

Paul's Bodily "Marks Of Jesus" In Galatians 6:17 And Its Implication For Christian Witness In The 21st Century Nigeria

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Abstract

The issue of stigmata with reference to Galatians 6:17 has raised a number of theological issues which centre on Paul's spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ. This paper sets out to investigate the correct interpretation of the text. In doing this a historical critical method of exegesis is adopted. This enables the research to place the text within its historical context in an attempt to understand what Paul meant when he wrote Galatians 6:17. The researcher has carried out an investigation on the *Sitz-Im-leben* (Situation of Life) of Galatians 6:17, its exegesis and theological conclusions. The researcher observed that there are lots of challenges facing Christians in their witnessing in the 21st Century Nigeria. So many Christians or churches in their witness today boast of bearing the marks of Christ in their body but when faced with challenges, they forget their claim of bearing the marks of Jesus Christ on their bodies. This paper recommends that Christians, not minding the opposition or challenges they are faced with, should, like Paul, anchor their faith in Christ and trust in His ability to deliver. They should share in the sufferings of Jesus during periods of adversity and not only accept His blessings.

1. INTRODUCTION

This topic, Paul's bodily "marks of Jesus" in Galatians 6:17 and its implication for Christian witness in the 21st century Nigeria has caused and is causing division among scholars on the issue of interpretation. Apart from the issue of interpretation, Christian witness in Nigeria in the 21st century has a lot of challenges it is faced with and because of these challenges Christians who claim to bear the mark of Jesus Christ tend to deny Jesus in the face of these challenges. This paper seeks to look at what it implies to say one bears the mark of Jesus Christ on his or her body in the face of challenges Christians face in their gospel witness in Nigeria today. Such challenges include Boko Haram insurgency, Fulani Herdsmen persecution etc.

The problem the Galatians text poses is its seeming ambiguity. The objective of this study therefore is to investigate its correct interpretation. In doing this a historical critical method of exegesis is adopted. This enables the research to place the text within its historical context in an attempt to understand what Paul meant when he wrote to the Galatians. This research will focus on the significance of Paul's statement of bearing the mark of Jesus Christ in his body for Christians testifying to the person of Christ in the

21st century. This work is concentrated on Galatians 6:17 and Christian witness in Nigeria.

The researcher has carried out an investigation on the *Sitz-Im-leben* (Situation of Life) of Galatians 6:17, its exegesis and theological conclusions. It was based on the theological conclusions that the researcher has discussed the implications of Paul's bodily marks for Christian witness in the 21st century Nigeria.

2. BACKGROUND OF GALATIAN 6:17

The letter to the Galatians mirrors the first major crises in the life of the infant church. Paul struggled to settle these crises. What were the crises? The major issue was that the people preached another gospel outside what Paul preached i.e. the Jewish tradition based on circumcision and the law. There was also the issue of doubt over Paul's apostleship. According to Acts 15:1, certain Jewish Christians were insisting that unless Gentile converts to Christianity were circumcised according to the custom of Moses, they could not be saved. But this demand on the part of OT Hebrews now reckoned among the Christian community, was extended beyond circumcision to the observance of the whole law of Moses (Acts 15:5; cf. Gal 5:3). In short, according to the "circumcision party," anyone wishing to join the ranks of the people of God from the outside must, with few exceptions, conform to the normal procedure prescribed for proselytes—circumcision and commitment to Israel's Torah (Donaldson 1986:54, 65). *From Galatians 1:1*, many of the Jewish teachers had subjected these Galatia Christians into believing that Paul was not truly an apostle because he had not known the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh. Paul was the one who planted the Galatia churches.

