

Branded—With the Marks of Jesus  
 Pastor Sam Richards  
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 Texts:Galatians 6:11-18

**From now on let no one cause me trouble for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. v.17**

The last eight verses written by Paul's own hand were so written as to give his final warning and benediction *gravitas*, or weight, significance Paul is signaling that the way of the cross is contrary to the way of the Judaizers—**those who would force you to be circumcised in the flesh** (v. 12) having relativized the central truth of the gospel of forgiveness of sins **through the sufferings (the atoning sacrifice) of Christ on the cross**. This act, the hand-written section, adds two things: a personal touch (yes, I Paul am writing this to you) and authentication (this is my own handwriting!), an attestation of authenticity. In a way, Paul is capitalizing on the first-hand nature of this transaction (yes, this letter is from him as demonstrated by his personal participation in the writing thereof). Yes, the whole letter was handwritten, probably by a scribe, or someone skilled in writing manuscripts but, setting the an *amanuensis*, or secretary aside Paul took his place at the table and wrote in his own hand in enlarged, identifiable letters!

These Judaizers were, one might infer, fearful men. Perhaps they were afraid of *being persecuted* for declaring that salvation was through faith in the crucified Jesus. They didn't want to offend the Jewish religious authorities—who wanted to downplay the “messiahship of Jesus” because Jesus had not met their expectations as the descendant of King David, a mighty Warrior/Deliverer figure. And, perhaps, they were very anxious about arousing the suspicions of the Roman authorities about this King of the Jews whose authority might conflict with that of Caesar. Perhaps they wanted to co-opt Jesus into a revived Judaism; treating Him as a prophetic extension of their religion. What is flagrant, however, is the realization that salvation through covenant keeping was a failure—no one was able to keep the law perfectly (excepting Jesus) and yet, they maintained, some did it well enough. Certain spiritual leaders in the Jewish past were considered “righteous” enough and some were reportedly “saved.” However, this was the achievement of a few, of an elite and not of the people as a whole which was the promise entailed in the new covenant foretold by Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Their compromise position was Jesus plus circumcision; but Paul saw this accommodation as a repudiation of the cross—and if the cross is dismissed, the resurrection is the next to go and Christ would be abandoned shortly thereafter. All the essential doctrines of Christian truth would fall like dominoes because **what is born of the flesh is flesh and what is born of the Spirit is spirit**.

When Paul writes **I bear in my body the marks of Jesus** we are to understand that he means plainly **in his fleshly body**. But what is the significance of these marks? *They mark Paul as the slave of Christ*. He was, as it were, branded as a slave to Christ. Now these were not brand marks as are commonly burned into the hide of cattle—as well as criminals, and even human chattel in days gone by as well as certain temple servants and military men! Tattoos for gang members may serve a similar function in our own day. It is unfortunate that Paul in Gal. 1:10 refers to himself by the milder terms, **a servant** when the truth of his relationship would have been better served by the word **slave**. (See Romans 1:1) This does not diminish the use of the word **apostle** in Gal. 1:1 at all—or, detract from it might be better phrased!

As outrageous, or alien as this sounds in our ears, not only is Paul a slave of Christ; so, too, are all those who aspire to a living relationship with Jesus—even you and me. To declare **Jesus is Lord** is a polite way of acknowledging the same truth: for the Christian:

“While the phrase “die to self” is actually not explicitly found in scripture, it is closely related to the idea of being born again and devotion of faith. The closest thing found in the Bible is where Paul writes, “our old self was crucified”<sup>1</sup> (Romans 6:6). Dying to yourself means to forego the selfish, physical, and egotistical desires of this world and wholeheartedly seek the kingdom of God.”

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/topical-verses/die-to-self-bible-verses/>

Self-will has no place in our lives, the old self is gone—

Nor does self-indulgence—

Nor, to venture even further, does self-gratification, and/or self-fulfillment.

Even “self-esteem” is relocated is the suspect category for the Christian!

