

THE CHRISTIAN AND TATTOOS

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Fads come and go in our modern American society. Styles of clothing, shoes, hair, etc. often change. Even medical ideas come and go. The same is true with religious fads among professing Christians. There was a time when sermons were printed and sold and read by most people. They were discussed in homes, in business places and even in drinking establishments. Evidence: the Penny Pulpit publications of yesteryear. Today most Americans seldom hear a sermon and their British counterparts even more seldom. Right now tattoos are a fad. And just like clothing fads, some professing Christians are running after the tattoo fad. And in this day of "feel good religion" success-oriented preachers dare not risk offending people by taking a stand on any subject. As followers of the Lamb, what attitude should God's born-again people take toward the subject of tattoos?

The Bible is not silent on the matter of disfigurement of the human body. In the Old Testament God prohibited the Israelites from doing such things. He said, "**Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD**" (Leviticus 19:28). Young's literal translation translates "for the dead" with the words "for the soul." Most commentators agree that the cuttings made were indeed signs of mourning among the pagans in the midst of whom Israel dwelt. It may be that at least some of the tattoos or printed "marks" were also related to this practice. They most certainly were pagan. Some pagans probably tattooed themselves in memory of loved ones – either living or dead - while others were tattooed to demonstrate their devotion to a particular pagan god or goddess. Pagan soldiers sometimes marked

themselves with tattoos identifying the general under whom they served. But God's national people, Israel, was prohibited from such practices. That is abundantly clear! The New Testament also prohibits anything connected with idols. John wrote: **"Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen"** (1 John 5:21). If keeping ourselves from idols is not important to God, why did the Holy Spirit guide John to write these words?

Aside from the danger of diseases being spread by tattoos and the unknown long-term medical effects of tattoo inks in the body, the question arises: is it right for a follower of the Lamb to mark his or her bodies with tattoos? (Both AIDS and hepatitis have been traced to contaminated tattoo ink and needles. One statistic indicates that tattooed persons are 9 times more likely to get hepatitis than those not tattooed. Some have suggested that all tattooed persons should be immediately tested for hepatitis.) But aside from medical concerns, are there other considerations for those who claim to be children of God? We answer yes! After all, the Bible clearly teaches that the body of each of God's true children is a temple of the Holy Ghost. Paul wrote: **"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's"** (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). It is true that the children of God today are not subject to the Old Testament or Mosaic law, but how can any right thinking person conclude that a believer in Christ is glorifying God by tattooing his or her body? Purity of life, modesty of dress, cleanness of speech, simplicity of lifestyle, deeds of kindness, the assembling together with believers and separation from the world are to be the outward "marks" of those indwelt by the Holy Ghost. One old preacher said that Christians ought to look like Christians, talk like Christians, live like Christians and even smell like Christians. We agree! Glorification of God in all things pertaining to ourselves and our lives is to be the hallmark of the child of God. Marking of the body with tattoos cannot be rightly thought to glorify God since it was prohibited in the Old Testament!

Let us consider the relationship of tattoos with nudity. We live in a day and age when it is obvious that most professing Christians give little thought to the idea of dressing modestly. Visit the average church or notice how people are dressed in the restaurants on Sunday after church services if you doubt that statement. Even most preachers and their wives wear shorts, tight-fitting clothes, sleeveless and see-through garments and clothing made of clinging textiles. Short skirts and tight pants are the norm for women in most religious groups. Of course they have their flimsy excuses: the weather is too hot or too cold, etc., ad nauseam. Concerned pastors have heard them all. The law of Christ – the law of love toward Christ and the brethren – is this: **“Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law”** (Romans 3:10). Paul stated this more clearly with these words: **“...that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way”** (Romans 14:13). No professed Christian loves Christ or his or her brother in Christ if they dress or behave in such a way as to cause a brother or sister to sin in thought, word or deed. There is a very real sense in which we are our brother's keeper! And suggestive or immodest dress (they are the same thing) causes a multitude of evil thoughts to flourish in those who cannot help but see such things. The mentality of the world is one of showing much flesh either actually or suggestively. (Sometimes the suggestion or illusion of nudity is more alluring to the sin nature than actual nudity). What does the current unconcern of professing Christians with their own nudity have to do with tattoos? Just this: both involve exhibitionism. The motive for all kinds of exhibitionism springs from a wicked and prideful heart. The desire to dress provocatively is akin to the desire to display tattoos on the body. Both call attention to the person's body. That is the purpose of both. Persons who get tattoos most often display them rather than hide them. Men and women who dress to show off their bodies in an alluring or prideful way are doing the same kind of thing as those who display their tattoos. And vice-versa. Modest clothing is clothing that is designed to conceal not to reveal. There is no such thing as a modest yet revealing piece of clothing. And in

