

# Priscilla

Preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 2021-10-10

So far we have looked at 20 different women in our series on Women of Faith. And in the process we have seen the incredible creativity of God in making so many different kinds of women - women with different personalities, looks, gifts, energy levels, ministries, and even different kinds of homes. God definitely does not put women through a doughnut producing machine where they all come out looking the same. And when we examine the life of Priscilla, we will see that she has a lifestyle that might wear some of you out. Not every woman is up to the travel she had to do, the massive numbers of people who traipsed through her home every Sunday, and the church kids who frayed her furniture, and the pressures of ministry. Being a pastor's wife (which is what she was) is tough enough, but her husband was anything but a normal pastor - he was a pastor/church planter on steroids. So don't think that you have to imitate everything that Priscilla did. We will look at a few characteristics that all of us can and *should* imitate. But let's start by looking at her background.

## She and her husband shared a Jewish culture and a Christian faith

Priscilla and her husband shared a common Jewish ancestry and were both already very mature Christians by the time Paul met them in Corinth. Let's read Acts 18:1-2 again.

1 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.

Just those two verses give us a bunch of clues on the background of this remarkable couple:

## This gave them a huge head-start theologically

First, their Jewish background would have given both of them a huge head-start on theology because (as Jews) they would have already known all of the Old Testament stories and history, and they would have been grounded in God's law. It would have been much easier to catch them up to speed on a comprehensive Biblical worldview. Yes, there were always bad traditions that Paul would have to undo, but there was an advantage to having some Jewish converts to start with.

## This explains why Paul met them when looking to minister to Jews in Corinth

It was one of the reasons why Paul made it his habit to reach the Jews first in any given city and then to reach out to the Gentiles. But when Paul goes to the Jewish community, he discovers that this couple had already become Christian. So, right out of the chute, here is a worthwhile question to ask: Why on earth would Christians move to a town that had no church and that actually had a pretty bad reputation? That doesn't seem very wise. Ordinarily your reason for moving to an area should not exclusively be because there is a

good job there. We normally counsel people against doing that. Turn down the job if there is no good church. That is generally wise advice. But this situation was different. Aquila was a special kind of pastor known as an evangelist who had already planted one church in Rome and would plant churches in Corinth and Ephesus within the next decade. So a maxim that might be true of one person (don't move to an area that has no church) might not be true of another person. We shouldn't be quick to judge. God can lead people for a variety of reasons.

### This explains why they were kicked out of Rome

The first reason *they* moved is that they had actually been kicked out the city of Rome. It wasn't for refusing a vaccine mandate. Verse 2 explains that it was because of a decree of the emperor Claudius. Ours is not the only age when arbitrary decrees are handed down from on high that have the potential of destroying a business. I have talked to a number of people who have lost their jobs and had restaurants go belly up because of the Covid-19 tyranny. It's sad. I have a cousin who just lost her job because the hospital wouldn't grant an exemption on vaccinations. Well, Aquila & Priscilla could sympathize. They lost the business they had in the city of Rome. The Roman historian, Suetonius tells us why, He said,

Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.<sup>1</sup>

Chrestus is a reference to Jesus Christ. So what Suetonius was saying is that the preaching of Jesus started riots in Rome in AD 49. Claudius was fed up with these religious disturbances, and rather than taking the trouble of figuring out who was right and who was wrong, he found it easier to kick all Jews out of Rome, whether they believed in Jesus or not. So Aquila and Priscilla were forced to leave, and they had just arrived in Corinth.

### They were already Christians in Rome, likely involved in church planting among Jews in that city

But since Paul did not need to convert them, commentators show that they had already been Christians when in Rome, and indeed, may have been part of the reason why there were riots among the Jews. Aquila and Priscilla were committed to promoting the Gospel in Rome, and as soon as they came to Corinth, they were committed to promoting the Gospel in Corinth. That forced-migration was used by God to extend the church. And we can trust that God is sovereign over tyrannical acts today - whether those be in Australia (where businesses are really being hit hard), or China (where many businessmen have actually been thrown into prison), or Germany, or America. God's providences can be a part of His guidance. Though these times can be stressful, we need not fear. God is totally in charge.

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<sup>1</sup> Suetonius, Suetonius: *The Lives of Caesars, The Lives of Illustrious Men: Translation*, trans. J. C. Rolfe, vol. 2, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA; London; New York: The Macmillan Co.; William Heinemann Ltd; Harvard University Press, 1914), 53.

## She and her husband were an ideal team in every way

One other thing that everyone notices about this couple is that the names of both Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned every time one of them is mentioned. It's like they were an inseparable team. Where some husbands and wives are constantly out of sync with each other, these two functioned beautifully together - almost like a dancing couple on a ballroom floor. They were an ideal team. Let's look at some of the evidence.

### Paul and Luke always mention them together; never separately (Acts 18:2,18,26; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19)

First, it is interesting that all six references to them mentions the two of them together. And it is interesting that half of those references put Priscilla first and the other half put Aquila first - almost as if they equally contributed to some of the tasks. In a bit I will look at why they are reversed in some of the passages. I think there is a logic to it. But let me quickly highlight the order in all of the passages:

Acts 18:2 - mentions "Aquila... with his wife Priscilla" Acts 18:18 - "Priscilla and Aquila" Acts 18:26 - "Aquila and Priscilla" - at least in the Majority Text. Only 2% of all Greek manuscripts have Priscilla first Romans 16:3 - "Priscilla and Aquila" 1 Cor. 16:19 - "Aquila and Priscilla" 2 Tim. 4:19 - "Prisca and Aquila" (Prisca being the more formal version of the name Priscilla)

This easy exchange of the order of names may show that neither Paul nor Luke wants to give any intentional preference to either one. But I think there is more to it than that. Since it was customary to list the man first, it can be deduced that Priscilla was really the more remarkable of the two in some ways. In any case, they beautifully illustrate how they were partners together in ministry.