Of course, we have, by virtue of owning Christ as our Lord and Savior, spiritually **died to self** and are **raised to life in Christ**. Therefore, we are not our own (**Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price.** (1 Cor. 6:20)); we must *voluntarily* surrender all our rights to Him (yes, all of them!) because, as slaves, we have made ourselves His possession, His property, His people. Now this arrangement is entirely based on love. **He gives** (gave) **himself for us, that He might purchase unto Himself a people for His possession, zealous for good works.** That is the word of God according to Titus 2:14. We owe absolute obedience and submission to the living Christ, Jesus our Lord. So Jesus holds absolute authority over us and we have unconditionally surrendered to Him—those are the conditions of our servitude. A quotation from A.Maclaren might prove useful here:

“Therefore *Christian slavery*, with its abject submission, with its utter surrender and suppression of my own will, with its complete yielding up of self to the control of Jesus, who died for me; because it is based on His surrender of Himself to me, and in its inmost essence it is the operation of love, is there co-existent with the noblest freedom.” Maclaren 14, 2 Cor.; p. 193

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<sup>1</sup> I am quite certain that we, having been heavily influenced by “Pop Psychology,” will see immediately a disconnect with the scriptural language used in Romans 6. Again, I reiterate that we, according to Scripture, have “a heart, a mind and a soul” which are the constituents of our essential being. See “self” defined below.

Here is a helpful definition: “psychological or pseudo-psychological counseling, interpretations, concepts, terminology, etc., often simplistic or superficial, popularized by certain personalities, magazine articles, television shows, advice columns, or the like, that influence the general public.” <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/pop-psychology>

“Self” is defined as “a person's essential being that distinguishes them from others, especially considered as the object of introspection or reflexive action.

“our alienation from our true selves”

<https://www.google.com/search?q=define+%22self%22&oq=define+%22self%22&aqs=chrome..69i57.4854j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

I want to be very clear. Paradoxically, we the slaves of Christ, are, by our bondage to Him, the freest of all men! **If Christ has set you free, you are free indeed.** (John 8:36) and again, It is for freedom that Christ has set you free. (Gal. 5:1) “The liberty to the Christian is slavery and the slavery of the Christian is freedom.” . . . “He is free who delights to do what he must do. He is free whose rule is love and whose Master is Incarnate Love.” (Maclaren, p. 193)

A word about these “marks of ownership.” Paul means the bodily weakness, and, possible diseases, and certain afflictions that are a direct consequence of his servitude, his apostolic faithfulness and zeal. All his pains and sufferings (stripes, beating, stoning’s, imprisonments, shipwrecks) and their permanent consequences (scars, an enfeebled constitution etc) which he bore because he preached Christ and Him crucified! No blundering fate, no merely secondary causes but from the hand of his Master came these “markings.” “Markings” by Dag **Hammar skjold**, first published in 1964, the title actually makes sense by virtue of this Pauline assertion! Dag was a peacemaker, not an apostle, but he had spiritual struggles akin to Paul’s. Christ put these marks in his flesh and “by means of these he (Paul) was drawn closer to his Master! He took these as “signs that he belonged to Christ . . . and the means of that possession being made more perfect.” (p. 194)

“We should rejoice and leap for joy when persecutions come,” writes Bishop Cyprian (early 3rd century to AD 24 Sept, 258) of Carthage. “When persecutions occur, then crowns of faith are given, then soldiers of God are tested, then heaven is opened to martyrs. . . . in this warfare of persecution, the Lord walked first. He is the Teacher of humility, endurance and suffering. What he tells us to do, He did first.”

[Knowingly, directly, prophetically and obediently!]

Pay attention, in Acts 3:1-10, the man lame from birth is healed by faith in the name of Jesus! He entered the Temple straight from the Gate Beautiful, walking and leaping and praising God right into a house of spiteful rejection! Into religious oppression and open persecution. Out of the gates. He was healed and they were lamed in the same instant. Or, for another example, the man blind from birth healed by Jesus. He has barely seen the Lord and he lands in the center of persecution and controversy. He, too, was hated, despised and rejected! (John 9) The Pharisees were blinded by the healing of a blind man! He was healed that the works of God might be displayed in him and them who were blinded that the works of the Enemy might be displayed in their hatred.

