

Whose Mark Do We Bear?

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Introduction

You can tell something about an object by the image that is stamped upon it (Luke 20:20-26). God made man in His own image (Gen. 1:26-27; Psa. 8:3-8), giving us a physical body to inhabit until we are clothed with our heavenly body (1 Cor. 15:47-49; 2 Cor. 5:1-2). Before submitting to the gospel of Jesus Christ, our bodies were the tools of Satan and instruments of sin. However, through obedience to the Lord's will in baptism, we are cleansed from our past sins, and raised to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-6, 11-13). Since our bodies are the temple of the living God, we must glorify God in our daily walk (Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Do We Bear The Mark Of The Lord Jesus?

The Greek word *stigma*, derived from *stizō* [to prick], occurring 1x in the NT, refers to “a tattoo, mark, or brand.” **Thomas** defines *στίγμα* [*stigma*] as from *stizō* [to prick], meaning “a tattoo mark or brand” [4742b]. **BDAG** say it refers to a “mark” or “brand.”

Strong/Thayer define *stigma* as “(1) a mark pricked in or branded upon the body. To ancient oriental usage, slaves and soldiers bore the name or the stamp of their master or commander branded or pricked (cut) into their bodies to indicate what master or general they belonged to, and there were even some devotee's who stamped themselves in this way with the token of their gods” [4742].

W. E. Vine says that it denotes “‘a tattooed mark’ or ‘a mark burnt in, a brand’ (akin to *stizo*, ‘to prick’), translated ‘marks’ in (Gal. 6:17). ‘It is probable that the apostle refers to the physical sufferings he had endured since he began to proclaim Jesus as Messiah and Lord [e. g., at Lystra and Philippi]. It is probable, too, that this reference to his scars was intended to set off the insistence of the Judaizers upon a body-mark which cost them nothing. Over against the circumcision they demanded as a proof of obedience to the law he set the indelible tokens, sustained in his own body, of his loyalty to the Lord Jesus. As to the origin of the figure, it was indeed customary for a master to brand his slaves, but this language does not suggest that the apostle had been branded by His Master. Soldiers and criminals also were branded on occasion; but to neither of these is the case of Paul as here described analogous. The religious devotee branded himself with the peculiar mark of the god whose cult he affected; so was Paul branded with the marks of his devotion to the Lord Jesus. It is true such markings were forbidden by the law, (Lev. 19:28), but then Paul had not inflicted these on himself. The marks of Jesus cannot be taken to be the marks which the Lord bears in His body in consequence of the Crucifixion; they were different in character.”ⁱ

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says that *stigma* refers to ““a mark pricked or branded upon the body.’ Slaves and soldiers, in ancient times, were stamped or branded with the name of their master. Paul considered and called himself the bondslave of Jesus Christ. The traces of his sufferings, scourging, stonings, persecution, wounds, were visible in permanent scars on his body (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-27). These he termed the stigmata of Jesus, marks branded in his very flesh as proofs of his devotion to his Master (Galatians 6:17).”ⁱⁱ

The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says that *stigma* means “to prick, point, or mark. In the Graeco-Roman World, (1) Owners’ marks are branded on cattle. Stigmata are usually letters burned on the right thigh; (2) People who are branded, e.g., criminals, prisoners of war, slaves, or deserters, are usually regarded as dishonored and are a butt of scorn in comedy. Caligula even has some citizens branded and sent to prison camps. Various devices are tried to remove the brands but without much success. Tattooed signs are placed on army recruits, usually on the hand.”

“In the New Testament, *stigma* occurs only in Galatians 6:17. Paul perhaps views the marks of Jesus here as protective... The marks can hardly be tattooed signs but are almost certainly the scars he has acquired in Christian service (2 Cor. 4:10; Col. 1:24; Phil. 3:21). These are palpable proof that he suffers with the Lord (Rom. 8:17).”ⁱⁱⁱ

Englishman’s Search

This particular Greek word only appears once in the New Testament (Gal. 6:17). In saying, “*From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the *brand-marks of Jesus,*” Paul probably referred to the many scars he bore of his persecutions (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7-12; 11:23-28).

Like the apostle Paul, we must be willing to suffer for the cause of Christ (Matt. 5:10-12; John 15:18-21; 1 Pet. 3:13-17). We must also be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:28-30; 13:11-14; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:22-24), who is the image of the invisible God (John 14:6-9; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3-4). If we do this in time, we shall be similarly blessed in eternity (1 Cor. 15:49; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2).

Do We Bear The Mark Of The Beast?

The Greek word *charagma*, derived from *charassō* [to sharpen, to engrave], refers to “mark that is engraved, imprinted, branded, cut, or stamped.” **Thomas** defines *χάραγμα* [*charagma*] as *charassō* [to sharpen, to engrave], meaning “a stamp, impress” [5480]. **BDAG** say it refers to “(1) a mark that is engraved, etched, branded, cut, imprinted, mark, stamp; (2) an object fashioned by artistic skill involving alteration of a medium, thing formed, image in the representative arts.”

