Paul

The entry for Paul in the Metaphysical Bible Dictionary says his name comes from Latin and means restrained, constrained; lessened; made small; little. This is surprising, given that he wrote many letters of the New Testament (but not all that are attributed to him) and that he is most responsible for the Christ message reaching the Gentile (non-Jewish) world. There are three things we need to know in order to understand Paul, both historically (Crossan :x-xiv) and metaphysically (MBD :506-7). These are his mission, his strategy and his vision.

Paul's mission for conquering Rome (the will and intellect). Luke, the writer of Acts of the Apostles, makes it appear that Paul's mission was to convert the Jews who lived outside of Israel. This is a distortion made for political expediency at the time the book was written. We learn from Paul's own letters that his actual mission was to the Roman Gentiles (non-Jews). When Paul declares in Acts 25:11 “I am appealing to the emperor,” he is not just talking about the unjust treatment he has got from the political system, he truly believes that he can demonstrate to Rome the Truth of the new world order that has come into his consciousness. This shows the true missionary
zeal of Paul. When the governor says “You are out of your mind, Paul!” Paul replies “I am speaking the sober truth” (26:24). Paul, like Jesus before him, questioned the entire world order as it appeared at that time. Rome was not just a political empire but rather a civilization, which provided people an entire set of beliefs and rules that established what is normal. And, Paul, having become conscious of a new order of being, set out to challenge that civilization. As Jesus had proclaimed that the reign of God challenged the normalcy of the Jewish religion as it was being practiced, Paul so challenged the reign of Caesar.

The metaphysical equivalent of challenging Rome is challenging the reign of the will and the intellect (or understanding) in consciousness. The MBD says “the entrance of Paul and his companions into Europe is symbolical of opening up the word of Truth in parts of consciousness where it has never before been realized (:506).” These new areas of opening are the will and the understanding, two of the Twelve Powers, which are often experienced in the front forehead. Paul's original name, Saul, comes from the central idea that we use our will to attain that which we need. As Roman civilization used will to impose its rule over conquered people, so do we, in consciousness, attempt to use our personal will to impose ourselves over things in the physical world. A central message of Paul is that the will, when it is “acting in harmony with divine law, is gentle” (MBD :506). This is why the metaphysical Paul is restrained, constrained; lessened; made small; little.

**Paul's strategy of missionary journeys (journeys into the depths of the soul).** In the Acts of the Apostles we learn that Paul embarked on three journey's throughout present day Turkey and Greece to convert the Jews who lived outside of Israel. But we know that Paul's true focus was on the Gentiles. What he was actually doing, according to Crossan and Reed, was *convert poaching* (:38-40). While it is true that Paul's base of operations was the Jewish synagogue, he went there, not to convert Jews, but to convert Gentiles who had been previously converted to a luke-warm form of Judaism, those who he referred to as “God-worshippers.” Converted Gentiles were low-hanging fruit for two reasons – their familiarity with the Jewish message made it easy for Paul to convey the Christ message and also their resistance to the restrictions of Jewish customs (especially circumcision) made it Paul's Christ message more practically appealing.
The metaphysical understanding of Paul's journeys is explained by Elizabeth Sand Turner.

spiritually interpreted, Paul's missionary journeys represent the activity of the word of Truth in the mind and heart of the individual ... even as the mission of Paul was to spread the Christ teaching throughout the world of his time, so it is the mission of our awakened consciousness to redeem our entire being. 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel' is the Christ command. When our soul is afire with the Christ light, we enthusiastically preach His gospel throughout our individual world of mind and body (:64).

We see a pattern in the journey when we read about these journeys in the Acts of the Apostles (chapters 13-20), in Be Ye Transformed (:64-111) and in the entries for each city he visited in the Metaphysical Bible Dictionary. Paul's strategy is to convert that which can be converted (God-worshippers) and to avoid that which is closed to the word of Truth (such as Athens and the Jews). Metaphysically, Paul is building faith for the eventual conversion of the entire soul. This pattern is useful for our own spiritual development – when we open our soul in areas where we are ready, and, with non-resistance, to allow God to work, and keep in consciousness the truth that although we are not yet perfect expressions of our divine nature, we will one day be fully in harmony with divine law – then we are truly “preaching the Gospel.” The MBD says this about Paul's strategy, “when guided by Spirit we are led to develop along the lines of least resistance and where the conditions are most favorable” (:507).

