

## PAUL TO THE ROMANS

A Martin Zender paraphrase

### PART III



Tryphena, at the Coliseum.

I have been writing to you Romans and getting sidetracked every other sentence. That is fine; I do not mind. There is a new phrase becoming popular among the believers in Philippi, and I may as well share it with you: “Go with the flow.” It has a certain rhythm and will catch on, I believe. It is already gaining traction with the crowd here in Corinth (“crowd” being a figure of speech, for there are less than two dozen of us in this city, besides Tertius and me—and we are practically tourists), and we say it at every meeting.

#### Go with the flow

The “flow” is the spirit of God, which blows like a wind. In fact, I use the same word for wind as I do for spirit: *pneuma*. The spirit of God has much in common with the wind. God’s spirit blows wherever it wills; it is invisible; it sometimes comes hard, and then on certain days seems not to come at all.

Make no mistake that the spirit of God makes its home in us! Even so, it waxes and wanes, when God wishes either to energize or humiliate us. And believe me, He wishes to do both (the latter to keep us humble).

I wrote to you, in my last installment, of my first trip to Cyprus with Barnabas and his cousin John-Mark aboard the *Thugater Thalassa*. When I tell you what happened in Cypress—specifically in Paphos, the coastal city on the southwest of the island—you will scarcely believe it.

# Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

*“If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love, I am a clanging gong” --1 Cor. 13:1-2*



Two out of three isn't bad.

For the moment, I wish to pursue this issue of spirit, and the new saying, “Go with the flow.” The trip to Cypress is an object lesson.

#### At the mercy of wind

Vessels at sea are at the mercy of winds and currents, but especially winds. A sailor discerns the wind, then makes sail accordingly. Is it not the same with the spirit of God? When it blows hard, we race. And when it sits down, so do we. We shall not blame ourselves, shall we?

On the way to Cypress, there was a day when only a hint of breeze maintained. I do not know where we were; it does not matter. What did we do? I shall speak for my-

**“I do not love my nephew Abahu,” said John-Mark. “Please do not say anything.”**

self; I sat and read my books, making some shade on the roping with a piece of canvas. John-Mark, however, cursed. I shall not tell you what he said. But then—why should I not tell you, if there is a lesson in it? He simply said, “Damn the wind!” That is not so bad; I have said it myself. Yet I was in the mood to play with him.

#### I play with John-Mark

“There is a hurry?” I asked.

He said there was not.

“Can we change the wind?”

“I would change it if I could,” he said.

“But you cannot.”

“Granted, Saul.”

I had irritated him.

“Name one fruit of the spirit,” I said.

“Love,” said John-Mark.

“Tell me whom you love.”

“I love you, Saul.”

“Good. And tell me whom you do not love.”

He hesitated.

“It is all right,” I said. “You cannot love everyone.”

He hesitated more. Then, finally:

“I do not love my nephew Abahu of Bethany. Please, do not say anything.”

“Of course. Can you love him of your own strength?”

“I have tried. The man is unlovable. I should tell you what he did to my sister.”

“My point is this: If love is a fruit of the spirit, how do you get it?”

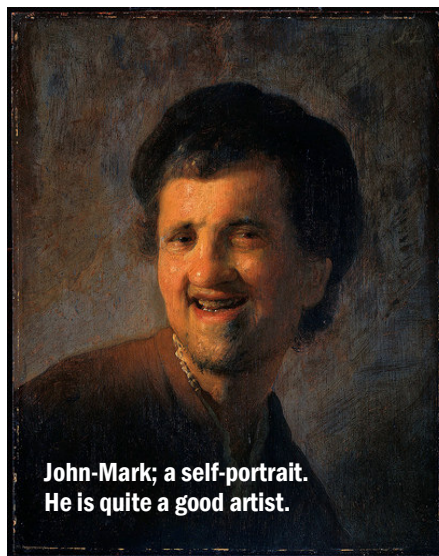
“By spirit?”

“There is no other source. And if that particular spirit does not blow for you?”

