

The Spiritual Marks of the Believer

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"...For I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Galatians 6:17).

When Jesus appeared to Thomas, He said, "Reach your fingers here, and look at my hands; and reach your hands here, and put it into my side" (John 20:27). There were physical marks on Jesus' body where the Roman soldiers had pierced His side and nailed His hands and feet when He was crucified. Paul too had scars from wounds inflicted on him by his prosecutors: "From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked" (2 Corinthians 11:24-25). Like Jesus, Paul bore many marks on his body when he chose to do the Father's will. Born-again believers should not be surprised when they too may be marked physically as a result of suffering for the sake of our Lord, Jesus Christ. "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter" (1 Peter 4:16).

Born-again believers also bear spiritual marks - marks that testify to the fact that they belong to Jesus. Paul taught that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation" (Galatians 6:5). Spiritual marks are evident in those who become new creation. You are neither merely being reformed nor just turning over a new leaf. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). You are also marked and identified as His own by giving you the promised Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God's guarantee that he will grant you everything He promised. In 2 Corinthians 1:21-22(NIV), we read that God has "anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit." Being sealed by the Holy Spirit, you will bear the character or trademark of the Holy Spirit who abides in you. You begin a new life with the power of the Holy Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit impacts your life, you will notice the following changes as recorded in Ephesians 4:17-32:

1. You no longer live like the Gentiles (v17). You no longer live like the unbelievers or share in their futile mentality. Instead, you will possess a spiritual mind that evaluates things in God's economy. Your lifestyle will change.
2. You put off the former conduct (v22-24). You put off your former lifestyle - the "old man" that is being corrupted by deceitful desires - and put on the "new man" that was created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.
3. You put off falsehood (v25). You do not live a hypocritical life.
4. You do not need to sin in your anger (v26). You must never let "the sun go down" on your wrath. Whilst you can be angry, you must never let anger provoke you to commit sin.
5. You do not give the devil any foothold (v27). Jesus said that the devil "has no hold" on Him (John 14:30 NIV).
6. You do not steal (v28). You work honestly for your living and help those in need.
7. You do not let corrupt words proceed from your mouth (v29). Instead of unwholesome talk, you speak words which are helpful for the building up of others.
8. You do not grieve the Holy Spirit (v30). You do not walk after the flesh but after the Spirit.
9. You put away all bitterness, wrath, anger, brawling, slander and every form of malice (v31).
10. You are kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another. Forgiving even as Christ has forgiven you (v32).

These marks are clear evidence of a new life in Christ. These changes are possible because God has granted you with all that is needed to lead a life of godliness. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:3-10.

Firstly, God has given us all things. "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness..." (2 Peter 1:3). God has given us everything we need to live godly lives. The Holy Spirit is given to us so that we can triumphantly and successfully face the challenges of each day. This is the reason Paul exhorts us to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, God has given us great and precious promises. "...By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakes of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4). Not only has God given us divine power but He has also given us His precious promises through the Word. Therefore we must know and believe God's Word and His promises. God's Word combined with faith brings us to His rest or enables us to be victorious.

Finally, Peter says we must add to our faith. Faith must have works. Our faith should cause us to develop Christian character which results from moral discipline. Peter lists seven elements of character that arise when faith and obedience work together:

1. Goodness. This is a virtue which means excellence in efficiency and courage in well doing.

2. Knowledge. This means wisdom and the ability to apply knowledge. It also means spiritual wisdom in understanding the things of God which the natural cannot understand.
3. Self-control. This is the ability to restrain in the midst of sinful lusts and human pride and the ability to say "yes" to spiritual activities like prayer, Bible study, giving, etc.
4. Perseverance. This is the steadfastness in the face of difficulties and hardship; being courageous enough to accept tough circumstances and to keep pressing on no matter what the cost.
5. Godliness. This means piety and carrying out a twofold duty to God and to man.
6. Brotherly kindness. This is brotherly love (affection - reaching out and helping a brother or sister in need).
7. Love - Agape love. This is not friendship love, erotic love or family love. This is God's love which knows no boundaries or limits. We love God and others with agape love.

The Bible is not a magic book. And the Christian life cannot be likened to rubbing a magic lamp in order for a magic carpet to appear so that you can ride off without effort. Peter says, "Roll up your sleeves and go to work." You need to reach out and cooperate with the Holy Spirit and work out your faith. You will then bear the marks of a spirituality that reflects the beauty of Jesus in you. Do you bear the marks of a born-again believer? If you do not, you can, because the Lord of Host says, "Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6).

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