Strong/Thayer define *charagma* as “(1) a stamp, an imprinted mark; (a) of the mark stamped on the forehead or the right hand as the badge of the followers of the Antichrist; (b) the mark branded upon horses; (2) thing carved, sculpture, graven work, of idolatrous images” [5480].

W. E. Vine says it denotes ““a stamp, impress,’ translated ‘mark’ in (Rev. 13:16, 17; etc.).”^{iv}

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says that *charagma* refers to “‘a stamp’ or ‘imprinted mark.’ ‘The mark of the beast’ (peculiar to Revelation) was the badge of the followers of Antichrist, stamped on the forehead or right hand (Rev. 13:16; compare Ezek. 9:4, 6). It was symbolic of character and was thus not a literal or physical mark, but the impress of paganism on the moral and spiritual life. It was the sign or token of apostasy. As a spiritual state or condition it subjected men to the wrath of God and to eternal torment (Rev. 14:9-11); to noisome disease (Rev. 16:2); to the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20). Those who received not the mark, having faithfully endured persecution and martyrdom, were given part in the first resurrection and lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years (Rev. 20:4). The ‘beast’ symbolizes the anti-Christian empires, particularly Rome under Nero, who sought to devour and destroy the early Christians.”^v

The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says that it means a “mark” or “stamp.” In the Greek world, “this word denotes an engraved, etched, branded, or inscribed ‘mark’ or ‘sign.’ It can be used for an ‘inscription’ or a ‘stamp,’ e.g., the imperial stamp on decrees. The impress on coins gives it the more general sense of ‘money.’”

“In Revelation 13:11ff. The second beast demands cultic recognition of the image of the first. The mark which is required in vv. 16-17 probably indicates the religious totalitarianism of emperor worship. Marking is common in antiquity (cf. slaves, and the branding of devotees with the marks of deities).”^{vi}

Englishman’s Search

This particular Greek word appears eight times in the NT. Except for Paul’s reference to graven images in his sermon on Mars Hill, all other occurrences are in the Book of Revelation (Acts 17:29; Rev. 13:16, 17; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

The “mark of the beast” was an unspecified, perhaps symbolic, form of documentation, indicating that one had bowed in obeisance to the beast of Revelation. Without such certification, one could not buy or sell in the marketplace (Rev. 13:16-17). However, those who compromised their convictions to avoid the temporal wrath of Rome would incur the eternal wrath of Almighty God (Rev. 14:9-12).

Application: Questions For The Heart

We Function In These Realms:	Is Our Example Good Or Bad?	Scriptural Standard
Church	Attitude & Actions	Ephesians 4:1-6
Home	Roles & Responsibilities	Ephesians 5:22-6:4
Society	Clothing & Conversation	Ephesians 5:3-16
Work	Performance & Priorities	Ephesians 6:5-9

We influence others for either good or bad. We function in the following realms: Church, Home, Society, and Work. What kind of example are we setting in each of these areas? Is our influence good or bad? What about our attitudes and actions? What about our roles and responsibilities? What about our clothing and conversation? What about our performance and priorities?

If you maintain purity, you will have a positive influence on those who have good and honest hearts, those who have an open-minded attitude toward the truth, and those who are seeking to please God. However, if you become defiled by sin, your influence will be directed toward those who have evil and dishonest hearts, those who have a closed-minded attitude toward the truth, and those who have no interest in pleasing God.

Conclusion

God made us in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). This alone should tell us not to change this body by putting marks on it. In a symbolic sense, bad conduct places marks of sin on the pure body that God has given us. In such a state, how can we be an influence on others to do good? Are you marked by God, or are you marked by sin? Do you bear the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ, or do you bear the mark of the beast? If we are not willing to stand up for Christ in the midst of an adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will not stand up for us in the judgment (Mark 8:38).

God wants us to be a special people for his own possession, purified from all iniquity, and zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). Christians must come out of the world and be separate from sin (2 Cor. 6:17-18). We must cleanse ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2 Cor. 7:1). Therefore, like Paul, let us magnify Christ in our bodies, whether by life or by death (Phil. 1:20).

ⁱ W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, (Seattle, WA: BibleSoft & Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985, 1996), s.v., "Mark (Noun)."

ⁱⁱ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 1915 Edition*, ed. James Orr, (Seattle, WA: BibleSoft, 1996.), s.v. "Mark."

ⁱⁱⁱ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. The Paternoster Press 1985), s.v. "STIGMA," p. 1086.

^{iv} W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, (Seattle, WA: BibleSoft & Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985, 1996), s.v., "Mark (Noun)."

^v *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 1915 Edition*, ed. James Orr, (Seattle, WA: BibleSoft, 1996.), s.v. "Mark."

^{vi} Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. The Paternoster Press 1985), s.v. "CHARAGMA," p. 1308.