

Body distortion

Tattoos & body piercing

Introduction

The fact that I need to write an article on this shows the problems that the modern church is facing. Something so basic as this should be understood by all Christians and yet we see a massive problem in this area worldwide.

The issue is: are tattoos and body piercings acceptable for a believer?

Basic governing principles

Before we get into details, we need to outline the basic Biblical principles that affect our decision on these issues.

Do not be conformable to the world

Whatever else we may say about tattoos and body-piercings, they are certainly worldly fads. It is not natural to intentionally cause pain and self-harm; indeed it goes against all common sense. This is especially true when things go wrong, as happens many times. Indeed, some people have died from sepsis as a result of poor clinical conditions in the process of body manipulation.

Following the fads of the world is not an option – it is forbidden.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world. **1 Jn 2:15-16**

You are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. **Jn 15:19**

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. **Rm 12:2**

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. **Col 3:2**

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. **Jm 4:4**

Christians need to understand that they have been lifted out of this world, they are not in the kingdom of this world any more (Col 1:13). They do not follow the pleasures and fashions of this world and have no interest in its trends. Their attention is elsewhere, on the above where Christ is seated.

This principle is enough to show that Christians do not get tattoos or body-piercings. Indeed, such things are flags that a person is submitted to the world and the forces that control it for wickedness.

Take care of the body that God created

Your body is not your own; it belongs to the God who created it. You are therefore responsible to God for the care of your body and cannot do with it whatever you please. Your responsibility is to care for your body in the way that God demands. You are not entitled to physically alter the body that God gave you (with the exception of medical necessity to aid the body).

Now this principle covers many areas of lust (drunkenness, smoking, drug abuse, gluttony etc), but it especially affects what we do to our skin which is what other people notice first about us. We have no authority to carve decorative marks on our body.

Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. **1 Cor 6:19-20**

For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. **Rm 14:7-8**

Know that the LORD, He *is* God; *It is* He *who* has made us, and not we ourselves; *we are* His people and the sheep of His pasture. **Ps 100:3**

It is vital, therefore, that we understand the will of God regarding our bodies and take care of the vessel he gave us.

Relevant information

Tattoos and body piercings originate in the culture of animists and very primitive tribesmen. They were not found in higher levels of human progress, such as ancient Greece or Rome;¹ they were, and still are, found in primitive animists that are still in the Stone Age.²

Tattoos and body-piercings were usually a means of self-identity. That is, they identified a person to a certain totem, or god, or tribe or function in a tribe.

Tattoos

The word 'tattoo' derives from mid 18th century Tahitian, Tongan, and Samoan *ta-tau* or Marquesan *ta-tu*, meaning 'to write'; these were primitive tribesmen in the South Seas. It was common for Stone Age animists in the South Pacific to use tattoos for religious and tribal reasons.

In New Zealand, Stone Age Maoris used tattoos extensively and especially to make themselves more fearsome to enemies in battle. They also wore tattoos to indicate social lineage and social status. Native American Indians also used tattoos to indicate tribal identity.

Maoris arrived in New Zealand as part of a series of waves of migration from Tahiti, probably from the 9th century onwards. In fact the word 'Maori' refers to a language, the Polynesian language. The Maoris in New Zealand are simply the migrants from Tahiti.

¹ Except amongst a very few extremists.

² Many modern primitive tribes-people would still be in the Stone Age were it not for interaction with western culture.

So the word 'tattoo' derives from primitive animists from the South Pacific. However, tribesmen from many cultures have been using tattoos for religious and other reasons for centuries before that where it was called 'skin painting' or 'scarring'. Sometimes used for medical purposes, tattooing has been observed on people going back as far as ancient Egypt; mummies have been found with tattoos.

After the travels of Captain Cook the word 'tattoo' became common usage in English.³ In Japan tattoos were called *irezumi* meaning 'insertion of ink'; however the practice was banned in the 19th century for 70 years. Today Japanese tattoos are largely identified with the Yakuza criminal gangs and frowned upon. Tattoos are a taboo in Chinese society. In some civilisations, such as the Philippines, tattoos were believed to afford magical protection to a person.

