

Scars

Several years ago, as I was taking a particularly heavy big bag of trash down the driveway to the garbage bins next to the street, my middle finger started hurting quite noticeably from the strain. The pain continued as I returned to and entered the house, and I mentioned it to my wife, who replied, "Isn't that the same finger you shot the nail through a few years ago?" It was indeed (I'll spare you the details).

Though that particular injury didn't leave a noticeable scar, many others have left visible reminders...in my case, usually of carelessness. Most people, who have lived to their "seasoned" years, have many such evidences of traumas, both small and relatively inconsequential, as well as others that bear witness of more significant injuries, perhaps even life threatening. Then too, there are emotional traumas that though they leave no visible mark on the body, the life therein is certainly left wounded and marred.

Most (if not all) of my scars are either self-inflicted, or the result of medical treatment, which was required to repair some injury that was probably also self-inflicted. Please do not misunderstand. I have never deliberately self-harmed myself, I just have worked and played hard, and such has left their marks.

But think for a moment about Paul's statement in the latter part of Gal.6:17, "*I bear on my body the **brand-marks** of Jesus.*" His scars were neither self-inflicted, nor the result of athletic endeavors or farm or industrial accidents. They came from being "*beaten times without number*" (2Cor.11:23) for the **Cause of Christ**. That is, from efforts to preach and teach the gospel of eternal salvation. Contemplating such perhaps brings another layer of meaning to his words in 2Cor.4:10, "*always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.*" Paul, and countless other preachers, teachers, and disciples of Christ, had bodily scars that testified of their remarkable faith and fidelity. Their wounds were not the result of athletic pursuits or farm accidents; they were beaten and tortured for their faith in Jesus Christ. They and others were indeed "*faithful unto death,*" just as Rev.2:10 requires.

There is, however, another important aspect of "*brand-marks*" that we need to consider, for it is the one more obvious in the text of Gal.6:17. A "*brand-mark*" (from the Greek word *stigma*- to mark by *pricking, branding, or stamping*), typically indicated **ownership**. *Branding* (burning an *identifying mark* in the flesh) was commonly used on *slaves* and *soldiers* to indicate who was the person's *master* or *general*. It was also sometimes self-inflicted by devotees as a *stamp* of affiliation to or *token* of a *god*. In Paul's case, all of these surely apply, though he wasn't talking about *brands* or *stamping* in the common sense. His "*brand-marks*" were the *scars* left by being beaten, whipped, and stoned. These all bore witness of willingly submission and servitude to his *Master*, of enlistment and fidelity to the *Captain* for whom he fought, and affiliation with and ownership by the *God* whom he believed and trusted.

These things are not presented to suggest that we must have our own "*brand-marks*" to be counted as faithful *slaves, soldiers, and servants*. Instead, they are intended to simply get us to consider a couple of things. Each *scar* has a story attached. You know why it's there. Whether you have *spiritual "brand-marks"* or not, **know why you're a slave, soldier, or devotee of God**. To borrow from Rom.14:5, "*Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.*" Also, some (most for me) *scars* are the results of

accidents. Please understand that **no one accidentally becomes a faithful Christian.** It requires a deliberate *decision*, and dedicated *devotion*, Lk.14:25-26.

We need not be literally *branded* or *stamped* to show our servitude or devotion to God, but we must be “*always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body,*” 2Cor.4:10. Live **for, by, and through** Christ!

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