### Luke says that "they were tentmakers" just like Paul (Acts 18:3)

In verse 3 of our passage Luke doesn't just identify *Aquila* as the tentmaker. It says, "*they* were tentmakers." So Paul joins them in *their* trade. But if both Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers, it implies that they worked together in this skilled manual labor. And some people bristle at that. They think, "Surely that's the man's role; the woman's place is in the kitchen." But no, they both worked at this trade.

Already we are beginning to see that Priscilla breaks some of the stereotypes that some Bible-believers try to fit all women into. Is it true that the man is the sole bread-winner? No. He may be the *primary* breadwinner, but he doesn't have to be the only bread winner. Proverbs 31 shows a wife who contributed hugely to the economic growth of that family. Martha and Mary, and Mary the mother of Jesus were all known to hire themselves out on occasion to manage banquets. Once Lydia lost her husband, *she* ran the business *all by herself*. The man in Isaiah 44:15 baked bread in the kitchen, and in Ezekiel 4:15 we see Ezekiel baking bread. And I bring that up to say that we need to be very careful about stereotypes and not use them as straitjackets for other people - to impose our preferences

on other people. When we looked at Eve we saw that both Adam and Eve were given the dominion mandate.

Of course, we also saw that one of the principles of economics is division of labor and specialization. You get much more done when there *is* division of labor and specialization. That's a good thing. I'm not knocking that. And it is likely that there was some division of labor and specialization even in their business. Maybe both of them equally knew all the parts of the trade, but it would be even *more* efficient for each to specialize in being involved in and/or overseeing others in the different parts of the tent-making process.

And by the way, the word tentmaker refers to a person who worked with many kinds of leather products, including bags, belts, horse's reigns, clothing, etc. But the main point is that they acted as a team. And ballroom dancing is (I think) the metaphor that best describes them.

And it is worthwhile for husbands and wives to discuss from time to time if they can improve their game as to teamwork. Is the division of labor working well, or should there be an adjustment of some of the roles? And I'll give you some guidance on that later. It's not *Victorian* ideals that should govern role relationships; it is the *Bible*.

### **They helped to plant the church in Rome (implication of Acts 18:2 with later work in Rome in Rom. 16:3)**

Moving on: verse 2 says that they were previously in the city of Rome. What were they doing there? It appears that they were tentmaking there too. But many commentators point out that the strong connection that *both of them* had with the church of Rome indicates that they may very well have been part of the original team that recently helped to plant the church in Rome. They not only had a house church in Rome, but they soon had one in Corinth, and they later had a house church in Ephesus, and then they once again have a house church in Rome. It may have been Paul's friendship with Priscilla and Aquila that gave him such a close relationship with the church of Rome long before he ever saw that church. He longed to go visit them. He had heard so many good things about the church in Rome. And I believe it was from Priscilla and Aquila.

So Aquila seems to be an ordained evangelist who was planting churches before he even met Paul. Once that friendship was established, he accompanied Paul on part of Paul's missions trip and then stayed in a city to plant a church and Paul returned to meet him there. And it really takes a wife with special skills to be able to put up with a person with a call like Aquila had. It's really a small minority of women who could do what she did.

And the point is that when you are looking for a prospective spouse, make sure you are a match for their calling and the other person is a match for your calling. I have seen too many people get married based on falling in love and the wife completely sidelined the man from his calling. And the apostle Paul said that even *he* could become disqualified from being an apostle - and marriage is one of the things that can disqualify us. For example, if you are being called as a missionary to a headhunting tribe, you better marry a woman who is robust enough to handle that.

Anyway, pastor and wife, evangelist and wife, and even the apostles and their wives acted as a team. The women weren't *ordained*, but they were definitely very involved in the ministry of their husbands.

## They no doubt attempted to do evangelistic work in Corinth just before Paul arrived (Acts 18:1-4)

In verses 1-4 they no doubt attempted to do evangelistic work in Corinth *just before the apostle Paul arrived*. And based on what they *later* do, it seems that they used the leverage of both business and home to spread the Gospel. And we need to get used to seeing both our businesses and our homes as tools for Christ's kingdom, not simply as tools for self-enrichment. We are stewards and everything we do must revolve around Christ.

And we saw from the Proverbs 31 woman, Salome, and Lydia that business and home don't have to come into conflict with each other. They don't. And we saw from Peter's wife that the home can be a tremendous platform for ministry outreach. Her home had multitudes coming into it. In fact, we saw that Peter's home was a base of operations for Christ whenever He was in Capernaum.

Well, something similar appears to have been happening with Priscilla and Aquila. They extended hospitality and leveraged both home and business in such a way that many people came to Christ through both vehicles. The Lausanne Missions movement is more and more leveraging business - especially for penetrating closed countries. Even countries closed to the Gospel need businessmen and businesswomen. And this husband-wife duo is yet another example of how business can be used to penetrate a new area with the Gospel.

## Both of them traveled with Paul (Acts 18:18)

Let's read verse 18. It says, "So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him." And we'll stop there. When Paul moved on, both Priscilla and Aquila traveled with him. This means that Priscilla needed to be flexible enough that she was able to pull up roots and move when the Spirit of God said to "move." They had previously left Rome for Corinth near the end of AD 49, or January of AD 50 at the very latest, but it was probably just a bit earlier. They helped plant a church in Corinth and left in verse 18 within two years for Ephesus. Paul often gets the credit for planting a church in Ephesus, but as Thiselton proves, Aquila and Priscilla ministered there just slightly ahead of him. Thiselton says, "When Paul traveled to Ephesus in the summer of AD 52, once again it was Prisca and Aquila (Acts 18:24-28) who were there ahead of him to prepare a welcome."<sup>2</sup> But not content with that church, they seek to plant another. Within five years they have already established another house church in Rome. And yet, within another eight years they have returned to Ephesus to minister there

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1343.

once again. That's a lot of moves and upheaval of both business and home within a decade. Not every wife is up to that, but Priscilla was.

