The Leadership of Priscilla

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Priscilla is mentioned precisely six times in the New Testament. Six times. And, although tantalizingly limited in detail, those six mentions tell the story of a woman who used her gifts and resources to influence the spread and nurturing of the early church. Priscilla was a businesswoman who, with her husband Aquila, likely owned leatherwork or tent-making shops in several urban centers of the ancient world of Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus.

Priscilla and Aquila were also good friends and ministry partners with Paul (Romans 16:3). When Paul met the couple in Corinth they were already believer, and they welcomed Paul the tent-maker and evangelist into their business and home, and he enjoyed their hospitality for 18 months (Acts 18). One scholar paints a convincing picture of Paul working in their ground-level shop (Priscilla and Aquila making their home upstairs), chatting with customers and sharing the Good News, alongside Paul's teaching in Corinthian synagogues, is how the churches in Corinth began.

The Bible is God's Word, and "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Because of this, Priscilla's leadership in the early church can easily be missed by our modern, western perspectives, especially as she and her husband receive only six mentions in Acts and Paul's letters. But when we consider Paul's experiences and

culture and the original audiences' experiences and culture, those six mentions like a trumpet proclaim Priscilla's significance in the nurturing of home-churches throughout the Mediterranean and impact on Paul's life and ministry.

In ancient Mediterranean culture, women were viewed as property of their husbands, of lesser status, needing to live under the protection of their fathers or husbands for their survival and well being. Five times out of six, Luke and Paul mention Priscilla's name first in the husband-wife pair (Acts 18:18, Acts 18:19, Acts 18:26, Romans 16:3, 2 Timothy 4:19), highlighting her agency and her value to the early church movement.

In ancient Mediterranean culture, women were not commended for work or accomplishments that fell outside of a traditional feminine roles such as caring for home and family. When Priscilla is mentioned by Paul, he describes her as a co-worker in the Lord (Romans 16:3), placing her alongside Timothy (Romans 16:21), Titus (2 Corinthians 8:23), Philemon (Philemon 1) and Luke (Philemon 24) in Paul's valuing of her work among the churches.

In ancient Mediterranean culture, women were traditionally uneducated, and therefore their voices were not valued in any teaching capacity in religious or educational settings; in Jewish culture, it was forbidden for women to teach men. Priscilla and her husband took the charismatic preacher and evangelist Apollos under

their wings “explaining to him the way of God more accurately,” empowering him to preach the Word of God with truth and clarity (Acts 18:24-26).

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Priscilla is mentioned only six times in the New Testament, and in each instance, she is named in a strikingly countercultural way. We hear Luke and Paul tell of a woman who had rich influence on the nurturance and growth of churches in Corinth, Ephesus and their home-city of Rome. Priscilla used her gifts of hospitality, hosting house-churches in her home; she used her gifts of knowing God’s truth to clarify **the Gospel message** for the charismatic Apollos; she used the fruits of her business acumen and welcomed Paul into the heart of her leather-works shop, providing him a platform to teach and to preach. And she used her gift of friendship to encourage the greatest evangelist who ever lived.

Bruce Winter writes, “Paul had no more loyal friends than **Priscilla and Aquila**, ‘to whom,’ as he put it some years later, “not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks” (Rom 16:4) (Winter 298). I can imagine no higher praise in that culture for one’s work and leadership in the early Christian movement.

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