

1 PETER 2:10-12 **BRANDED!**

¹⁰ *Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

¹¹ *Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.* ¹² *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

In my lifetime, the idea of branding has come a long way. As a boy watching “westerns” on television, branding was something done to cattle in order to identify them as belonging to a particular ranch. Since cattle lived exposed to the weather, and cattle rustlers were quite wily, the identifying mark on a cow had to be not only identifiable, but also indelible. So it was that the cowboys would spend several days wrestling down the young cows and burning a “brand” into their hide (think calf roping of today’s rodeo). The scar formed from that burn was permanent so that as long as the cow lived everyone would know its owner.

These days, “branding” is something that a graphics firm does for your business or organization, through creating a unique and memorable logo and publication “look.” Although the methods are different, the goal is the same – everyone will identify the origin of the product or correspondence as belonging to you.

Like newborn calves, we were born into this world identified only as the offspring of particular parents. As long as we remain unbranded, we are free game for all the unscrupulous ranchers and poachers of this world, including that great rustler, Satan. God wants to place his brand on us, but his way is to round us up with the ropes of love. Such ropes don’t coerce, but rather patiently wait for us to respond to his love and allow him to brand us. Then once branded through God’s mercy, all should be able to know that he is our God and we are his people.

The identifying brand is the image of Christ. It is an image not seen in our physical appearance, but in the life we live. It is the expression of the love of Christ through our lives lived in this world that identifies us as his people. It is loving your neighbor, expressed through good deeds, that will identify you as belonging to God and not the world.

Being branded will attract attention and attention is not always good. But even negative attention will be redeemed to the glory of God if we stand firm in our faith. Our brand is eternal and indelible, let’s not hide it, but let’s let the love of God shine through us even to those who might wish it otherwise.

Spirit of God, work in me the courage of my convictions. Grow my faith beyond that point where I seek solace and comfort, but remain a closet Christian in public and among my peers. Embolden me to carry your brand proudly and not withdraw at the first hint of resistance. Amen.