And for those who insist that a wife needs to stay at home, with the idea being in a house, where was home for the wives of the apostles? Paul asks in 1 Corinthians 9:5, "Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?" In the case of constantly traveling apostles, home was wherever their husband was. So we need to adjust our thinking of what it means for a wife to manage the home. Sometimes that home is a moving target. Priscilla and Aquila traveled as a team. That takes a special woman to be able to do that. But there was also the benefit of ministering to each other, and upholding each other, and jointly ministering to others as a team.

## They tag-teamed in "explaining" accurate theology to Apollos (Acts 18:26)

And that's what they did in verse 26. Let's begin reading the context at verse 24. And if you have an ESV, you will notice that they reverse the order of the names, but I am following the New King James Version here, which also follows 98% of manuscripts in this reading. Verse 24:

Acts 18:24 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

Notice the word "they." *They were both* involved in this explaining of doctrine. There are some who believe that Priscilla was involved in sin in doing this, since they believe (wrongly) that it contradicts Paul's admonition in 1 Timothy 2:12, which says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." But there is no hint that Luke or Paul disapproved of what Priscilla did under the leadership of Aquila (whose name is listed first in this context of the Majority Text).

When we get to our applications at the end of the sermon I will get into more detail, but for now I will just point out that there is a huge difference between the meaning of the Greek word for teach (διδάσκω) and the meaning of the Greek word for "explain" (ἐκτίθημι). The first word carries with it the ideas of discipleship and formal teaching whereas the second word carries with it the ideas of private conversation and communication of information. Generally men disciple men and women disciple women and elders disciple and teach formally the whole congregation. But *anyone* can engage in informal conversation about *any* doctrine. If a bunch of you are at a table or in our living room and a woman hears an interesting conversation about Biblical ethics applied to culture, or doctrinal controversies, that woman does not have to excuse herself from the conversation. Just like we saw with Mary Magdalene, Priscilla was very comfortable involving herself in doctrinal conversations - *even when there are disagreements* - as there were with Mary Magdalene and the apostles as well. And that this was a conversation and not formal teaching can be seen by not only the Greek word ἐκτίθημι, but also by the fact that the text makes clear that

they took Apollos aside privately, and by the fact that this was not just Priscilla talking. The three of them were conversing, with Aquila taking the lead and Priscilla obviously adding in great doctrinal clarifications. If you think of it as a ball-room dance, I think you will have a good idea of what went on. I'll talk about this controversy a bit more when we get to the end of the sermon, but let's move on to other descriptions of this husband-wife team.

## They were “fellow-workers” with Paul in Asia (Rom. 16:3)

Romans 16:3 is the next verse that talks about them. It says, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.” No one could accuse the Presbyterian scholar, John Murray, of being a feminist, yet in his commentary he acknowledges that this label of “fellow workers in Christ Jesus” cannot be restricted to their tentmaking together. After mentioning that theory, he says,

But in view of verses 9 and 21 we must regard the cooperation as referring to joint labour in the gospel in the bond of union and fellowship with Christ. Here we have another example of the contribution made by a woman (Prisca) in the work of the gospel and of the church (cf. vss. 6, 12) within the limits prescribed by Paul elsewhere (cf. 1 Cor. 11:3–16; 14:33b–36; 1 Tim. 2:8–15).<sup>3</sup>

We will get to those limits later, but we cannot miss the fact that Priscilla was a fellow-worker with Paul in advancing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. How did she do it? We aren't given a lot of details, but we do have some hints.

## They hosted one of the churches of Ephesus in their home (1 Cor. 16:19)

For example (and this is the next point - and the next Scripture), 1 Corinthians 16:19 says,

The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

This means that in AD 55 (when 1 Corinthians was written) they already had a house church. That means that within three years of leaving Corinth and arriving in Ephesus (where Paul was visiting when he wrote 1 Corinthians) their Gospel outreach had been a tremendous success in Ephesus. They have a viable church meeting in their home in that city too. And by the way, the home wasn't in just Aquila's name; they both owned the house according to the Greek. It is Biblical for husband and wife to own a home - contrary to the opinion of some hyper-patriarchalists.

But let's do a little more synthesis. Authors have deduced several things about Aquila and Priscilla from the facts we have looked at so far. First of all, they must have been somewhat wealthy. That means that their leather-working business was not just a hole-in-the-wall shoe shop. It was likely a thriving international trade that required employees, marketing,

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<sup>3</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, *The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 228.

travel, connections with related trades, and amounted to an international business of some sort. They were entrepreneurs. This was probably not nearly as lucrative a trade as what Lydia had, but it was still quite profitable.

It also explains why all their homes were large enough to be able to accommodate a church - not just a small group, but a church. That would require a rather large house - much like the house that Peter owned, and that archaeology has recently discovered next to the synagogue (as the Gospel says that Peter's house was located). It also shows that both of them likely had tremendous people skills that enabled them to be able to bridge gaps and gain the confidence of people fairly quickly. At least one of them had to have had evangelistic skills, winning people to Christ through their ever growing business contacts. But it also shows that their business was not an end in itself, but a tool for Christ's kingdom. And as already mentioned, business still remains one of the most significant means of outreach in closed countries.

### **They then returned to minister to the church in Rome as a team and established yet another house church (Rom. 16:3-5)**

But within another five years, they must have felt that the church in Ephesus was in good hands, so Priscilla and Aquila traveled back to Rome. The ban on Jews had been lifted by that time, with Nero (who had already been in office for a year) filling his court with Jews and marrying a Jewess. I don't have time to get into the reasons for the reversal, but it had to do with pressure from the international banks - which by this point were dominated by the Sadducees. Anyway, when Paul wrote to the Roman churches in AD 57 we find that in less than two years this missionary duo had already established yet another house church in their new home. Romans 16:3-5 says this:

Rom. 16:3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5 Likewise greet the church that is in their house.

