

THE BRANDS OF THE LORD JESUS

Galatians 6:17-18

The Christian faith is basically a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. This sets it apart from the religions in which men involve themselves. Those who walk in the Christian way are marked by their consecration to Christ as Lord. From the very beginning there have been attempts to attach to the Christian walk marks that are more external. Over the months we have been studying this letter, we have noted the attempt to add circumcision and Jewish observances as outward signs. These Jewish-Christian teachers wanted to make these externals the sure signs of a Christian.

As a closing personal note in this important letter Paul calls attention to an external mark that he will accept. He declares, "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ." If the concern of the Jewish brethren is external marks in the flesh, Paul has some that he bears proudly. They were not placed in his body on the eighth day after birth, but were made on his body by the enemies of Christ during his adult years. They are scars left by whips, stones, sticks, and other instruments that have been used in inflicting pain upon him. He proudly bears them like one bearing a banner in a parade. They are an outward sign of his consecration to Jesus Christ.

"Marks" is an interesting word. Most modern translations render it with the word "brand". Actually our word "stigma" comes from the word. It was used in that day of those marks that would be made in the flesh of a human being to indicate the consecration of life. Slaves, soldiers, and worshippers were branded with such marks in their bodies. It is in this sense that the Apostle uses this word here.

Not many of us bear any outward brands, but would we if it became necessary. How deep does our consecration to Jesus Christ go? Let us explore this figure in some detail.

I. THE BRAND OF THE SLAVE---OWNERSHIP AND SERVICE.

The branding of slaves was a common practice in that day. Just as cattle are branded here in the West so that their owner can be identified, so men were branded when they belonged to another person as property. In this way it would be easy to return them to their owners if they ran away. However, it must be remembered that such men always wore this brand unwillingly. Their being the slaves of another person was usually a thing of constraint. Due to a loss of war, or an inability to pay their debts, or some other misfortune in life, they would find themselves considered as property.

Paul considered himself as being the bondslave of Jesus Christ. This title was a favorite, used in many of the openings of his letter. He viewed his life as

belonging to Jesus Christ because he had been purchased by the blood of Christ upon the Cross. However unlike other bondslaves, Paul was willingly a bonds slave of Jesus Christ. He had become a bonds slave by a willing surrender of his life to Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament does provide us with one example of a willing bonds slave. In the case of a Hebrew man who had become a bonds slave, it could never be for an unlimited amount of time. God built in protection for his people at this point. But if in the year a man was to become a freeman, he had fallen in love with another bonds slave in the same household, and because of his love for her, he wanted to remain a bonds slave, God provided a way. He could go to the man, the owner, and make his wish known. The owner would take him to one of the judges where the desire would be made known. Then before the judge, the owner would pierce through the ear of the slave in such a way that it would be marked. This brand, or hole in the ear, would indicate to all that he was a willing bonds slave. It would mark him as belonging to another forever.

The service of Paul to Jesus Christ had brought to him sufferings. Others had inflicted upon him great sufferings. These infliction's of pain had left their marks upon his body. Paul bore them as the proud signs that he belonged to Jesus Christ, that the goal of his life was to be of service to the Lord Jesus Christ in any way possible. This should be true in the life of every Christian. We should view our lives as belonging to Jesus Christ alone, and the purpose of our lives being that we might render service to Him.

II. THE BRAND OF THE SOLDIER --- ALLEGIANCE AND OBEDIENCE,
The branding of soldiers was also a common practice. Just as many men who have served in the military in our day have tattoo's somewhere on their body, so ancient soldiers would do. Only they did not usually have the name of some girl, or a picture tattooed on their body, rather it would more likely be the symbol or the name of their commanding officer. Those who warred under Alexander the Great would have the Greek Alpha marked on their body. It was an outward sign of their allegiance to their Commander, and of their willingness to obey whatever command he might give to them. Since it was not uncommon to view such Commanders as a deity, you can see even more clearly the significance of such a body mark.