The most obvious answer to the question of Paul's apostleship is that he is defending his apostleship against accusations by his opponents in Galatia – as pointed out by most scholars one of who is Lyons (1985:81). An examination of Galatians 1:1 reveals that its primary purpose is to emphasize in a forceful way the fact that Paul's apostleship is dependent on (and thus authorized by) God and not on (a) human beings (Schlier 1971:5 and Dunn 1998:27). The type of argument Paul uses may thus be identified as an argument based on divine authorization. It is based on the presupposition that, in order to be an apostle, one should have been called by God. In this case Paul claims that he is indeed an apostle, because he has been called by God (Anderson 1999:145). The importance of this argument from Paul's perspective is evident from the fact that he introduces it at the outset of the letter. It should also be noted that the way in which Paul conveys this notion to the audience enhances its effect. Instead of merely mentioning the positive side of the argument, he begins with two denials before expressing the message he wishes to convey. It is thus clear that the issue of the divine origin of Paul's apostleship dominates the first five verses of the letter. According to Dunn (1998:26), the change from "from human beings"(Galatians 1:1) to "through a human being"(Galatians 1:1) may reflect a two-pronged attack on Paul's apostleship: his opponents may have claimed that his apostleship originated with the church leaders in Antioch and that it was mediated by way of a specific individual, for example, Peter or Barnabas. However, this is not certain. Nevertheless, the basic charge lodged against Paul is clear: his apostleship

does not have divine authorization and there is therefore no need to accept his version of the gospel.

The Jews emphasized that one must be circumcised for salvation. Paul wrote to address the fact that circumcision which the Jews emphasized as necessary for salvation is part of the boundary and identity marks of the Jews (Dunn 1985:309-34). Paul after handling these issues in closing his epistle to the Galatians wrote: "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Galatians 6:17). The Apostle Paul in closing this epistle talked about the badge he wore which identified him as a true servant of God. Invariably, this was to further authenticate the apostleship he stated in 1:1. At this point, no one could deny that his apostleship was of Jesus Christ, for Paul bore "in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus." The "I" in this verse is emphatic in Greek, it was not a point of boasting but it was to vindicate his ministry.

3. *SITZ-IM-LEBEN* OF GALATIANS 6:17

Before we go ahead to look at the interpretations of this passage, the life situation of the people in Galatians 6:17 need to be examined. In looking at their life situation, their cultural background is important. With regard to the cultural background or life situation of the people where *ta stigmata*- *ta stigmata* (the marks) was used, the practice of religious tattooing in antiquity is the most likely background. Some scholars like Lietzmann (1971:45), Lightfoot (1921:225), Schlier (1971:284), and H. D. Betz (1988:324) support this fact. Even though the above scholars and others support that view, it is not unanimous. For example, Burton (1962:136) rejects this view and prefers to link Paul's use to another custom, namely that of branding slaves to indicate ownership. Some exegetes like Longenecker (1990:299) and Lührmann (1988:102) merely name both possibilities without choosing between them. The custom of religious tattooing seems to be the most obvious parallel to Paul's use of *stigmata* (*stigmata*) in Galatians 6:17, and it is therefore understandable that exegetes tend to prefer it as potential background. However, perhaps one should not restrict the potential background for Paul's reference to *stigmata* (*stigmata*) to either of the two possibilities mentioned thus far, since branded marks were a well-known phenomenon in antiquity, functioning in various social contexts.

In his comprehensive overview of *stigmata* (*stigmata*), Betz (1988:657) provides numerous examples in this regard: the branding of animals; deserters; prisoners of war; robbers of temples; wrong-doers; slaves (for running away, stealing, or sometimes merely for the sake of indicating ownership on the forehead; recruits of the Roman army; members of certain tribes; devotees of Dionysios [with an ivy leaf], the Great Mother, Mithras or other cults/gods). From Betz's overview it is evident that branded marks were a well-known phenomenon in Paul's time. Furthermore, one could also say that such marks were regarded either positively or negatively. For example, in the case of runaway slaves or prisoners of war they functioned in a negative way. However, in those cases where people received such marks voluntarily, for example to indicate devotion to a particular cult/god or membership of the Roman army, they were regarded as something positive (at least by the people who wore them!). Generally speaking, Paul's reference to

his *stigmata* (*stigmata*) could be classified as an example where the "marks" he received are viewed in a positive sense.