The fact that all the churches of the Gentiles are thankful for them shows that we only know a few facts about this dynamite evangelistic couple. They must have contributed to other churches in ways that we simply do not know. We only have hints.

### **They then returned to minister in Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:19)**

And one of the hints is that eight years later we find that they had returned to Ephesus to minister there. In 2 Timothy 4:19 Paul tells Timothy, "Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus." They sure were able to get around. But all of this travel and church planting makes it clear that their main goal was evangelistic and the establishment of churches, and their tentmaking helped them to accomplish that goal.

### **Conclusion on their tag-teaming efforts**

We can make some additional conclusions from the facts that we have gathered thus far. First, Priscilla and Aquila do not live in separate insulated worlds - the world of the female



and the world of the male. Certainly we have seen from past sermons that there *are* distinctly female roles and distinctly male roles that God has ordained, but Mary the sister of Martha shows that women sat at Jesus feet to learn from Him, and Mary Magdalene shows that women followed Jesus and ministered to Him, and Priscilla illustrates how women can work with their men and dialogue with their men in a tag-teaming way. To quote Elizabeth Botkin:

Priscilla ... [is] a neat corrective to the idea that all activities, like French nouns, should be gendered (only women should cook, only men should kill badguys, only women should wash dishes, only men should take out the trash). With Priscilla and Aquila, they're both making tents, they're both talking to Apollos about doctrine, they're both risking their lives to help Paul, and they're both helping to host/plant churches. And yet we know there are differences in how they are doing these things, and that Priscilla is not crossing any lines.

Before we end the sermon by demonstrating how she was comfortable with a woman's role without feeling like it was a straightjacket, let me look at a few more characteristics that help to give a fuller picture of who she was.

## Her characteristics

### Brave - risking her life to help Paul (Rom. 16:3-5)

Paul says that both she and her husband were brave. In Romans 16:4 he says, "...who risked their own necks for my life..." This means that they rescued Paul from death in a situation that was so dangerous that their lives could have been lost in the process of attempting to rescue him. We aren't told when or where they did that. There are all kinds of theories that have been put forth, from the riot in Acts 19, to various arrests and sentences of death. But whichever event it was (and maybe it wasn't even an event recorded in the book of Acts), Aquila and Priscilla were quite prepared to lay down their lives in order to rescue Paul. That speaks of bravery and courage - a virtue that all of us should aspire to have for the sake of Christ.

### Adventurous - never in one place for very long (see above)

A second characteristic that they both had was that they were adventurous. Not everyone has the kind of travel bug that they had. But to travel as much as they did would mean lots of planning, packing, purchasing, selling, arranging of boat fares, and facing all the risks and adventures associated with ancient travel. We need to thank God that some people are up to that. But I think all of us should at least be inspired to get out of our comfort zone once in a while for the sake of Christ. Challenge yourself from time to time to get out of your comfort zone.

### Sacrificial

The third characteristic I see from the various passages we have read is that they were sacrificial. They opened their home not only to Paul's large missionary team, but also to at least three churches that met in their home in different cities (some people say at least four

churches at different times). Their home always seemed to be the base of some kind of ministry. This means sacrificing privacy, comfort, energy, and finances. Having church at your home means wear and tear to the home and it means the expenditure of plenty of energy. Engaging in hospitality as they did is not cheap. Traveling as they did is not cheap. And whatever was involved in rescuing Paul, it involved personal sacrifice as well. Not all of you are able to sacrifice to the same degree that they did, but all of us should be willing to sacrifice our comfort, privacy, energy, and finances for the kingdom - at least to some degree.

### **Hard working - like Paul bi-vocational**

A fourth characteristic that we can imitate is that they were hard working. Like Paul, Aquila was bi-vocational. In part it was because he had to be - they were always on the cusp of reaching unreached areas, and then moving on to other unreached areas. This would mean that they couldn't be fully supported by any local church until that church was established. But forget about the financial sacrifices for a moment and think of the hard work that this involved. We need to develop a good work ethic in our children and model a good work ethic to them. The kingdom is not built without work. This should be an absolutely minimum characteristic of every Christian - they should have the Protestant work ethic.

### **Theological - it is obvious that both of them explained theology to Apollos**

A fifth characteristic is that they were both theologically competent. It is obvious that both of them explained theology to Apollos. Priscilla didn't leave the study of theology to her husband. She too had deep interest in God's Word. And we have seen in previous sermons that there are other women in the Bible and in early church history who learned theology well. And though God calls husbands to wash their wives with the water of the Word and to lead the family in discipleship and in worship (that is a husband's role), that doesn't mean that a wife is a passive receptacle. The Bereans were praised because they checked out everything Paul said from the Scriptures to see if it was true. They were thinkers.

And it is obvious that both Aquila and Priscilla were used to evaluating all teaching against the touchstone of the Bible, because when they heard Apollos teach, much as they recognized that he was a powerful preacher, they also immediately recognized a few mistakes that needed correcting. (And by the way, we pastors need to be open to correction.) And just as Jesus authorized Mary Magdalene to correct the false ideas that the apostles had about the resurrection, Priscilla was engaged in doing something similar - yet within the bounds that God's law lays out. And we will look at those bounds in a bit. But it is important for our women to be theologically sound. Study doctrine, ethics, Biblical history, and Biblical worldview. It will help you in your day-to-day decision making; it really will.

## Synergy with husband in Gospel ministry

Sixth, she didn't compete with her husband. Rather, there appears to be synergy in their efforts together. Again, this probably meant that they complemented each other with their knowledge, gifts, and capabilities. No one person can do it all.