**Paul's vision for a new reign of God (Oneness with all in Spirit).** To learn of Paul's vision for a fully converted Roman civilization we must look to his letters. But this can be a problem, because many of the letters attributed to Paul were written by others (we are confident of this because the grammar, vocabulary and logic of these other letters differs so much from those we know are written by Paul). Here is a passage from the Letter to the Galatians, which is certainly from Paul.

For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God thorough faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (3:26-29).

Just as Jesus had preached to tax collectors and prostitutes, Paul was happy to work with any who would receive the Christ message. For Paul, there was no social hierarchy within the body of Christ. In contrast to Roman civilization, Paul actively
sought partnership with women, slaves, Jews and Gentiles. Crossan and Reed point out that the picture shown at the start of this chapter is of Paul and Theoklia, partners in leading the Christian community in Ephesus, and they are of the same height, with the same raised hand of blessing and the same open, perceptive eyes. This fresco is additional evidence of Paul’s true vision of a classless social order in the body of Christ. Someone, however, has scratched out the eyes and hand of Theoklia, defacing her image and reducing her status to subordinate to Paul. This same reduction in power was perpetrated by the writer of Ephesians 5:22 who wrote “wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.” Paul, contrary to what some of the writings attributed to him may suggest, was perhaps as radical as Jesus in his vision for an open, non-hierarchical society.

It is very easy to grasp the metaphysical truth of no distinction, in consciousness, of male and female aspects of our soul, of Jewish aspects of our soul (Divine ideas or spiritual consciousness), of gentile aspects of our soul (worldly thoughts, thoughts pertaining to the external, or thoughts that function through the senses). As Paul had a vision of a new reign of God leading to complete freedom and harmony in Roman civilization, Paul also had a metaphysical vision, in consciousness, of a new reign of God leading to freedom and harmony of all aspects of our soul. Metaphysically, we call this vision Oneness. It may be referred to psychologically as integration. Developmentally, it may be what we call bonding. Regardless, what Paul is accomplishing metaphysically is a consciousness of one power and one presence in the universe and the shared divinity of all things in union with that Oneness.
Now that we have a broad sweep of Paul's writings, let's drill down into the writings themselves. Interpreting Paul's letters can sometimes be difficult for a number of reasons. Unlike the stories in Acts, Paul's letters seem to convey concrete, literal instructions on how we should live our lives. Paul's letters can also be difficult to interpret because we seem to be bombarded with images like the one shown above and we seldom question them from a metaphysical perspective. Regardless of the difficulty in interpreting the letters of Paul, we must try. The Bible quote shown above is a fairly modern, correct translation of the writing of St. Paul. The terms in the Bible are not going to change. If one wants to read the Bible, one must deal with terms that are in the Bible, and if those terms seem to be literal instructions or if they have been distorted by religious fundamentalism, we must find a way to uncover the metaphysical meaning.

**Four Divine ideas in the religion of Paul.** Before starting, let's remember that we are metaphysicians, meaning that we look for the underlying Truth behind all phenomena. This means that if the religion of Jesus, the religion of Paul and our religion are authentic spiritual experiences, then there should be common Divine ideas behind these events, regardless of the differences in how they are expressed by Jesus, by Paul or by us. What might those Divine ideas be? Marcus Borg (:243-58) has
identified four that appear time and again in Paul's writings. In the following sections, I will describe these ideas and match them to our understanding of metaphysical Christianity.

To help guide our reading, here is a summary of the points I will make:

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<th>Divine Ideas in process</th>
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<td>“Jesus is Lord”</td>
<td>Oneness in God-Mind</td>
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<td>“In Christ”</td>
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After reading the information below, we should see that the well-known verse from Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death,” may be be understood as “when I think of myself as alone and separate from God, then I find it difficult to express my higher, Christ nature.” Doesn't that sound better?

“Jesus is Lord”: Oneness in God-Mind

“Jesus is Lord” We saw, in Chapter Seven, that Paul's true mission is not just converting Jews or Gentiles, but rather converting all of Rome, for Rome symbolized a world order that could not stand in light of the new world order (of oneness) established by Christ. According to Borg, when Paul declares that “Jesus is Lord” he is implicitly declaring that “Caesar is not Lord,” neither are the masters of slaves, and that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. But all of these, including Caesar, are part of the one reign of Jesus Christ.