4. THE TEXT AND TRANSLATION

4.1. 1. Greek Text of Galatians 6:17 (Pros Galatas6:17)

Tou` loipou` kovpou\$ moi mhdei\$ parecevtw: ejgwV gaVr taV stivgmatatou` jlhsou` ejn tw` swvmati mou bastavzw (Aland et al 1993:653).

4.1.2. Transliteration of Galatians 6:17

Tou loipou kopous moi medeis parecheto. ego gar ta stigmata tou jesou en to somati mou bastazo

4.2. Working Translation of Galatians 6:17

The Greek text from which this working translation was made is *UBS 4 Greek New Testament* published in 1990. There are several versions and manuscripts of the Bible. As a result of the various versions and translations, there are variations in the English translations because there are several places in which the English versions depart from this text. Therefore the researcher adopts a personal working translation: From henceforth let no one give me trouble, for I bear in my body the marks of Jesus (PWT).

5. AN EXEGESIS OF GALATIAN 6:17

BDR and Bruce (1982:186,275) say that in verse 17a Paul uses a command to warn the Galatians that no one should trouble him in future: *Tou` loipou` kovpou\$ moi mhdei\$ parecevtw:* (*Tou loipou kopous moi medeis parecheto.*) By referring to anyone who opposes his gospel as somebody who is in fact "troubling" him, he is effectively discouraging the Galatians not to do this in future.

In verse 17b he motivates this warning as follows: *ejgwV gaVr taV stivgmata tou` jlhsou` ejn tw` swvmati mou bastavzw* (*ego gar ta stigmata tou jesou en to somati mou bastazo*) The word "marks" in its Greek rendering is *στιγματα* (*stigmata*), meaning mark, brand. As stated earlier this is one of the difficult passages for exegetes due to the fact that scholars do not agree on the interpretation of this expression. This researcher agrees (as most exegetes) that Paul uses the expression to refer metaphorically to the marks left on his body as a result of his suffering as an apostle (Tolmie 2004:207). In a sense, one could thus state that he is again using autobiography as argument (as he did in Galatians 1 and 2), as he mentions the marks on his body in order to recall certain events in his life.

Before looking at what scholars have said on this issue of **Paul's bodily marks of Jesus** that is the *στιγματα* (*stigmata*), according to Lilliebjörn (1933:14) the issue of marks or branding in Paul's context can be divided into five groups namely

- i. Tribe and primitive tattooing
- ii. Tattooing of slaves and prisoners of war
- iii. Tattooing as punishment
- iv. Tattooing of soldiers and

- v. Cultic tattooing. With regard to cultic tattooing, there are two reasons why people had it done namely: to give themselves to the deity as slaves of the deity, and to be influenced by the magic power flowing from the names or statues of the deities.

According to Rogers (1998:433) it was a custom to mark slaves by scars; religious tattooing also played a great role in antiquity (BAGD 59). Barnes (2005:n.pg.) states that it means *in* *tribus* *et* *in* *dermatibus* *et* *in* *scram* *et* *in* *reporp* upon the body. So slaves were sometimes, equally branded by their masters to prevent their escape. Devotees to an idol god sometimes caused to be impressed on themselves the name or image of the divinity which they adored. Paul 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 favourite 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.

When Paul and Barnabas were ministering in Lystra (present-day central Turkey, in the vicinity of Galatia), on Paul's first apostolic journey, the unbelieving Jews caused great trouble for God's servants. Luke writes in Acts chapter 14: 19-20 thus:

And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe (Bruce 1982:115).

Personally, one might think Paul died here—after being stoned to death, after being literally pummeled with rocks. The Bible says that Jesus Christ saw fit to send Paul back to Earth, where the Apostle returned to Lystra and went onward to other cities, his earthly ministry continuing another 25 years or so. To be stoned to death, to have one's physical body pulverized with rocks, would certainly leave some scars, some dislocated or broken bones, and other severe bodily injuries.