It is my belief that the ideal marriage *ordinarily* (maybe not always, but ordinarily) should be able to accomplish more together than what the same people could accomplish unmarried. And this is because of the concept of synergy. You young people will likely marry a person who is stronger than you in some areas and weaker than you in other areas, but through marriage you can complement each other with your strengths and therefore get more done. The best illustration of synergy that I have seen was watching draft horses pull loads at competitions. My favorite videos are from the Calgary Stampede up in Alberta, Canada. I saw one pair of horses in 2012 pull 13,400 lbs of dead weight on a skid. For dead weight that is pretty impressive. I think the world record of what a pair of draft horse could pull in a wagon was close to 100,000 pounds. The wagon was pulled by a pair of Shire draft horses in 1924. But the point of synergy is that a pair of draft horses can pull (not twice as much, as you might assume, but) three times more than what a single horse can pull. And if the horses are well trained, they can pull up to four times more. That's synergy. By working as a team, you can do much more.

And that is true of a good marriage. Kathy and I have been able to accomplish far more as a team than either of us could have possibly been able to do when unmarried. On the other hand, I have seen some pastors who have such needy wives that they accomplish less being married than before they were married. So marry well if you are going to get married. Look for synergy. Don't be unrealistic and expect a perfect spouse or none of you will get married - 'cause you're not perfect either. All of us have our weaknesses, but your spouse can help to fill those in.

## Breaks stereotypes of hyper-gendered spheres of life

But the last characteristic of Priscilla that I want to mention is that she breaks the stereotypes of hyper-gendered spheres of life. She was good in the home and good in business. She was good in private and good at having a public church at her house. She was good in travel and good with laying down roots for a time. She was not your ordinary wife, which means that not all of you would be able to relate to her. That's OK. But at least she helps to fill out the picture we have been painting over the past twenty sermons of what women of faith *can* look like.

**Quad-perspectivalism. Is Priscilla a model of feminism? Or is she an ideal example of a helpmeet bringing synergy to the husband/wife team? This sermon will mine the data then seek to apply the principles.**

Before we get to some additional applications, let me reiterate how important quad-perspectivalism is in biographical sermons. As I have analyzed the women of faith in this series, I have tried very hard not to confuse the four perspectives on Biblical ethics. Just because a woman of faith did something in a given situation (that would be the personal and situational perspectives), does not make that action a righteous action - especially if that woman violated a Biblical norm. All four aspects of ethics must be accounted for before we can imitate a person in the Bible.

And let me list those four perspectives for you: The normative perspective looks at the direct commands of God and his prophets. It deals with not just God's law, but also whether God elsewhere approves of something and/or commands something. That's the normative perspective. It's giving us God's norms or commands.

The teleological perspective analyzes what the Bibles says about the *consequences* of an action (or inaction ) as well as righteous *goals* and whether a given action is *worthwhile* in God's eyes. So, for example, Paul says all things that are lawful (that would be the normative perspective - all things that are lawful) are not necessarily expedient, helpful, or edify (the teleological perspective - see 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23). He said that not all lawful things are worthwhile doing. So in 1 Corinthians Paul instructs us to not only look at whether we are violating a law of God, but to also to look at whether our liberty is expedient, helpful, or edifying. Those instructions are all dealing with teleology. It's an important part of ethics.

The situational perspective amounts to the historical background into which God is speaking. It may be lawful to bless your neighbor, but Proverbs indicates that when you do it in the wrong situation (early in the morning) and with the goal of irritating (with a loud voice), it is sin. So that is the situational perspective. You've got to make sure that your actions meet the biblical criteria describing various situations.

And then the Bible says that norms have to be seen in context of *who* is being spoken to. That's the personal perspective. For example, when Paul said, "if anyone will not work, neither should he eat," he was not talking about babies or invalids. He was talking about able-bodied people who were being lazy. That norm had specific people in mind. So, (as another example), when we looked at Mary Magdalene we didn't try to make you women feel guilty if you weren't involved in full-time ministry. She was different; she was independently wealthy.

And both feminists and hyperpatriarchalists have failed to account for all four perspectives when looking at Priscilla. For example, Harold Hoehner uses Priscilla as proof that women

can be pastors and teachers.<sup>4</sup> Well, there is nothing in any of those passages to indicate that she was a pastor or a teacher. Others look to her as proof that she was an apostle. But in doing this these authors completely overturn a direct command or norm in 1 Timothy 2:12, where God says, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” But before we go to the opposite extreme and say that Priscilla was in sin when doing what she did, we should realize that Luke by inspiration seems to *approve* of what Priscilla was doing, and it is very similar to the communication of truth that Christ actually *commanded* Mary Magdalene to give to the apostles. If Christ commanded these kinds of actions, they should be able to be reconciled with Paul’s norm. And they can. Do you see where I am heading?

## Application questions from the life of Priscilla and Aquila

So with that as a background, let me end by answering five questions that two people have brought up to me concerning Priscilla:

### Does Priscilla overturn the role relationships laid out by the apostle Paul?

The first question is, “Does Priscilla overturn the role relationships laid out by the apostle Paul?” And the answer is, “No.” Indeed, the very order of the names in each unique situation strongly hints at this. Let’s go through them.

In Acts 18:2 Aquila is placed first. What’s the situation? Well, the two things being highlighted in that verse may explain *why* his name is placed first. Those verses are describing their move from Rome *and* their business. Aquila no doubt was the authority who determined where they would move to and Aquila was no doubt the boss and authority in the business. Both of them worked as a team, but someone does have to make the final decision, and in both travel and in business it appears that the buck stopped with Aquila. This upholds the principle that the husband is the leader and authority in the family. Does he get input from his wife? Absolutely. He would be stupid not to.

In verse 18 *Priscilla* is mentioned first. What’s the context? Well, there is nothing in the context that might imply authority. It just mentions that they were travel companions to Paul, Luke, and the rest of Paul’s team. It says, “Paul... sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him...” Why was she the first one to come to Luke’s mind when describing that trip? Maybe she was the more dominant personality. Maybe she was the more fun of the two to talk with. Maybe on the ship she was the more helpful of the two in enabling the

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<sup>4</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), and “Can a Woman Be a Pastor-Teacher?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 4 (2007): 761–71.

trip to be a pleasant trip for Paul's team. We aren't told, but it is obvious that she is highlighted as more significant in some way on this trip.