Apart from self-decoration, tattoos were used for practical purposes, such as to identify the slaves of a certain master or soldiers of an emperor (e.g. Roman soldiers). Sometimes they were a punishment for certain crimes to publicly identify a criminal; such as facial tattoos on Chinese criminals. The Nazis used tattoos to identify labour camp prisoners.

It seems to me that tattooing was popular amongst Asiatic ethnic groups in ancient times and this spread via migration to other lands, particularly the north and south pacific areas. While the practice has not been popular or widespread amongst Europeans, it did exist from earliest times, including amongst Iron Age Britons and some later aristocrats. However, the first professional British tattooists were established in Liverpool in the 1870s to accommodate sailors while the first professional American tattooist was Martin Hildebrandt in 1846.

In the later 19th century, after tattooing machines were invented, the practice was largely held amongst the military, lower classes and criminals. Today, when tattooing is fashionable and modelled by celebrities, polls show that as many as a third of people have a tattoo.

Modern association

For a long time tattoos were identified with social deviance, rebellion and criminality. They were considered to be a social stigma and tattooing of women was almost unknown.⁴ Even today criminals in prisons use tattoos to indicate facts about their crimes and associations. Some use symbolism, such as a teardrop to indicate murder. Military personnel have also used tattoos to indicate their units.

In modern times tattoos are considered as a means of self-expression or even as an art form. The reality is that it is a fad as people copy celebrities.

Body-piercing

Piercing the skin to insert rings, studs and other objects other than the earlobe arises from pagan practices performed by primitive animists, usually Stone Age peoples.

Nose piercing is less of a deviation than on other areas (such as genitals or nipples). It was common in the Middle East (and thence in India after the Mughals) in the form of a stud in the left nostril – a supposed aid to conception. Septum piercings are less common and usually found in primitive peoples, such as the Maya and Aztecs and African tribes.

³ Cook returned to England in 1769 from his first voyage to Tahiti; the first version of the word was 'tattaw'.

⁴ One exception was Jessie Knight from the 1920s.

Lip piercing and stretching appeared in African tribes, Papua New Guinea and some Amazonian primitive cultures.

Nipple, naval and genital piercing are more dangerous and more rare (though common today). There are many false statements made in defence of such. For example, they are not common amongst Egyptian nobility and statuary; and the legend of the Prince Albert is just that. Some extremists cover their body in piercings. The most pierced woman in 2009 had over 6,000.⁵

The reasons for such deformation vary; they involve, ritualistic, sexual prowess, social status, shamanistic, aids to conception, etc. but most often they are personal symbols of false religion. In other words they are signs not only of the social structure of paganism but heathen religion primarily.

Other body deformation includes Chinese foot binding to make women walk a certain way head binding and neck elongation in African tribes to appear taller.

The modern western trend began with its increasing popularity amongst homosexuals after WWII. It then exploded with the Punk Movement of the 1970s. It was even promulgated as 'Modern Primitivism'. It was then popularised by a group of Californians; notably Doug Malloy (aka Richard Simonton) and Jim Ward. Ward opened a home-based piercing business in West Hollywood in 1975. Malloy wrote articles on piercing as part of the sexual fetish fashion; his first book was called, *'The Art of Pierced Penises and Decorative Tattoos'*. His writings are the source of many myths about piercings, especially concerning the erotic.

In 1987 the UK courts decreed that body-piercing was not illegal but that erotic piercing was. Appeals against this decision failed. In practice this law is not prosecuted. In 2005 a poll showed that 10% of UK people had a piercing.

Dangers

Complications from body-piercings are common. In 2005 a survey showed that 31% of people suffered complications with some requiring hospitalisation.

The risks include: allergic reaction, infection (bacterial or viral), hepatitis, HIV, scar tissue, physical trauma (including tearing, friction and oedema), at least one woman has lost a breast after a nipple piercing.

Risks

Both tattooing and body-piercing carry significant medical risks.