In Paul writing to the Galatians, especially mentioning those "marks" in chapter 6 and verse 17, it is highly likely that he had this stoning incident in Lystra in mind. In fact, Galatians 6:17 may explain the "infirmity of the flesh" Paul mentioned elsewhere in that epistle to Galatia: "Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus" (Galatians 4:13-14). Some physical injury or illness kept Paul detained in Galatia, which gave him opportunity to share the Gospel with these pagans in Galatia, and they were saved unto eternal life!

These “marks” (stigmata) are primarily the scars resulting from the various beatings he had to endure, particularly at the hands of the Jews (2 Cor. 11:24; Acts 16:23). But the marks “of Jesus” are an additional allusion to the cross, since victims of crucifixion were scourged beforehand e.g. “by his stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5). Paul, then, really is being crucified to the world (6:14). These marks of his identification with Jesus’ own sufferings (Rom 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:5; 4:8-10; Phil 3:10; Col 1:24) should be proof enough of the genuineness of his apostleship and the sincerity of his devotion to Christ (Garlington 2007:189). Since “marks” were also common in the ancient world for religious tattooing or slave branding, Paul is likely suggesting as well that he is the possession of Christ. But besides “marks” in the sense of “stripes,” Beale (1999:222) argues that Paul used “marks” here because “He wants to be identified with the only mark of the new creation that there is, which is Messiah Jesus himself. Therefore, Paul’s statement in v. 17 that he ‘bears on his body the brand-marks of Jesus’ is another way of saying that he does not want to be identified by the badge of the old creation (circumcision) but wants to be identified with the only sign of the new creation: with Jesus, and his suffering at the cross.”

According to Lightfoot (1921:225), the ‘marks of the Lord Jesus’ are the bodily scars that he received at the hands of his persecutors for his belief in Jesus. Paul is speaking of the permanent marks which he bore from persecution undergone in the service of Christ. This bodily “Marks of Jesus” Paul is talking about may be understood as implying the scars of the wounds which he had received in the course of his ministry- he had been scourged, stoned, maltreated and persecuted in diverse ways for the sake of the Gospel. Paul may also be referring to those brands with which servants and slaves were often impressed in order to ascertain whose property they were. Paul was virtually saying: “Do not trouble me I have suffered already sufficiently, I am suffering still, do not add any more to my afflictions. I bear the marks of my Lord and Master, Jesus. I am His, and will remain so. You glory in your mark of circumcision; I glory in the marks which I bear in my body for the testimony of the Lord.” Bligh (1969:496) agrees with scholars who are of the opinion that Paul is probably thinking of the scars left on his body as a result of the persecution, but also believes that *stivgmata* (*stigmata*), (marks) is Paul's "metaphorical description of the 'circumcision of heart' or 'new creation' which he and other Christians receive through faith and baptism."

Shawn is saying that these stigmata which Paul suffered were scriptural, and they involved shame and hatred, not awe and pride like the “*stigmata*” of religious tradition (wounds on one’s hands and feet superstitiously believed to be Christ’s scars, which lead to nothing more than pagan idolatry). Barnes argues that, it seems that by these marks or brands he refers to the weals which he had received in his body; the marks of stripes and sufferings which he endured in the service of the Redeemer (2 Cor. 11:24-27) (n.pg.). Paul doubtless refers to the scars left upon his body by persecution and hardship (2 Cor. 4:10). Based on all these worries the people were giving him, talking about circumcision, the law and doubting his apostleship, in Galatians 6:12-13 he told them you glory in your circumcision mark , but I will glory in my marks of suffering for Jesus Christ- 2 Cor. 11:23-28 (Finis 2007:361).