By the way (and this is somewhat related) her fun personality may be hinted at in the fact that in five out of the six occurrences of her name, she is called Priscilla, not Prisca. Prisca is the formal form of the name, used only by Paul in one place, and Priscilla is the diminutive form. Priscilla would be like calling Daniel "Danny." It's a more personal, fun-loving name. It's a name used by friends and people you are comfortable hanging around. And commentators say that this shows that both Luke and Paul were on very friendly and comfortable terms with her - despite the fact that she may have been an Aristocrat - as at least some commentaries have claimed (whether legitimately or not I haven't delved into enough). But for some reason, she is the one who seems to be the more noticed of the two *in the context of traveling*. I personally think that she was probably a very fun conversationalist and fun travel companion.

In verse 26 Aquila is mentioned first in the Majority Text. What's the context? It's correcting a very prominent and gifted teacher, Apollos. Both were involved in correcting his doctrine in private, but Aquila takes the lead and Priscilla fits into and supports Aquila's leadership role. But since a private situation is not exclusively the man's world, either name could have come first. So this textual critical issue is not a hill to die on. I'm just following the New King James here. Think of it sort of like ballroom dancing. Though Aquila no doubt took the lead, Priscilla entered into the discussion with confidence as well, contributing things that Aquila may have missed.

In Romans 16:3, *Priscilla* is mentioned first. What's the context? It's greetings. He is expressing his love and appreciation to a number of people in Romans 16 who have stood head and shoulders above everyone. Both labored in the gospel with Paul and both risked their lives for Paul and the churches of the Gentiles certainly appreciate both. But there is something even more special about Priscilla. In any case, she can be mentioned first because there is no mention of authority, church, or home.

In 1 Corinthians 16:19 Aquila is mentioned first. What's the context? The *church* that they had planted. So it makes sense that the church-planter (who is the authority figure in that church) would be mentioned first. Though both would be obviously very involved - especially since the church was meeting in their home and Priscilla would be an indispensable part of the home, Aquila is mentioned first because he was the official church leader, church planter, and head of the home.

In 2 Timothy 4:19 Priscilla is mentioned first. What's the context? There is no context. He simply greets Priscilla and Aquila, who were both obviously a huge help to Timothy in Ephesus. But the fact that she is once again mentioned first when it is a context with no potential confusion over authority or office shows to me that in Paul's mind, Priscilla is the first person that comes to mind, whether that is because of her more dominant personality, or fun personality, or that she was constantly there to help in some way, no one knows for sure.

But putting all the commands of Scripture, the trajectory, the unique personalities, and the situations together we can say at least the following conclusions about the ministry of both in home and church:

Paul didn't see Priscilla as the leader. Aquila was. But would the home and church been as warm without her? I doubt it. I don't normally talk about Kathy and me from the pulpit, but I'm going to take a risk and use *both of us* as a comparison by looking at the contributions of Kathy and me to both home and church.

I find it fascinating to see which one of us our children will call for various issues. When the kids just want to talk, they call Kathy. They can talk on and on with her. She is a much better conversationalist than I am, and probably a bit more fun to talk to than I am. When they want to make an important decision, they will call both of us together. When they have a tough ethical or theological question they will ask me. It just seems natural. There are good reasons for those emphases.

When we homeschooled, I was obviously the vision caster and leader and overall approver of our homeschool curriculum, but Kathy implemented it better than me. I checked up on the kids to see how they were doing, and I did troubleshooting more frequently. But we complemented each other as a team.

When we planted the church up in Smithland, Iowa and when we later planted this church, Kathy was an indispensable part of its success. I guarantee that we could not have done either church plant without her. I would have been overwhelmed. But I was the church planter, not her. But was she a fellow-laborer? Absolutely yes, and anyone who met with us week after week knew that we both played indispensable roles. Well, that's how I see it with Priscilla and Aquila.

The point is that *leadership* (which is what everyone seems to get hung up on) isn't everything to the success of a team - not by slingshot. Aquila respected his wife's opinions, labors, and huge contributions to relationships, outreach, conversation, and ministry success. And so did Luke and Paul.

## How can a woman help in church-planting efforts without crossing lines?

The second question someone asked me is, "How can a woman help in church-planting efforts without crossing lines?" Well, I think I just answered that.

## How can a woman teach/disciple/share knowledge without crossing lines?

The third question is, "How can a woman teach/disciple/share knowledge without crossing lines?" And I might add, "What are those lines?" I won't look at all of the lines, but 1 Timothy 2 and Titus 2 outline the fact that women should dress differently, pray differently, and teach differently. It's not that men teach and women don't. Women are *commanded* to teach (same Greek word) in Titus 2 and women are *prohibited* from teaching

men in 1 Timothy 2. So its not that one can teach and the other can't. Women can't teach men in one passage and are commanded to teach women in the other one. And it is not simply authoritative teaching that 1 Timothy 2 prohibits. There are two commands Paul gives in 1 Timothy 2:12. It says, "I do not permit a woman to teach *or* to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." The "or" is οὐδέ, or "and not" - not this and not that. They can neither teach men nor exercise authority over men. And the context there can't be limited to just the church, because the very illustrations Paul uses are outside the church. Verses 13-14 point to Adam and Eve as the example of God giving instruction to Adam about taking dominion, and expecting Adam to teach that to Eve. Likewise he gives an example of a woman's role (childbearing) that is not related to the church but is uniquely female. So it seems to be a universal prohibition - women shouldn't teach men.