Separation from God, “Sin.” If Paul's principle concern is acknowledging the oneness of the entire cosmic order in Christ, then the term he uses to convey separateness from that new cosmic order is sin. Sin has been generally understood to mean a state of separation from God. For the traditional Christian, this separation is an inescapable fact except for the grace of God or the church.

Metaphysical sin, consciousness of separateness with God-Mind. We saw in the first chapter, on Metaphysics, that establishing a consciousness of oneness with God-Mind is the principle goal of one who does metaphysical work and is the starting point.
for the creative activity we know as Mind-Idea-Expression. Metaphysically, we know this as Christ consciousness, the harmony of all our faculties in service to our true Self, the I AM. For the metaphysician, there can never truly be a separation from God, only a consciousness of separateness from God; sin is merely a mistaken belief of that separateness. Regardless of this distinction, there is no reason why, when we hear a reference to sin, sinfulness or sin-full nature, we are not able to hear the speaker conveying a sense of separation from my true Self.

“In Christ, In the Spirit”: Free Flow of Divine Ideas

“In Christ,” “In the Spirit.” Borg says that Paul uses the term “in Christ” 165 times in this letters and another twenty times he uses the synonymous term “in the Spirit.” These terms convey what Borg calls Paul's “vision of the Christian life.” In other words, they speak to how we should live. When Paul speaks about living “in Christ” or “in the Spirit” he is speaking about being free from sin, which means it is how we live when there is no separation from God. For the metaphysician, a life lived with no separation from God-Mind results in the flow of Divine Ideas into consciousness. I will describe that flow in a moment.

“In the Flesh,” “In Adam,” “Judgment.” In contrast to a life “in Christ,” Paul describes another way of living, separate from God and one of bondage to sin, which he refers to as life “in the flesh” or “in Adam.” Since traditional Christianity views the separation from God as being inescapable, the traditional view of bondage to sin is also inescapable, meaning that overcoming a life in the flesh is not a matter of will power. Paul writes in Romans, “I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (7:14-15).

If sin is the term that conveys separation from God, then judgment is the term that conveys living in bondage to sin. There is a difference. Sin is a state of separation. Judgment is what happens to us when we remain in that state. John has Jesus saying “anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). We will get to passing from death to life in a moment.
Metaphysical “judgment,” the constriction of Divine Ideas. Judgment, for the metaphysician, is known as “compensation,” which is an immediate and absolute constriction or tightening of our soul, preventing the flow of Divine Ideas from God-Mind. The flow of Divine Ideas into our soul corresponds to our sense of oneness with God Mind. Emerson writes,

See how this rapid intrinsic energy worketh everywhere, righting wrongs, correcting appearance, and bringing up facts to a harmony with thoughts. Its operation in life, though slow to the senses, is at last, as sure as in the soul. By it, a man is made the the Providence to himself, dispensing good to his goodness, and evil to his sin. Character is always known.

Divine Ideas are, for the metaphysician, our source of well-being, health and prosperity. Charles Fillmore writes,

Divine ideas are man’s inheritance; they are pregnant with all possibility, because ideas are the foundation and cause of all that man desires. With this understanding as a foundation, we easily perceive how “all . . . mine are thine.” All the ideas contained in the one Father-Mind are at the mental command of its offspring. Get behind a thing into the mental realm where it exists as an inexhaustible idea, and you can draw upon it perpetually and never deplete the source. (Christian Healing :13)

By constricting the flow of Divine ideas into our soul, sin, the state of consciousness of being separate from God, brings on what the Paul called living “in the flesh” and the traditional Christian calls judgment.

“Justified by Grace Through Faith”: Perfect Expression

Justification by grace through faith. The third great theme of Paul’s understanding of the Christ experience is what Borg calls “justification by grace,” which Paul places in sharp opposition to “justification by works of the law.” Borg says “life under the law is the life of ‘measuring up’ in which our well-being depends upon how well we do” (:254). Being a legal term, we sense that this distinction of “works” versus “grace through faith” will determine the quality of our daily life.