The “marks of Jesus” in Paul’s body is the basis for the Galatians to stop doubting his authority heeding the false teachers, thereby causing him trouble no longer (6:17). Remember that the Judaizers’ insistence that the mark of circumcision proves a person’s loyalty to the Jewish Messiah motivated Paul to write Galatians in the first place. Here in verse 17 the apostle employs irony, granting in a sense his enemies’ point those bodily marks can show forth true discipleship. Yet circumcision is not the sign of commitment to Jesus but the scars of persecution for the cross of Christ. Paul does not invest these marks with absolute significance for salvation. Unlike the Judaizers, he does not say that one must be physically marred to be justified. But he is pointing out that true disciples show forth their love for the Master in their willingness to suffer all manner of hardships for the truth of gospel (see also 2 Cor. 11:16–12:10). They do not substitute human effort for God’s grace and then claim to be Christians while following a false gospel (Ligonier 2001:n.pg.).

Paul’s bodily “marks of Jesus” is used here in contrast to the irrelevant mark of circumcision. Paul asserts that he has marks on his body which do mean something real; the *stigmata* or marks which he has acquired as the direct consequence of his service for Jesus. These proclaim whose he is and whom he serves. Among them the most permanent were probably the marks left by his stoning at Lystra (Acts 14:19; cf. 2 Cor. 11:25), and if the church at Lystra was one of those to which this letter was addressed, some of his readers would therefore have a vivid recollection of that occasion (Bruce 276) and understand the point he is making. Bruce gives more interpretations to the “marks of Jesus” which are: tattoo marks of religious devotion; a mark received at baptism and eye trouble resulting from the blinding light of “the divine glory on the Damascus road.” Yet Bruce does not conclude anything more than the marks of Jesus simply stand for what he has endured for the sake of Christ.

Hirsch (1930:196) is of the opinion that the events that occurred during Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus – in particular, the appearance of Christ could have caused him some lasting medical problems. He however doubts the possibility of this argument owing to the fact that according to Acts 26:13-14, the other people who travelled with Paul, also saw this blinding light, and we do not have a record of this posing an eye problem to them. He therefore prefers to interpret the *stivgmata* (*stigmata*) as unspecified medical problems resulting from Paul’s conversion.

Williams (1999:167) states that with the expression “the marks of Jesus” the apostle transforms a slave’s tattoo or brand into a metaphor of his sufferings on behalf of the gospel (perhaps alluded to at 4:13-14), thus reminding his readers that he is a slave of Christ. Yet Paul, so far as is recorded, was never a slave, nor was he marked by anyone to signify ownership. However, Barclay (2001:57) engages this idea, stating that often a master branded his slaves with a mark that showed them to be his. Most likely what Paul means is that the scars of the things he had suffered for Christ are the brands which show him to be Christ’s slave.

Nearly all exegetes studied in this research respond by referring to the marks left on Paul’s body as a result of his suffering as an apostle. Dölger (1911:51) rejects the idea

that Paul is referring to marks left on his body as a result of his sufferings as an apostle, and, claims that he had tattooed the name of Jesus on his body. He also states that if this was not the case, Paul's reference to his *stivgmata* (*stigmata*) should not be understood as any physical marks at all, but as referring to the fact that he considered himself a slave of Christ. Dinkler (2000:110) argues that Paul has bodily marks in mind. However, he links these to symbolic markings at baptism, in particular, to the possibility that the bodies of the Christians were marked symbolically with the letter X (the first letter of "Christ" in Greek) during baptism. Fenner interprets the *stivgmata* (*stigmata*) as Paul's auto-suggestive reactions to the sufferings which Jesus experienced on the cross. In other words, Fenner suggests that Paul experienced his mystical unity with Christ to such an extent that he in fact developed bleeding wounds on his hands and feet (Betz 1998:664).

Paul's having the marks of Jesus does indeed signify a special relationship not only between himself and God, but also between himself and his readers. Obviously Paul is writing to "reconvert" the people of Galatia. "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel" (Gal. 1:6). Telling enough is the fact that the "him" in this verse is referring to none other than Paul himself. In his attempt to win them back to his gospel, Paul reminds them in 4:14 that he had been received "as Christ Jesus" and to emphasize that fact, he concludes by stating that he bears upon his body the wounds of Christ. Thus, he is not only affirming the gospel he brings, but that Christ, revealed in Paul, brought that message to them.