This is the kind of thing that is in the claim of Paul. The marks left on his body by the whelps in Philippi, and the stones in other places, the chains in yet another place, were to be viewed as the brands that marked him as being a soldier in the army of Jesus Christ. It was an outward sign of his inner loyalty to Jesus Christ, and an outward sign of his inner pledge of obedience to Jesus Christ. Just as soldiers move forward into a dangerous position, risking life-itself, at the word of their commander, he was committed to give to Jesus Christ the complete

obedience of His life. There was no place he would not go, there was nothing he would not do for Him.

We are afraid of that kind of allegiance and obedience. Even our soldiers have begun to learn how to question the commands of their superiors. You cannot help but wonder how our nation would stand up in another war if this philosophy of everyone doing his own thing is allowed to prevail. Know this --- this Christian faith conquers only through the lives of those who bear the brands of the soldier in their body. The soldiers of the Cross who win the battles for the Prince of Heaven are those whose allegiance to Jesus Christ is complete, and who obey His every command.

Could there not be a protest here toward those in Galatia who were tempted to give allegiance to the false teachers who had come among them? By calling attention to the scars on his body, Paul wants it to be known that his allegiance is to Jesus Christ alone. He is not giving allegiance to any heritage, or system, or human teacher. He is under the command of the heavenly Lord of glory, Jesus Christ, and Him alone. He will not be obedient to any other Commander.

III. THE BRAND OF THE WORSHIPPER --- CONSECRATION AND SACRIFICE

Such brands were also used in the religious context. Out of religious devotion the worshipper of a certain God would have the name of that God inscribed on his body, or maybe it would be the symbol of that god. There are reports of slaves who would go to the altar of some god, have his body so branded in the name of that god, and thus he came under the protection of that god. His owner would lose all claims upon him for he was seen as belonging to the deity. You cannot imagine how important some of the pagan religious systems were in the Roman and Greek world. You get a little idea of it when you visit the ruins of some of the great temples they constructed to these false deities. I never will forget visiting the ruins at Baal-bek in Lebanon. At one time three great temples stood on this site. They were constructed at great sacrifice and hard labor on the part of the people.

However, a worshipper of such a false god might find himself in the system due to the power of another. It might be that his parents had him marked with the brand of the god at his birth. Not so with Paul. This brand that he bore in his body was there by his choice. He had made the decision to devote his life to Jesus Christ, to make the worship of Jesus Christ a first thing in his life. These marks that were on his body could have been avoided if he had so desired it. But he had chosen to be the devotee, the worshipper of Jesus Christ and of Him alone.

How deep is your devotion to Jesus Christ? You see him as the Saviour who saves you from your sin, but do you see Him as the God to whom your life is

bound by devotion? Is He the God that you worship? Is your whole existence consecrated to Him? Is there any sacrifice that you would not make for Him? This searches my heart. Paul's devotion to Jesus Christ is both a rebuke and a challenge to me. I do want to bear in my body the brands of the Lord Jesus that mark me as belonging to Him in devotion and worship.

CONCLUSION:

These marks on his body spoke volumes to his world. Paul did not have to give a continual testimony about how much he loved the Lord Jesus. All he had to do was hold up his wrists, to uncover his back, to expose his scars. Each of these scars declared that he was committed to Jesus Christ without any reservation. And this was the thing that authenticated his Christian witness. He believed what he declared so deeply that he was willing to suffer or even to die for it.

We must wait for the world to put the brands on us, but we must not wait to put Jesus in the proper place in our lives. If we will make Him our Lord and Master, and ourselves his willing bondslaves, the world will take care of the rest of it. If we will make Him the Commander in Chief of our lives, and ourselves his willing soldiers, the world will take care of the rest. If we will make him the God of our devotion, and ourselves the devotees of Him, the world will take care of the rest. And this is not what we need?

Most of us have just enough of a relationship to Jesus Christ to make our lives miserable. We have just enough to create guilt feelings in our life, but not enough to bring us the joy that belongs to those who make Him everything. As we close the Galatian letter, I want to appeal to you not only to trust Christ alone for salvation, but also to consecrate all of your life to Him and Him alone. In this you will find a fullness of peace and joy.

He bears marks in His body as a sign of His devotion to us, dare we face Him unmarked?