I won't get into all the ins and outs of this question, but the clue to understanding Paul's command is simply the meaning of the Greek word for "teach," which is διδάσκω. A teacher in the Bible is a discipler who directs and molds the disciple. In the words of the Great Commission, we only fulfill the mandate to *teach* the nations as they "*observe*" all things that Christ commanded. So Christ said that a disciple "who is fully trained will be *like* his teacher" (Luke 6:40). Teaching in the Bible is not simply communicating information, or it would *not* be forbidden to women. Teaching is often closely tied with the three words characteristic of nouthetic counseling (νουθετέω, παρακαλέω, and ἐλέγχω). This is why Scripture says that false teaching leads to immoral living (Titus 1:11) whereas good teaching leads to upright living (Tit. 2:3ff). This is why teaching or discipleship is best done by men with men and women with women, though the man is called to disciple his wife and the elders are called to disciple their flock.

In contrast, the word used for Aquila and Priscilla talking with Apollos is more akin to discussion, dialogue, and conversation. The word "sharing" is perhaps overused, but they were gently sharing their perspective with Apollos. And Priscilla was not alone with him; she was with her husband. But it is obvious that she contributed at least some helpful information to Apollos. And as already mentioned, if she is not being confrontational with Apollos, this would have been nothing more than what we have already examined Mary Magdalene doing with Christ's approval.

### **How can a woman support a godly man's ministry (if he's not a husband or family member) without crossing any lines?**

The next question was, "How can a woman support a godly man's ministry (if he's not a husband or family member) without crossing any lines?"

I would say that she shouldn't be spending alone-time with the pastor. There is no indication that Priscilla was spending time ministering alone to Luke or Paul. She ministered to them "with her husband." In the Gospels the women who ministered to Jesus did so with other women and men present. I have seen too many romantic involvements begin unintentionally between a man and a woman who started off with the purest of intentions, but they happened because they violated this principle.

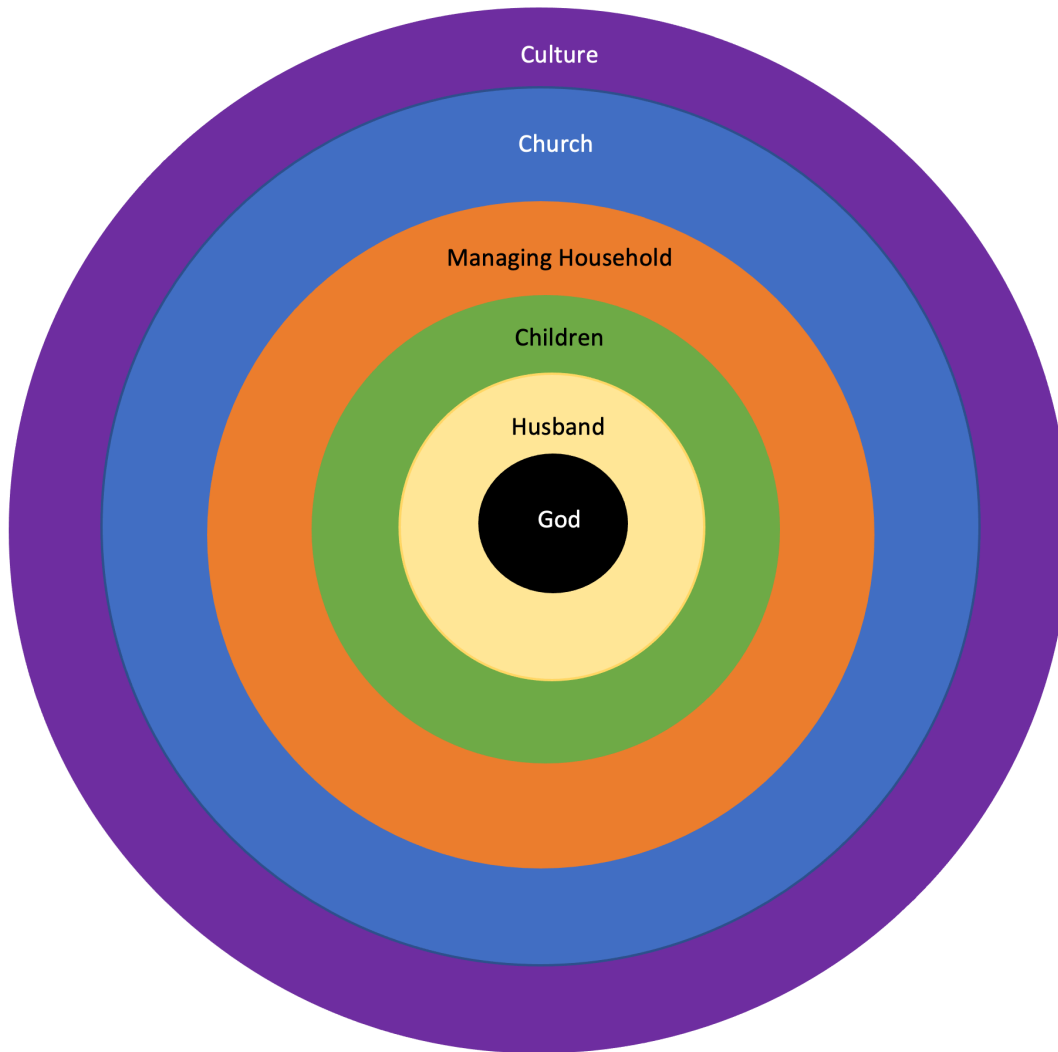


For the same reason, there shouldn't be any counseling of the opposite sex in private. As I've already mentioned, counseling is more akin to Biblical teaching. So when I counsel a girl or a woman, I always have someone else with me - my wife if need be. And if it is a man being counseled and you want a woman to be present so that the wife can feel supported, it is ideal for a man to be the lead counselor and the woman counselor to be the assistant counselor. But women can counsel women. We have trained many women to do so over the past thirty years. Sheri Duff and Kit Fox spend a lot of time in counseling. Pray for them.