As Maccoby (1987:107) states:

Even more important for an understanding of Paul's view of his own status is his claim to have special marks or stigmata on his body, showing the depth of his self-identification with the sufferings of Jesus on the cross. Thus the stigmata of Paul, whether self-inflicted or psychosomatically produced, made him, in his own eyes, and those of his followers, the supreme embodiment of the power of the mystery God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is claiming nothing less than the actual stigmata as the capstone for authenticating his message to the Galatians. Paul, saying no one should trouble him for the bodily "marks of Jesus" he bore, was just saying "I consider every matter settled. I have said all that I have to say on the subject in this epistle. I have no more to add. I have clearly met all the arguments of my opponents. I refuse to give any more time or attention to the proposal in vs. 12, 13. Hence I do not want anyone to disturb or bother me anymore as it relates to the subject [concerning the law]." For him, Paul is protected by Christ; he belongs to Jesus and he lives under his protection.

6. THEOLOGICAL CONCLUSION

1. As Christians, if Paul wishes to emphasize that he is the property of Christ, we should not entangle ourselves or be conformed to the standard of this world so that we can boldly say like him that we are the property of Christ.

2. The church and Christians are to share in the sufferings of Jesus and not only accept His blessedness.
3. By the reason of Christ's bodily marks on Christians, they are to affirm their loyalty to Christ.
4. When Christians belong to Jesus, they enjoy his protection and have no need to entertain fear. For Paul, the stigmata are his amulet and talisman.
5. The revelation of faith in Christ brought about suspension of the law which held people as a schoolmaster. Therefore, this revelation has given Christians new identity (stigmata) which makes them different from other people who still live under the law.

7. BACKGROUND OF CHRISTIAN WITNESS TODAY

Christianity in Nigeria is under attack and Christians must work out a fitting response to the violent threat against the Faith. Okoh (2012:1) welcoming delegates to the *2012 Divine Commonwealth Conference (DIVCCON) in Abuja*, said: "The Christian Faith is seriously under attack in Nigeria from two directions, from without and from within." In the Christian witness in Nigeria today, there have been violent expressions of Islam represented by Boko Haram. In some parts of the North, the Christian Faith is endangered species: Boko Haram is not just against Christians, but has stated emphatically that it wants the Christian Faith rooted out of the North. There has been as serious threat to Christians in their witnessing in the country. As a result of the violence, opposition and persecution, many Christians have become intimidated and have entered into their shell forgetting that their claim of bearing the marks of Jesus on their body. Christians in their witness today because of persecution and oppositions have moved from their places of abode that is the area they found themselves to other areas thinking it will be safer for them. As a result of this, some churches in some parts of the country have drastically depopulated. Okoh (2012:1) said that the Anglican Diocese in Maiduguri, Damaturu, Kano, Bauchi, Yola, Zaria, Jos etc. are now drastically depopulated because of attacks and oppositions from Boko Haram, Fulani Herdsmen etc.

Christians in their witness in Nigeria today have also come under attack from the threat of African Traditional Religion, espoused in "its various expressions in cults." This threat is in two ways:

- a. Outright violent confrontations.
- b. The other threat is more subtle, presenting paganism as culture and tradition, with many ignorant Christians swallowing it hook, line and sinker! Thus promoting a syncretistic faith (Okoh 2012:1).

These issues have caused "disunity among Christians" in their witness today and it had exposed the church to so many disadvantages.

Another threat from within the church is the fact of nominalism- the case of faith that is one mile wide and one inch deep, leading to distorted beliefs. An aspect of this fact arising partly from it is the ease with which individual traders, carpenters, civil servants, house wives, unemployed graduates now establish their own churches, become the Archbishops, General Overseers and teach whatever catches their fancies (Okoh 2012:2).

