

Aquila, Priscilla, and Paul: The A.P.P. Evangelistic Society?

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Acts 18:1-4 records Paul's visit to Corinth and his stay with Aquila and Priscilla. Some brethren are trying to use this passage to justify the practice of business organizations conducting evangelistic work. It is argued that by "working" with Aquila and Priscilla, the three of them constituted a business organization. It is then argued that this "organization" functioned *evangelistically*. There are several problems with this claim, but let us be reminded of the passage before considering these problems:

"After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. 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. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:1-4, NASB).

1. The passage tells us that Paul worked with Aquila and Priscilla: It does not say that the three of them formed a business organization. Acts 18 nowhere states or implies that these three individuals functioned *jointly* in *any* work or activity (commercial, spiritual or otherwise). No mention is made of any *common identity, oversight or treasury*. No mention is made of any organism that bound Aquila, Priscilla and Paul into one functioning unit. There was no *Aquila-Priscilla-Paul Teachers & Tentmakers Inc., or A.P.P. Tent-making and Evangelism*, or any other such organization. Such a concept is the product of some overactive imaginations. It is not the product of careful investigation of the Scriptures. The claim is made only because certain brethren need for such an organization to be in place in order for them to prove their further claims that this "organization" functioned in the realm of evangelism. Once again, those who wish to defend the use of human organizations in evangelism are guilty of thumbing their noses at God's silence.

Not surprisingly, the above argument is being made by a bunch of *preachers*. Apparently, some of them have little understanding of the secular work environment. Perhaps a little "tent-making" advice is

in order: People can share the same “occupation” and work at the “same trade” without forming a business **organization**. There is nothing wrong with Christians forming a business organization, but the Scriptures nowhere suggest that this was done by Paul, Aquila and Priscilla. One must add to the biblical narrative in order to reach such a conclusion. Sadly, that is what some are doing.

2. The passage speaks of concurrent action, not organic action. *Bias* affects interpretation. Those who approach the Scriptures for the purpose of defending what they are already practicing will tend to see in the Scriptures what they want to see. Those who seek to defend the concept of business Bible lectureships and individually supported missionary societies tend to see *organic* action in every passage that speaks of action taken by 2 or more individuals. It is possible, however, for people to work together without any organic arrangement. Paul worked on and off with Barnabas, Silas, Luke, Timothy and others (Acts). This does not mean that he was in a constant state of forming and dissolving various evangelistic organizations throughout the course of his preaching life. Paul worked *concurrently* with these men.

Concurrent action is different from joint action. Joint action occurs when 2 or more individuals form an organization. These individuals operate under a common name, pool their resources into a common treasury, operate under a common oversight, and work through that organization to achieve a common purpose. This is not an arbitrary definition: It is the very one that is used by God in the Scriptures! The New Testament local church is such an organism. The saints that comprise a local church operate under a common name that distinguishes their local church from others (ex. “church in Ephesus, church in Symrna...Pergamum...etc, Rev. 2:1, 8, 12...). They have a common treasury (Acts 4:35; 1 Cor. 16:2). They have a common oversight (elders, Acts 14:23; 20:28; Eph. 4:11; Phil. 1:1). And they have a common purpose (Eph. 4:12-16). When saints function through the local church they function as one.

It is *individual* action when a person works in his own name, makes his own plans and decisions, and pays for his work out of his own funds (ex. Good Samaritan, Luke 10:30-37). It is possible for 2 or more individuals to engage in a common work, such as teaching the

Bible, without functioning *jointly*. That is, without forming an organism such as described above. Each person makes his own decision about what he will do, and each person pays his own way, but he does so in coordination with other individuals who are doing the same thing. There are many examples of this in the Bible. As I referenced above, Paul worked alongside Barnabas, Silas, Timothy and others. After a “sharp disagreement” Paul and Barnabas “separated from each other,” Paul taking Silas, and Barnabas choosing Mark. Obviously, these men made their own decisions and had their own funding! They did not function *jointly*!