Death. “How well we do” means whether we prosper or struggle and, ultimately, whether we live or die. So the ultimate penalty for our inability to be “justified” before God is death.
Metaphysical death: imperfect expression of our Christ nature. Metaphysically, we can never die, for our essence is a Divine idea, continuously expressed by God-Mind. However “metaphysical death” may also be thought of as a less-than-perfect expression of that which is our perfect Divine idea. This may ultimately mean our physical death, but, as metaphysicians, we are always concerned about fully expression our full Christ nature at all times. Anything less can be considered a type of death. Paul found that “works of the law” were never sufficient to cause full expression of our Christ nature. He taught that it could only be achieved by “grace through faith.”

Justification by grace though faith, not by will-power. Paul came to his understanding of “justification by grace through faith” because of his inability to achieve a perfect expression by will and intellect. He was a good Pharisee, but he knew that his life was not sufficient to achieve the full expression of his true nature. The will is one of the Twelve Powers, our decision making faculty that moves the other faculties into action. The problem with the will is that it cannot see the reality of Divine ideas. So, as we said in the chapter on the Metaphysical Paul, Paul's mission was to conquer the will and intellect (symbolized by Rome) and to place it in service to his Christ nature. Paul's discovery is that the it is the faculty of faith, our ability to perceive the reality of the oneness of God and the flow of Divine ideas, that enables us to achieve perfect expression.

Works of consciousness. The power behind justification by grace through faith, or perfect expression, is what metaphysicians know as “works of consciousness,” that is, our work in consciousness with the Divine Ideas given by God-Mind, primarily through affirmations, prayer and what Eric Butterworth called keeping “in the flow of life.” Such works can't help but express our Christ potential. Trying to be perfect by our own will-power doesn't work.

“Christ Crucified”: Metaphysical Freedom

Centrality of the crucifixion of Jesus. Given what we have said about death, we should also ask about the crucifixion of Jesus. Why was Christ crucified? Traditional Christianity has given a variety of answers, sometimes declaring that Jesus was a scapegoat for our sins, sometimes saying that “God so love us that he sacrificed
himself for us and sometimes accusing Rome or the Jews of spiritual blindness. But none of these answers are truly satisfying for modern day spiritual seekers. We get a glimpse of the meaning Paul placed on the crucifixion of Jesus in the following well-known passage from Galatians:

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20)

Note a few things. First, it is Paul who is crucified. Second, it is Paul who is crucified with Christ. Third, Paul is transformed, not in his status before God (he still lives “in the flesh”) but rather in his new reliance on faith. Finally, Paul is aware of being loved.

All these point to one inescapable conclusion: that the path to declaring “Jesus is Lord!” (oneness), the path to a life “in Christ” (flow) and the path to “justification by grace though faith” (expression) is the path of spiritual rebirth and spiritual rebirth only occurs by being crucified with Christ.

**Metaphysical rebirth: crucifixion of error thoughts.** Metaphysically, crucifixion is our experience of letting go of error thinking, some cherished aspect our our personality or of our personal life, in order to unfold more of our spiritual potential. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans,

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (12:1-2)

There is perhaps no other passage in all of Paul's letters where he so clearly reveals his own metaphysical understanding of the sacrifice of Christ. Paul believes we are a living sacrifice, not for the forgiveness of sins, or for martyrdom, but rather for the “renewing of our minds.” Our mind is where we establish our oneness with God by declaring “Jesus is Lord!” Our mind is where we allow the flow of Divine ideas to enter by living “in Christ.” Our mind is where we are justified by grace through works of consciousness of our faith faculty. And, ultimately, our mind is where we are transformed into new life by embracing our crucifixion with Christ.

Now that we understand some of the Divine ideas in Paul's writings, we should be able to metaphysically interpret some of the well-known verses from his writings. Refer back to Chapters Three and Nine for the process. The process is the same, except that these verses are short and have few, if any, names and places to look-up in the Metaphysical Bible Dictionary. Instead, we will look for the Divine ideas that Paul is expressing. Using the example from the last chapter, do the following:

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<td>(Rom 6:23)</td>
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<td>Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God  (Rom 3:23)</td>
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<tr>
<td>But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us (Rom 5:8)</td>
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<td>So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Cor 5:17)</td>
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<td>For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain (Phil 1:21)</td>
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<td>which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col 1:27)</td>
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<td>Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1)</td>
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