Amidst the attack on the Christian faith from false religion, disunity, Boko Haram, Cattle herdsmen, Secessionists and radical Islam, Christians in their witness have grown weary and some have denied Christ forgetting their claim of bearing the marks of Jesus in their bodies.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF PAUL'S BODILY MARKS IN GALATIANS 6:17 TO CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIA

Below are some of the implications of Paul's bodily "marks of Jesus" in Galatians 6:17 to Christian witness in the 21st century Nigeria.

- i.** In the Christian witness in Nigeria today, Christians are to remember that they have never been promised an easy life as Christians. Like the Apostle Paul, his companions, and all the saints down through the ages, Christians too will be persecuted for serving the Lord Jesus Christ. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). It calls for one to determine to continue onward, no matter how challenging or hostile this world becomes. God's grace was truly sufficient for Paul, and it is truly sufficient for us! (2 Cor. 12:7-10).
- ii.** In the Christian witness in Nigeria today, Christians must suffer for Christ's sake. We are bound to suffer in the hands of men and women for the Lord's sake just as our brethren in the North are suffering much at the hands of men and women for their Lord's sake. It is only the bodily marks of Jesus that will enable Christians to live under Christ's protection.
- iii.** In the Christian witness today, without having an encounter with Christ, Christians cannot get the bodily marks which signify that Christians are His own. And when Christians are His own, those marks will become their amulet and talisman and they will not be afraid of Boko Haram, Cattle Herdsmen, the spate of Kidnapping in Nigeria, Pro-Biafra Agitation etc.
- iv.** That in the Christian witness today, the boasting of Christians should be in Christ alone, and in His glorious finished work.

9. FINDINGS

The findings of this work are that:

- i.** There are lots of interpretations among scholars over this passage under study i.e. Galatians 6:17.
- ii.** There are lots of challenges facing Christians in their witnessing in the 21st Century Nigeria.
- iii.** So many Christians in their witness or the church in their witness today, only boast of bearing the marks of Christ in their body in the absence of challenges and persecutions but when the real test comes, they forget their claim of bearing the marks of Jesus Christ on their bodies.
- iv.** From this research, there are four interpretations on Paul's bodily marks of Jesus given by scholars namely
 - a.** Emphasis on the fact that he is the property of Christ.
 - b.** A sign of his loyalty to Christ.
 - c.** An indication of the protection by Christ.

- d. A way of contrasting himself with his opponents, for example, contrasting himself with their emphasis on circumcision or their unwillingness to suffer for Christ.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

This research recommends as follows:

1. That Christians amidst the oppression, persecution and opposition they are faced with in Nigeria should not deny Christ but should affirm and remain steadfast as an indication of their loyalty to Christ.
2. That Christians not minding the oppositions or challenges they are faced with should like Paul anchor their faith in Christ and trust in His ability to deliver and not to seek for power or protection where there is no protection. They should be like Paul who took the stigmata as his amulet and talisman.
3. That Christians and the church in the face of evil and persecution, Boko Haram, Fulani Herdsmen, the spate of kidnapping in Nigeria, Pro-Biafra Agitation etc. are to share in the sufferings of Jesus and not only to accept His blessedness.
4. That the church should continue to strive for correct interpretation of the scripture as they preach and teach in their ministry rather than joining heretics to dilute the word of God.
5. The church and teachers of God's word should be more involved in going back to the life situation of the people to which the bible was written as well as adopting the right method of interpretation.

11. CONCLUSION

Within scripture itself is a record of the apostle Paul claiming nothing less than the stigmata of Jesus Christ. His claims may be dually motivated. First, it validates his message to the Galatians and strengthens the impact that his words might have upon the reader. Second, the stigmata works to further authenticate the claim that Jesus Christ has been made manifest in him. There can be little doubt that Paul means the reader to accept his letter not only as Paul speaking on behalf of Christ, but also as Christ speaking through him. Galatians 6:17 talking about Paul's bodily marks of Jesus was the final refutation of his opponents' attacks. He was concluding all the arguments he had engaged in since Chapter 1. This was the best way to persuade the Galatians to accept his point of view and to reject that of the opponents.

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