If Paul and Silas constituted a preaching *organization* in Thessalonica (Acts 17), then the church at Philippi financed a missionary society, for Philippians 4:16 says that the church supported Paul while he was at Thessalonica! This brings us full circle back to Aquila and Priscilla: Paul received funds from Macedonian churches in order to preach at Corinth (2 Cor. 11:8). If Paul’s association with Aquila and Priscilla constituted an organization (Acts 18), then the Macedonian churches financed a missionary society! Some brethren have obviously not considered the consequences of their position and arguments.

Some have suggested that it is still “individual action” even when those individuals engage in functions that are planned and paid for by an organization. **If this argument is correct, then local churches would be authorized to plan and provide social meals, entertainment and recreation for their members on the basis that eating, watching movies and playing sports are all “individual action.”** The arguments that are being made by some brethren are inadvertently defending liberal practices. I wonder: If our institutional brethren were to make the argument that some have used to defend the Guardian of Truth Lectures, would these lectureship defenders oppose them? Will they continue to condemn these “individual” practices of liberal churches? Let us remember the rule: If one is unwilling to accept the consequences of his position, then he must give up that position!

3. The passage states that *Paul* “reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath day, and persuaded the Jews and Greeks.” It does not say that Paul, Aquila and Priscilla did such reasoning and

persuading *together*. Again, bias causes men to see things in the Scriptures that simply aren't there! The passage does not say that "they" reasoned with and persuaded Jews and Greeks. It says, "*And he reasoned...*" The passage does not say that Paul functioned *jointly* with Aquila and Priscilla in the work of evangelism. Verse 5 goes on to describe how **Paul** was pressed in the spirit upon the arrival of Silas and Timothy, and **Paul** "*testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.*" When they opposed the truth, it was **Paul** who said, "*Your blood be upon your own heads: I am clean: from henceforth I will go to the Gentiles*" (Acts 18:6). It was **Paul** that the Lord appeared to in a vision (vs. 9, 10), and it was **Paul** who "*continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them*" (vs. 11). **Paul** was the one that was charged with heresy against the Law of Moses (vs. 13), not Aquila and Priscilla.

Some have carelessly linked Paul with the Aquila-Priscilla and Apollos incident at Ephesus. These brethren need to go back and read the text of Acts 18:18-26. When they do they will learn that Paul had already departed from Ephesus by the time of Apollos' correction. The (fictional) *A.P.P Tent-making and Teaching* organization had already been dissolved!

4. Paul earned his own money by working with his own hands.

He was not supported out of a common "business" treasury. Acts 20:34 is quite instructive on this point. Paul said, "*Yea, you yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.*" Paul claimed to support himself by the work that he did with his own hands. In fact, Paul made enough money to also help others financially. Incidentally, Acts 20:34 authorizes the support of gospel preachers by individuals. Some have cited the fact that Paul "abode with" Aquila and Priscilla, as proof that a business organization may fund evangelism. But where does the Bible say that Aquila and Priscilla constituted a "business organization?" The Bible identifies Paul's hosts as being two individuals named "Aquila" and "Priscilla." Unless this is a code name for some tent-making organization, no organism is cited as being Paul's host!

5. Paul was also supported by Philippi "from the first day until now" (Philippians 1:5, 7; 4:14-18). If Paul, Aquila and Priscilla

functioned *jointly, as one organism*, and not *individually* and *concurrently*, then by supporting Paul, the Philippian church actually supported a missionary **society!** The position that some brethren have taken on the nature of Paul's associations with Aquila, Priscilla, Barnabas, Luke, Silas, Timothy, Titus and others has paved the way for tacit approval of church support of missionary societies. Sloppy exegesis leads to a chain reaction of errors, leading ultimately to total apostasy.

Conclusion

For this passage to help those who wish to defend the right of business organizations to conduct worship, edification and evangelism, it needs to teach two things: One, that Paul, Aquila and Priscilla had formed some type of business *organization*, and Two, that this organization preached the gospel. The passage affirms neither.

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