

Galatians 6:17 From Strength to Strength: Marks of Christ

This series of ten messages is collectively titled, “From Strength to Strength” based upon **Psalms 84:7**: “**They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion.**” This seventh message deals with both the reaction and evidence of following Christ.

The apostle Paul wore a badge that marked him out as being a true servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. He bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Is there anything about us that marks us out as belonging to Christ and identifies us with Him? The word “I” is emphatic in the Greek. Paul said, “I bear in my body the marks of Jesus.”

Galatians 6:17: “**From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.**”

- Grammatical Usage: “**marks**” or in the Greek, “stigma” meaning, “mark; scar”.
- Literal Interpretation: Let no one interfere with me after this. I carry on my scarred body the marks of my owner, the Lord Jesus.
- Contextual/Comparison: God keeps His Word, God continually uses His Word. What is the proof of our attachment to Christ? Is it the words we speak? No, not primarily. There should be some distinctive marks about our lives that identify us as Christians.

1. THE LITERAL EXPLANATION OF THE APOSTLE’S STATEMENT

What did he mean when he wrote **Galatians 6:17**? He had in mind a common custom of those days, namely, that of branding certain people with a hot searing iron. For example, slaves were branded as a mark of ownership; they were also branded as a mark of shame, for if a man ran away and was recaptured his master would brand him as a mark of shame and ignominy; soldiers were branded as a mark of allegiance to their generals, just as, at one time, soldiers would have the crest of their favorite general tattooed upon their arm; and religious devotees would frequently be branded by the priests in some heathen temple as a mark of devotion and fidelity.

The brand-marks of the Lord Jesus upon the body of Paul consisted of each of these. They identified him as the slave of Christ (**Philemon 1:1**); they were the marks of shame and reproach in the eyes of the world (**1 Corinthians 9:22**); they were the brand-marks of the soldier (**2 Timothy 4:7**); and they were marks of devotion and fidelity (**2 Corinthians 5:14**).

But what were the actual marks? They were the bodily scars and blemishes which he had received as the result of the persecution he suffered because of his faithfulness to the Lord Jesus. **2 Corinthians 11:23-28** is a description of the fearful physical suffering he endured, and particularly notice the five kinds of suffering mentioned:

1. “**in prison more frequently**” (**Acts 16:23**; **Ephesians 3:1**).

2. “**exposed to death again and again**” Paul was frequently exposed to death, and it seems certain that on one occasion he was actually killed, though God mercifully raised him up (**Acts 14:19-20; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4**).
3. “**five times I received...the forty lashes minus one**” These were inflicted with a long leather strap divided into thongs, on each of which was attached stones and pieces of metal. Thus, the back would soon be lacerated and torn.
4. “**three times...beaten with rods**” This method of punishment was inflicted on Paul and Silas at Philippi (**Acts 16:22**).
5. “**once I was stoned**” Large boulders, as heavy as a man could lift, would be hurled at the victim until his body was reduced to a pulp.

This descriptive passage of scripture explains the marks on Paul’s body - the brand-marks of the Lord Jesus. Do they not put us to shame? Most of us want to be popular Christians, and we know little of suffering for Christ’s sake. Let us remember those in many lands today who are suffering much at the hands of men and who are, for their Lord’s sake, bearing in their body the marks of the Lord Jesus. And let us pray that should we ever be called upon to suffer shame for His name we may be given grace to be faithful even to the point of death (Revelation 2:10).

2. THE SPIRITUAL APPLICATION OF THE APOSTLE’S STATEMENT

The description of Paul’s suffering does not apply to many of us, but there is a spiritual application which applies to all who name the name of Christ. Just as those physical marks branded Paul as one of Christ’s slaves, as His property, as His soldier and as His follower, so there should be upon us spiritual marks that brand us as belonging to Him:

1. A cluster of fruit (**Galatians 5:22, 23**). These are the marks of the Lord Jesus, for He personified them all, and as we are united with Him by faith, these marks will characterize our life also.
2. A spirit of meekness (**Galatians 6:1**). This is one of the fruits of the Spirit mentioned above, but it is such an important characteristic of the real Christian that we give it special and separate emphasis. The opposite of this spirit of meekness is mentioned in **Galatians 5:26**, “**Let us not become conceited.**” The apostle says, “Don’t be proud!” and Jesus says, “**Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart**” (**Matthew 11:28-30**).
3. A willingness to share the burdens of others (**Galatians 6:2**). What a true mark of the Lord Jesus this is! If we truly follow in His steps we shall do likewise.
4. A willingness to help support those who minister (**Galatians 6:6; 1 Corinthians 9:7-15; 1 Timothy 5:18**).
5. A life made up of doing good (**Galatians 6:9-10**). Compare **Acts 10:38**: do we ‘go about’ with the same object in view?
6. A complete separation from the world (**Galatians 6:14b**). If the marks of the Lord Jesus are upon us we shall recognize that while we are in the world we are not of it, and we shall see to it that His prayer for us is fulfilled (**John 17:15-16**).
7. A glorying in the Cross (**Galatians 6:14**). What does this mean? We shall glory in the preaching of the cross, the story of the cross, and above all, in the victory and the virtue of the cross, for it is through the cross of Jesus and His shed blood that we are saved and sanctified. Think what the cross meant to Him. In what sense did He glory in it? The will of God was the consuming passion of His life (**Luke 22:42**), and it should be the consuming passion of your life and mine.

➤ Conclusion: What scars your life?