Remember Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:11-12, Cyprian did:

**11 “Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

How counterintuitive! **Rejoice and be glad?!** Why? Because as Cyprian notes, “Beloved, observe that He done bore all the Father’s judgment and will Himself come to judge. He has already declared His future judgment and recognition. He has foretold and testified that He will confess before His Father those who confess Him and will deny those who deny Him. . . . if death should come, we should embrace it as an occasion coming from

God's promise to reward us in the end with eternal life. We shouldn't fear being slain, since we are sure that we will be crowned when we are slain." What an encouragement from an early church father!

But what is that to us who have no severe persecutions to endure and to us who have never endured physical damage by virtue of our service to Christ? Is there any application here? Yes. Every Christian ought to bear in his or her body in a plain and literal sense the tokens that he or she belongs to Jesus Christ. How? From the things suppressed in our physical course! From the effects of self-denial, and the subduing of our animal nature, with its desires, passions and unavoidable appetites. We should manifest the effects of self-mastery . . . with its blisters and calluses. Shouldn't there be evidence of crucifying the flesh, its affections and lusts? If these are absent what evidence is there that you ever submitted to Christ?! Or, take your reading of all the slights, the pains, sorrows and disappointments that you have borne in this life? Surely these things should scar, or brand us. And beyond the limitations and restrictions, are there signs of evident grace, of the sweetness of the Lord *transmitted to our faces*? What is the light of our countenance? Is there tranquility that comes for faith? A quiet, gentle and assuredness? Or, joy?

If we come to look upon sorrows and losses with some idea of their source, meaning and purposes, that in itself will change the narrative. A sense of triumph enters every godly life, these marks speak of servitude but they also express certitude. **From henceforth let no man trouble me** . . . my marks establish my condition, my servitude! Who can care what outsiders say of such things? Let them roll their eyes if they must. A true slave is less distracted and annoyed—no time for that!

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
look full in His wonderful face.  
And the things of the world will grow strangely dim  
in the light of His glory and grace!"

Just as last week, I want to pause and consider that it is like "to turn your eyes upon Jesus." Last week we thought about "**the power in the Blood**," remember? We touched on the natural analogy of what the blood which visits every cell does in feeding and cleansing us entirely. What I see when I look into the eyes of Jesus is that character resides in the eyes, like an etching when emerges over time from within. In His eyes I see the promise of an emergent eternity—an accommodation of redeeming love, I am His and He is mine. We are "present" in our eyes, just as undeniably present as the stars in the canopy of heaven just as planned and unrolled by Him. He fixates me, he is my global positioning system—I know where I am when I am with Him, as one exactly and divinely placed. My place, the "arc of my trajectory," my speed, force and impact all prepared and seamlessly set in sequence. I see in Jesus' eyes just whose He is. I am either mine, or His . . . a black hole, or a supernova; imploding, or exploding in a burst that is a stream, more than an event. It is Genesis ongoing, or a desolation of dust being dispersed! It is all this by grace directed, all a givenness. O Lord, ask what of us whatever you will, guide the where and how and when according to your good pleasure. I see my delight in Thee reflected in me. I see command authority. I see the expectation of compliance, solemn and serene, in your all-absorbing gaze. I see contentment. O Lord, translate that into me! I see that time always has its say. I see myself reflected in your eyes and perhaps a few others besides! Aging is a declarative gift; it announces who we are. The eyes are herald to the soul—windows, yes, to the heart of all. They shout, "Lordship and Sovereign power,

majesty and grace. And I see that You see me living as well as dead . . . either animated by Your breath, to breathless instead.

Let those mock whose faces are etched with living dissipation. The empty eyes of sensuality now languid and vague, the ravages of depravity's pursuit (those you sought to spoil, despoiled you!), you may be sure, will pock, or scar their cheeks and foreheads. That's it: disfigurement or adornment. Some have avaricious/lustful eyes, gluttonous fingers and dirty, greedy hands . . . they are obeying another master. They are not happy and their end is destruction. Mean faces, worldly faces, defeated faces of despair and confusion . . . lostness and misdirection. They have no rest day or night, they are those who worship the beast!

But we are yielded to a different Master. It is His likeness that emerges in us, and is expressed through us. He stamps as Mine those who are His and we, we are glad to serve and honor Him above all else, and all others.

Amen