Anything breaking the skin barrier carries a risk of infection or allergic reaction, even worse when multiple implements are involved and yet more danger when the dye is taken into account. This risk is massively amplified if the person doing it is an amateur, which is often the case.

Bad cases of infection can result in Hepatitis⁶ and even death. Other dangers include herpes, HIV, staph, tetanus and tuberculosis. In some cases reactions to red ink in tattoos has resulted in amputation.

⁵ Guinness Book of Records.

⁶ Inflammation of the liver.

For a Christian, such risks are a step too far.

Specific Biblical commands

You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard. You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo⁷ any marks on you: I am the LORD. **Lev 19:27-28**

The word 'tattoo' here means 'print, incision, tattoo, mark'. 'Tattoo' is used as the translation in the NAS, RSV, NRSV, NKJV, Darby, and others.

They shall not make any bald *place* on their heads, nor shall they shave the edges of their beards nor make any cuttings in their flesh. **Lev 21:5**

You *are* the children of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead. For you *are* a holy people to the LORD your God. **Deut 14:1-2**

Authority

The current authority of commandments specifically applied to Israel in the Mosaic Law is a question of great debate, which we need to consider.

Firstly, we are not under the Law of Moses but the Law of Christ. It is true that we do not follow written rules but, under the New Covenant, we follow the Spirit of Christ who applies God's moral law even deeper than that of Moses. Thus we are to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us, whereas the Old Covenant told us to hate those who hate God (Ps 101:3, 119:113, 139:21).

Secondly, the aspects of the moral and civil law in the Mosaic Law are not binding on us today; they were specifically for Israel for a certain time period. Thus it is not forbidden to mix two types of cloth in garments today.

Despite this, there are principles contained in laws that do prevail today. Sometimes, even specific dietary laws remain.⁸ Where a law involves a prime moral or practical principle then the basis of that law still stands since it enshrines a universal moral principle of God's law. Thus the Mosaic Law forbidding homosexual sex, for example, remains in force (Lev 18:22, 20:13 cf. Rm 1:27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10).

The case of body marking, piercing, cuttings and tattoos are part of these case types. They identify the sin of damaging the body that God created for a symbolic, social or decorative purpose. Such sin was already known to the Patriarchs but the Mosaic Law simply codified it as a statute. The moral principle remains in force.

Thus those Christians who advocate tattoos by saying that the Levitical command does not apply to us today under the New Covenant are wrong.

Can you possibly imagine the Lord Jesus as a man having a tattoo or a pierced face?

⁷ Some editions of the NKJV have 'mark' instead of 'tattoo'.

⁸ Acts 15:20, 'we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood'.

Questions from Biblical precedents

Ear boring

Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened. **Ps 40:6**

Some see a parallel here with the boring of a slave's ear. The word 'opened' is literally 'dug' or 'excavated'. Though the verse may well be saying the same as Isa 35:5,⁹ some commentators make the point of seeing a reference to Exodus 21:5-6:

But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.
Exod 21:5-6

Thus it could be that someone could affirm the validity of body-piercing based on these verses.

In fact, these verses give no support for modern body-piercing whatsoever. The bored ear was a conventional sign of a committed Hebrew slave as the lifelong servant of a master instead of availing himself of the opportunity of freedom in the seventh year. It was something unusual and not commonplace. It was a sign of subservience to another person.

The value of the committed slave is the typological reference to Jesus as the committed servant of the Father.

Nose rings

Like an earring [nexem] of gold and an ornament of fine gold *is* a wise rebuker to an obedient ear. **Prov 25:12**

Then all his brothers, all his sisters, and all those who had been his acquaintances before, came to him and ate food with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversity that the LORD had brought upon him. Each one gave him a piece of silver and each a ring [nexem] of gold. **Job 42:11**

The word 'earring' and 'ring' here is actually 'nose-jewel' or 'earring'. Nose-jewels were worn by women while both men and women in those cultures wore earrings (Exod 32:2). A similar situation prevails today in India.