no way can the display of tattoos said to be modest because they are obtained for showmanship reasons. Read what God has to say about nakedness in the Old Testament if you think modesty is a thing of indifference to God. There it is revealed that your nakedness belongs to your husband or your wife. It is not yours to prostitute to the world in sinful displays. The whole idea of such exhibitionism is one of display or nakedness. This is also a part of the reason people get tattoos: to display and call attention to their bodies and thus themselves. In a sense, tattoos do not evidence modesty. Say what you will, Holy Ghost regenerated people want to live holy and righteous lives. Holy living is separated living. You will convince no one that you are a true child of God if you look like the world: tattoos included!

As a practical matter we cannot but think of the words of poet John Keats: "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever: Its loveliness increases..." By Keats' standard, tattoos are most certainly not "a thing of beauty." They are not "a joy forever!" It has been estimated that as many as 50% of those people who get tattoos live to regret their action. Mature consideration does not regard tattoos as "a thing of beauty" and thus the impetuous action of a moment in youth often leads to years of regret. Many people do in fact regret having gotten such marks on their bodies and spend time and money trying to have them removed. Tattoo removal is a growing business in the United States. After time and gravity have their devastating effects on the body, sagging skin often contributes to huge increases in the ugliness of old tattoos obtained in youth. It cannot be said of tattoos that their "loveliness increases!"

Besides their pagan origins, tattoos have until recently been associated with a dissipated lifestyle. The acceptance of tattoos in today's society is an acceptance of a dissipated lifestyle. Drunkards, drug abusers, whore-mongers, promiscuous women and such like were the people who obtained tattoos until the present-day fad came along. Today's tattoo fad is directly related to the present immorality of our society. What was once looked

down upon as trashy living is now acceptable to most people. Prison tattoos along with men wearing sagging pants have migrated from the cell to the streets and the schools. This is to be expected as a consequence of taking the Bible out of schools. Sociologists are concerned that Americans lack morals. Teenage murderers are common today. Why not? Schools teach evolution. They are generally forbidden to teach the Bible. The consequence of evolution is that humans are no different than dogs or worms. Killing one of them is a matter of no real consequence if you can get away with it: this is the common idea. Marriage is looked upon as unimportant: couples shack up and society and most churches take no stand against such actions. As morality slides ever more rapidly downward, all kinds of things formerly regarded as sinful or pagan are now acceptable. So it is with tattoos. It is of interest to note that we have known some tattooed people who later in life professed a good profession. Without exception they regretted having been tattooed in their younger years. These people, after professing faith in Christ, were careful to dress so as to hide the tattoos obtained in their early years of sinful living. This ought to speak volumes to anyone considering getting a tattoo!

What can we expect regarding the future of tattoos? A kindred question is this: What surprises await God's elect in this present age of apostasy? Are today's professed Christians at all concerned with the pagan origin of tattoos? Not at all! Popular "Christianity" is saturated with paganism. Most professing Christians celebrate pagan holidays such as Christmas and Easter, etc., with not a thought or concern for what they are really doing. These are all part and parcel of the same thing. Today's "Christians" care not that practicing pagans and occultists among whom they dwell laugh at them for their worshiping of idols. Pagans know that by these "Christianized" observances professing believers actually honor the pagan gods whose days they are. So it is that the pagan origin of tattoos is of no concern to them. As stated above, most professing Christians have also thrown out any real concern for modesty so it should not surprise us when these people follow after the current fad of marking their bodies. They think

it is of no consequence that they obey their sinful and prideful desires to be noticed and approved by the world. Perhaps the current fad shall fade away in time if the Lord allows much more time to pass, but to many that is doubtful. Perhaps this present tattoo fad is a part of the subtle work of Satan to get people accustomed to receiving and observing marks in people's bodies. After all, there is coming a time when a mark in the forehead or in the hand will be necessary to survive according to the Book of Revelation.

This preacher is convinced that God's true children should have nothing to do with the current recurrence of the pagan fad of tattooing. In no way can tattooing glorify God. The desire for tattoos springs from a sinful heart filled with selfish longing for attention just as all exhibitionism does. In short those who desire tattoos are motivated by sinful pride. The facts remain: tattoos are pagan in their origin. They were forbidden to God's ancient people. And they do not evidence that holiness or separation that is to be the mark of God's true children. The aged John summed it up this way: **“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world”** (1 John 2:15-16). What more needs to be said?