But women can support a godly man's ministry in many many other ways. We've looked at some of those ways when we looked at the women who followed Jesus. They were ministering to Jesus. In one message I looked at the numerous behind-the-scenes ways that women served as a support team for Jesus just like Jeremy Camp's support team helped him to be a success. Over the years we have matched older women with women who are young in the faith for figuring out homeschooling, child-rearing, scheduling, and many other things. When women are doing a wide range of one-on-one ministries with each other, it frees up the elders from needing to do so. When women put out gossip, slander, and divisive behavior, it helps the pastors enormously. In other words, the more women mature in Christ, the more they are an asset to the elders rather than a drain on the elders. So this is an open-ended question with an open-ended answer.

### **How can a woman be economically productive without crossing any lines?**

The next question was, "How can a woman be economically productive without crossing any lines?" Obviously she needs to not be doing so against her husband's wishes. Right? She is under authority. But I think the chart of concentric circles that I have put into your outlines is the easiest way of explaining the liberties a woman has in this area.



The heart and center of the circles of your life is God, not man. The first thing Eve saw when she came to life was God. He was the center of her life and needed to remain the center of her life even after she was given in marriage to Adam. The husband should represent God to his wife (yes), but he is *not* in the place of God. Otherwise Deuteronomy 13:6 would not command a wife turn over her husband to the state if he was trying to get her to worship other gods. She has to be a Berean who thinks for herself, and her loyalty to God comes before loyalty to her husband. Deuteronomy 13:6 is crystal clear on that. Nothing takes the central place of God.

But the next responsibility (the next circle on the diagram working out from the center) is the husband. So the next responsibility that the wife has is to make sure that she is not so busy with children and with other responsibilities that she is failing to be her husband's helpmeet or failing to meet his sexual needs or failing to be a friend to him. He is her next primary responsibility. And of course, if I was preaching on a man's biography, I would point out that Paul commands the man to learn how to please his wife. She is that circle to him.

The next part of the circle are the children that are added and little by little leave the home. Too many times they become the center and when they grow up and leave home, the wife realizes that she is distant from her husband. Well, she became distant a long time earlier by putting the children in a closer circle than her husband's circle. Of course, she *does* have a responsibility to her children, and the circles show that her responsibility to her children comes *before business or church or anything else outside the home*. If she is failing in her Titus 2 duties to her children, she should drop her volunteer work for the church. For sure she should not take a job outside the home if she is not fulfilling her Titus 2 duties.

But of course, wives are commanded to manage the household, which includes a lot of duties if it is done well. Obviously wealthy wives will have slaves they can purchase (I say that tongue-in-cheek. I'm referring to things like dishwashers, washing machines, phones, computers, and other time saving devices - yes, those are equivalent to slaves - most of you women are mistresses with a bunch of slaves). But she is still responsible to manage the home.

If she is doing a great job at all of those circles, then she can branch out and serve in the church and then in the world. Some women have enormous energies and are able to manage all of that plus more. So, given all of those caveats related to priorities, let me list a partial list of things that the Bible says women can do to supplement the income of their households or do just as volunteer work.

And we will start with finances, because that often drives a couple's decisions. They can be frugal and save money through efficiency. Ah, you were probably not expecting me to bring that up. But before you even think of working outside the home (which may be a necessity), figure out frugality. Frugality is buying what we need, but not necessarily everything we want. And it involves learning how to be more efficient with your finances - turning off the lights when you leave a room, lowering the furnace thermometer, buying bulk, etc. Proverbs 21:20 says, "There is desirable treasure, and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish person squanders it." Frugality will sometimes be all that is needed to keep a wife from needing to work outside the home. She can do it because she wants to, not because she needs to.

Second, wives can be wise economists within the home and utilize division of labor and specialization among the children, time saving devices, and other helps. You maybe never thought of putting your children to work, but the Scripture calls for it. Too many homes fail to see the training value of including the children in the family's financial growth. The children benefit and the husband and wife benefit when the children are contributors to the family's efficiency through efficient use of gardening and other chores. When the family is functioning like a smoothly running machine, then she can *optionally* branch out into numerous things outside the home (with the husband's permission of course). And I will begin by listing a bunch of things women can do outside the home.

The Proverbs 31 woman engaged in grocery shopping, real estate transactions, gardening, selling merchandise, manufacturing fabric and clothing, retail, training of servants, teaching her children, and mercy ministries. Verse 11 says that many of those things increased the family income.

The women of Matthew 27:55 helped Jesus as the support team for his ministry. Now, granted, that was not for pay; that was volunteer work. But the principle of working outside the home is the same. Luke 24:1 shows women involved in funeral preparations. Matthew 28:5-9 shows them running errands and delivering messages. Acts 1:14 shows them participating in church prayer meetings. Matthew 15:32-39 shows women going away on a three day conference and Mark 15 shows even longer ministry trips like some of our women have taken with Joni and Friends. Several Scriptures show women involved as midwives outside the home (Gen. 35:17; 38:28; Ex. 1:15-21). Exodus 35:25-26 shows women working on the temple curtains (basically equivalent to helping to beautify and make the church facilities more functional). Ruth 2 honors gleaning. Several passages show skilled and trained women serving in a worship music team (1 Sam. 18:7; 2 Chron. 35:25; Ezra 2:65; Neh. 7:67). Exodus 33:8 and Luke 2:37 show women serving at the temple in whatever practical ways were needed. Acts 16:14 shows a woman running a business. Titus 2:3-5 shows mature women discipling younger women. Those are all outside the home.

I think you get the point. As the inner circles are dealt with to the husband's satisfaction, there is no reason why women cannot go beyond those boundaries. Obviously there are some things that are prohibited to women. I believe women are prohibited from political office or in any other way having authority over men. But if you avoid the two prohibitions given in 1 Timothy 2:12, the sky is the limit on what capable women can achieve.

But one of the most central things that Priscilla did was to be a part of leveraging their home and business to expand Christ's kingdom. To the degree that God enables, let's all aspire to do at least that. Amen.