Then I asked her, and said, 'Whose daughter *are* you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the nose ring [nexem] on her nose and the bracelets on her wrists. **Gen 24:47**

And the rings; the nose jewels [nexem]. **Isa 3:21**

I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head.
Ezek 16:12

These references are to nose-jewels (*nexem*) worn in the right or left nostril, sometimes as a ring with a jewel or coral on it; on rarer occasions connected to the forehead by a chain. The word had also a more generic meaning of 'ring' or 'jewellery', whether worn in the nose or not. In some cases it meant an amulet or necklace.

⁹ Isa 35:5 'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped'.

The nose-jewel was simply a facet of Hebrew culture at that ancient time, one that prevailed throughout the Middle East and Asia into recent times. It was as much a facet of life as a turban (e.g. Lev 8:9), sandals or a tunic.

There is no support here for general body-piercing of all sorts in various parts of the body. The reference is simply a matter of culture. Just as we don't need to wear a turban, we don't need nose-rings either.

Christian history

The church has long realised that body modification was sinful and many authorities forbade tattoos. Emperor Constantine (a professing Christian) banned tattoos about 330 while the Second Council of Nicea banned all body marking as a pagan practice in 787.

Since body-piercing was virtually unknown and tattoos frowned upon in Post-Reformation western culture, it has not been an issue that required comment; Christians simply did not participate in such things. Therefore, there is little writing upon this matter.

Judaism has historically forbidden body modification as being pagan. It is outlawed in Jewish Halakha (based on Lev 19:28), backed up by rabbinic teaching, such as Maimonides (Mishnah Torah, '*Laws of idolatry*', 12:11).

The paganising of society

Christians need to understand what is going on today as the devil pursues his plans to dominate the world and fill it with wickedness. I have explained his purposes in many papers.

Part of the satanic plan is to paganise society. Satan intends to destroy all the features of progress made by Christians since the Reformation and reverse them. Thus all the good things that Christians have contributed to society are in the process of being destroyed and replaced with iniquity. For example, the sanctity of monogamous marriage is being ruined while the evils of homosexual marriages are sanctioned by the state. Thus the state legislates for evil. For this reason alone God will judge the nation.¹⁰

Thus everywhere around us we see the wickedness of demonic plans encroaching on all aspects of society, and it will increase more and more. We could write whole books on how the world is going insane, replacing good with evil. This is not an accident; wicked world leaders are following a satanic strategy towards the end of dominating the world in a wicked despotic government. The quicker you understand this the better off you will be. National leaders are not benevolent; they are subject to evil powers.

Tattoos and body-piercings are clearly a part of this paganising of society. Today both are highly fashionable, seen everywhere and even have television programmes dedicated to them every week. It is sad to see beautiful women ruin themselves with multiple tattoos thinking that they are fashionable. Two or three decades ago multiple tattoos on the body were only found on sailors, soldiers, criminals and a few societal sub-groups, such as bikers or Goths.

¹⁰ Ps 94:20 'Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, have fellowship with You?'. Eccles 3:16-17 'In the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there. I said in my heart, "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked".'

Satan not only wants western people practising shamanism and animism, he wants them to look like the primitive tribesmen that originated such things.

Summary

Body modification (distortion is a better word) is wrong for Christians for the following reasons:

- It contravenes God's command not to follow the world.
- It disobeys our obligation to our Creator to care for our body and not corrupt it for fleshly purposes.
- It is based on pagan and often idolatrous practices.
- The clinical practice of performing these activities carries significant risk of disease.
- The current practice is the result of a demonic fad in the world to distort the image of God.
- It transgresses specific commands of God in the Mosaic Law to not tattoo, deform or cut our bodies in following the world. Though part of the Old Covenant, these laws enshrine universal, moral principles that have eternal significance and are, therefore, incumbent upon us under the New Covenant.

Conclusion

The current trend favouring body-piercings and tattoos is simply another demonic strategy to paganise western people in former Christian nations. It is a perversion intending to deface man as the image of God.

Make no mistake, this is a satanic corruption that all Christians should eschew.

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