He stared at me for a moment, then looked up at the sky and smiled. “Then I sit,” he said.

I passed him one of my books. “When God is ready, we will move.”

“And I will love,” said the young man, John-Mark.



John-Mark; a self-portrait. He is quite a good artist.



The Cyprus coast, near Paphos.

### Landing at Paphos

As anxious as I always am to board ships and travel somewhere new for the sake of Christ, I am even more anxious to get *off* ships. This fantastic enterprise is otherwise known as disembarking—my favorite part of sailing. So disembark, we did. The first order of business was to pay a courtesy call to the proconsul, Sergius Paul.

### What is it about resurrection?

It was more than simple courtesy, as we had heard from Cephas in Jerusalem (I can't say where *he* heard it) that the gentile politician had gotten wind (spirit!) of the Savior of Israel, and had more than a



We speak of the resurrection, and this is what people do; Barnabas drew this.

passing interest in—of all things—the resurrection.

I say, “of all things,” because it is ordinarily the resurrection of Jesus Christ that sets people against us. I have noticed it everywhere. People are willing to hear us up until the time we tell them, “Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.” Then they practically choke on their lentils. I wonder why. Is it because we cannot produce the evidence? I suppose that if Jesus showed up, as He did to Thomas, then the lentils would go down easier. He did show up for *my* sake, but that's another story. I shall tell it someday, to be sure.

### How I was saved

As for me—if I may continue this thread—I was saved by sight, not faith. I sometimes regret that. But how can I, truly? Before that, I was helpless to believe. The word of Christ surrounded me in Jerusalem, and yet I hated it; I hated *Him*. I shudder to say that, but my life is an open book. He appeared to me to humble me.

I tell you truly. Everyone thinks the opposite. They think it was a glorious thing to be blinded by His presence. It was glorious, but how much more glorious to not see, and yet believe. People envy *me*, because I have seen Him. I tell them, “Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.” That is what He said to the apostle, Thomas, who doubted His rising. (I have spoken to Thomas since; he regrets it, but he is like me in that, at the time, he could do nothing about it. He was what he was: a rank unbeliever.)

I tell people to stop envying me. Celebrate faith; few grasp how great and rare a treasure it is. Horde it. To do that, you must be convicted concerning matters which are *not* being observed. Are you seeing nothing? Then, thank God! Fortunately, for all of you, our Master does *not* often wander about making conversation. (Remind me to tell you about Arabia sometime. I promise I will do it!)

### “Across from the post office”

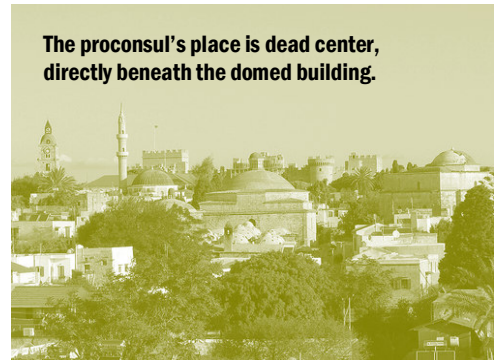
None of us knew the way to the proconsul's, so we stopped to ask directions. John-Mark never wanted to ask for directions; he was too proud. We would walk and walk and walk to accommodate him, but soon accommodating him would have meant that no one would ever hear of Christ, ever. The last piece of the puzzle came from a young girl scaling fish at a seaside market. “Up Herron Street, just past those two palm trees. His quarters are on your right, across from the post office.”

I expected a palace, but indeed, the lodging of the proconsul was no bigger than Cephas's mother's place in Jerusalem—not that that helps you.

### Our introduction

He was not expecting us, and I wondered if this little sidetrack would be in vain. A page greeted us at the first door, asking our names and business. John-Mark introduced himself first; I sometimes wonder about that boy. I was the

The proconsul's place is dead center, directly beneath the domed building.



only one of us with whom the page—as well as the proconsul—had even a chance of familiarity. My story had spread from Jerusalem to parts of Greece and the Isles. When John-Mark finished stuttering and the page had exhausted his head scratching, I cleared my throat, stepped to the fore and said:

“I am Saul, originally of Tarsus, and we have recently heard that—”

I had barely uttered these words, when the page gasped:

“You are Saul! Of Tarsus!”

