have told the holy spirit that it picked the wrong place. Someone should have asked the holy spirit why it passed over Pasadena or Houston in order to choose Willard. Someone should have asked the holy spirit why it passed up Jerusalem and picked Corinth as a headquarters for early belief in Paul’s gospel. Again, Corinth was the ancient equivalent of Las Vegas. Why *not* Jerusalem? Jerusalem—in accord with the wisdom of the holy spirit—instead, became the seed-plot of Jewish apostasy, as it remains today.

Maybe the holy spirit is smarter than all of us. Maybe it marches to the beat of a different Drummer. Maybe men like Silas and Timothy possessed a state-of-the-art *spiritual* GPS that defied conventional wisdom and run-of-the-mill tourism brochures. Maybe the Queen of Sheba will be the Queen of the Great White Throne as she rises on a glory cloud to condemn the inhabitants of the then-celebrated Capernaum (Matthew 11:23;12:42), who couldn’t be bothered to walk three miles to see the Man whom they could not recognize as the Savior of the world.

## PRISCILLA AND AQUILA FOLLOW PAUL TO EPHESUS, THEN MEET APOLLOS

Now Paul, remaining still a considerable number of days with the brethren, taking leave, sailed off to Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow. Now they arrive at Ephesus and he left them there. Yet he, entering the synagogue, argues with the Jews. Yet at their asking him to stay on more time, he does not consent, but, taking leave and saying, “I shall come back again to you, God willing,” he set out from Ephesus. And, coming down into Caesarea, going up and greeting the ecclesia, he descended to Antioch (Acts 18:18-22).

## VOW ME

Was it Paul or Aquila who took the vow? I don’t know. I like to think and I hope that it was Aquila, as he was not quite as up-to-speed on Paul’s gospel as the gospel’s namesake. But I fear that it was probably Paul, as Paul had not yet learned his lesson concerning kowtowing to Jewry; we see him indulging in yet another ceremony in Acts 21, which lands him into a heap of controversy. Paul’s overreaching zeal to become all things to all people did not always serve him well.

In Acts chapter 21, Paul, succumbing to Jewish pressure from the hard-line Circumcisionists, agreed to purify

himself (this is shocking, considering what he knew then of the death of the old humanity; I'm assuming that he knew it then) and took a vow with some other Jews. Paul bent over backward so as not to offend people who woke up in the morning thinking of things to be offended by.

A.E. Knoch made this same mistake early in his career, calling people "brother" who had no right to the title; they shared not one common shred of his faith. He later repented of the practice, at last realizing that "grace" did not equal "nice." But back to Paul. The result of his compromise was that some of the Jews saw him in the sanctuary (doing his vow/purification thing) and assumed that he had brought Trophimus, a Greek, into that strictly Jewish space. If Paul had simply refused the vow, he'd have avoided the trouble. But Paul was human and screwed up occasionally. Additionally, all things are of God; God used Paul's well-intentioned mistake as a catalyst to get him to Rome. I'm pretty sure that this was the last time Paul toyed with vows.

This was probably the so-called Nazarite vow, described in Numbers 6:1-21. You can read about it there if you'd like; I've no stomach to detail it here; I just ate. In light of the present grace, the death of the old humanity and completeness in Christ, the Nazarite vow is a Saturday morning cartoon. Like baptism, it's completely symbolic. It's an outward show of an inward dedication to God. In Paul, we no longer require symbolism or outward shows. In Christ, the length of one's hair is no indication



of one's dedication to God—otherwise Bob Marley was a freaking saint.

(The Nazarite vow, on the other hand, cares a great deal about the length of one's hair and—oh—don't forget to abstain from raisins; and if your father or mother dies, don't touch them; yes, these things are all part of the Nazarite—not Nazarene—vow. And when the vow is finished, remember to bring your turtledove to the tent of appointment and carry your freshly-shorn hair to the altar and burn it there; after that, you'll be fine.)

Again, I know that Paul tried to become all things to all people, but taking these vows was overkill. Paul was yet far too optimistic concerning Jews who had decided to hate him no matter how he tried to appease them. By the time Paul wrote Ephesians, all such charades as the Nazarite vow came off the table. As with water baptism, Paul left vowing and outward purifying in the cedar chest of Israelite history, where it belonged. Thus, there is no reason, today, to kowtow to any religious ceremony for the sake of so-called friends in what will inevitably amount to an ill-fated attempt to please anachronistic religionists who will hate you no matter what you do, because you will no doubt continue holding to your "heretical teachings" such as the salvation of all humanity, the sovereignty of God, and the separation of Paul's gospel from that of Peter.

## THE ARRIVAL OF APOLLOS

Priscilla and Aquila followed Paul from Corinth to Ephesus. They became Paul's groupies, you might say. But shortly after that, Paul felt the need to journey down to his headquarters in Antioch. This vagabond itinerary was probably too much for the married couple—after all, they had practically just arrived in Ephesus—so Priscilla and Aquila stayed put. This turned out to be providential (big surprise) because after Paul left—

"...a certain Jew named Apollos, a native Alexandrian, a scholarly man, arrives at Ephesus, being able in the scriptures. He was instructed in the way of the Lord, and fervent in spirit. He spoke and taught accurately what concerns Jesus, being versed only in the baptism of John. Besides, he begins to speak boldly in the synagogue (Acts 18:24-26).

What happened next is astounding. —MZ

*(To be continued.)*