The next thing we knew, we were in an antechamber eating cucumber slices and getting our feet washed by a young servant girl. Mark looked at me with a sly grin and said:

“I will introduce myself, first. Okay?”

### The proconsul

A shout came from the other side of the door:

“Saul! Come in! And your friends!”

The page was nowhere; this was the voice of the proconsul himself.

We entered the chamber to find a man sitting at a white desk, thrusting a long pen into a grapefruit half. He practically ran to Barnabas, saying, “I have heard so much about you.” Barnabas said, “It is likely, your honor, that *this* is the man whose fame has reached your royal ears,” and he transferred the hand of Sergius to mine.

The proconsul, a surprisingly young man, wore thick hair parted at the side in the

themselves, then took two chairs placed quickly by the proconsul. I felt the urge to stand, especially as I just then noticed a figure I had not seen—a man—sitting in a far corner. He slouched in a chair beneath the fronds of a potted fern.

He wore an adobe-colored robe that blended too finely with the wall he leaned against. It is a wonder I did not first see his beard—long, black, compressed, and pointed like the tail of a snake. My eyes are not eagle-like, and yet, staring, I perceived a discomfiting blackness looking back at me.

Eerily, the man did not move. I had forgotten, for a moment, where I was.

### Bar-Jesus, or Elymas

The proconsul said, “Oh, don’t mind him. That is my magician. His name is Bar-Jesus, but you can call him Elymas. Several of us call him, ‘Dr. Know-It-All.’”

Barnabas and John-Mark laughed. I did not. And neither did Elymas. I willed myself to take a chair and attend to the proconsul. As I turned my back, the dark

His voice echoed in the chamber. I was hoping the proconsul would dismiss him, but I perceived in my spirit a power in Elymas that trumped the authority of Sergius Paul.

The head of Elymas now cocked sharply to the side. “*This* man ...” he gave me the slightest nod; then, “is *also* a Jew. Yet, *simultaneously* ...” he paused again, for effect. I perceived no motion in him. “... *simultaneously*, he is the *enemy* of our laws, and he will *baptize* you—Captain Intelligent, the Seeking Sergius—not into the waters of our gracious God—oh, far from it—but into a cesspool of His sworn enemies who, themselves, oppose the sacred laws of *all* good men of Israel.”

I glanced at the proconsul, who had blanched. Barnabas and John-Mark said not a word. I, myself, did not know what to say ... until ...

... *it* happened. A surge of God’s spirit welled up within me. I have felt it before—like a hurricane driving ships, it comes, pushing pools of blood into my heart, then into my hands, which now shook, and then into my mouth, so suddenly poised upon words of Another’s making.

What happened next would send John-Mark, the very next day, to a ship bound for home. ■

*(To be continued in two weeks.)*

*(Dramatization adapted from Acts 13:5-9.)*



**Grace and peace to you all, in Christ Jesus. To those who sent financial assistance on the heels of my entreaty of two weeks ago—I thank you. I am once again behind on my mail, so some contributors have yet to receive personal acknowledgment. Thank you for your patience, and for your continued care of this ministry, which continues only by God’s movement upon your hearts. Without this, I could not do what I’m doing. So thank you—and thank you again,**

*—Martin*

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Sergius Paul

manner of the Melitians. His blue eyes sought me with quiet intelligence. Pumping my hand, he said:

“You! You have seen Jesus Christ alive.”

I vigorously returned his greeting: “Yes, sir. Several times.”

“Come. Sit. All of you. Tell me your names.”

Barnabas and John-Mark introduced

man spoke.

“I am a Jew.”

That is all he said. We all turned to look at him; he had not moved. He stared at us, transfixing us. Would he not speak again? Moments passed. We turned again to one another, and again the dark man said, this time louder:

“I am a Jew!”