

TATTOOS

by Avram Yehoshua

[THE SEED OF ABRAHAM](#)

To tattoo or not to tattoo? With many peers of Christians and non-Christians getting tattoos it's hard not to want them. After all, butterflies are pretty and crosses say "so much!" With an alarming figure of 40% among 18-29 year olds (and more than 20% of adults) having tattoos, tattooing has become "in" and mainstream.¹ Everywhere you look people have tattoos—from babies to bikers and from mothers to math teachers. Some tattoos are beautiful long stemmed red roses, while others are demons straight from the Pit of Hell, and everything else in-between.

The biblical question is asked and answered in churches throughout the USA—"Is it sin for Christians to have tattoos?" Some pastors think it's sin, but many pastors give it the green light. These 'green light' pastors realize that God prohibits tattoos in Leviticus 19:28, but because of its association with mourning rites for the dead, and their heretical interpretation of what it means to not be 'under the Law,' they approve it because no one is doing it to mourn their dead *and* Christians are 'not under the Law.'² Perhaps they haven't read that a Christian's body is the temple of the Lord Jesus? (e.g. 1st Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19) At the very least doesn't a tattoo deface the temple?

Pastors today agree that God certainly didn't want His ancient people Israel tattooing themselves in mourning for their dead, but does that mean that He looks favorably upon tattooing today if it's not 'for the dead'? Would God have allowed Israel to tattoo themselves if it wasn't "for the dead"?

At the heart of this issue for Christians is the question, 'is the displaying of one's body as an advertising poster acceptable to Jesus or does He consider it sin?' After all, Christians have been bought with the price of the death of Jesus (Hebrew: Yeshua), which means they are not their own and they are to not only follow Him, but be a living example of Him to others.

To discern His will in this matter we need to see what God says. Lev. 19:28 is part of four verses (Lev. 19:26-28, 31) where the Lord warns His 'just freed from Egyptian slavery' people against pagan idolatrous practices:

1. Leviticus 19:26-27 NKJV: ²⁶"You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying. ²⁷You shall not shave around the sides of your head,³ nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard."⁴
2. Leviticus 19:28: "You must not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor make any tattoo (עֲקָקָה *ka'ah'ka*) mark/writing/picture (כִּתוּבָה *kitovet*) on you! I am Yahveh!"
 - a. Lev. 19:28 NASB: "You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead, nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the Lord."
 - b. Lev. 19:28 NIV: "Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord."

¹ [We All Need to Admit that America has a Tattoo Problem](#) by Mark Hemingway.

² To understand why the Lord wants Christians to keep all the laws of Moses that apply to them, like the 7th day Sabbath, the Feasts of Israel and the Mosaic dietary laws, see [Law 102](#), [The Two Triangles of the NT](#), [The Feasts of Israel and the Church](#) and [A Snapshot of Church History and Mosaic Law](#).

³ The shaving around the head, "in various designs," is something else we see today among many teens and adults, another ancient pagan practice.

⁴ See [The Biblical Beard](#) for why God requires a full, untrimmed beard on all Christian men.

c. Lev. 19:28 HCSB: “You are not to make gashes on your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves; I am Yahweh.”

3. Leviticus 19:31 NKJV: “Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God.”

The Hebrew word for tattoo is **קָעַקַע** (*ka’ah’ka*). *BDB* says it means an ‘incision, imprintment, tattoo.’⁵ This is confirmed by other lexicons and commentaries.⁶ *BDB* then states that the second word in Hebrew, ‘mark,’ is **כִּתְבָה** (*kitovet*). It comes from the word which means to write, and so it means, ‘a writing (mark or sign) of imprintment...tattoo.’⁷ This understanding is also seen by other scholars.⁸ There’s a consensus that the two Hebrew words taken together as a phrase mean, to make or to cut open the skin, and to mark or cut into the flesh for a tattoo. “The Septuagint translates it as “*grammata stikta*, tattooed writing/drawing.”⁹

In Lev. 19:28 God prohibits the engraving or making of a tattoo upon one’s flesh associated with mourning for the dead. Tattooing was common among the Egyptians and Arabs as ‘lucky charms’¹⁰ to ward off evil spirits. C. F. Keil translates the two Hebrew words as a prohibition not to engrave *or brand any writing (tattoo) upon one’s self*.¹¹ He reveals that the prohibition entailed more than just making a tattoo for mourning the dead:

‘the prohibition of tattooing...a custom...*in Egypt* among both men and women of the lower orders (Lane, *Manners and Customs*, i. pp. 25, 35, iii. p. 169)—**had no reference to idolatrous usages**, but was intended to *inculcate upon the Israelites a proper reverence for God’s creation*.’¹²

⁵ Dr. Francis Brown, Dr. S. R. Driver and Dr. Charles A. Briggs, based on the lexicon of Professor Wilhelm Gesenius; Edward Robinson, translator and E. Rodiger, editor, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Lafayette, IN: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1978), p. 891.

⁶ Benjamin Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 657, from **קָוַע**. The word means, “a mark cut into the skin.”

R. L. Harris, editor; Gleason Archer, Jr. and Bruce Waltke, associate editors, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. II (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 806: “it’s an, ‘incision, tattoo.’”

Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, authors; M. Richardson, translator, *The Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2001 (Accordance Bible Software; Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 2011), vol. 3, page 1116: a “tattoo,” and that the exact meaning is “unknown; it could even be a simple decoration, in which case it would probably be used for warding off the spirits of the dead.”

Hebrew to English Dictionary and Index to the NIV Old Testament: Derived from the Zondervan NIV Exhaustive Concordance, n.p. (Accordance Bible Software (Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 2012). “tattoo.”

G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, Editors; John Willis, Translator, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. VII (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), pp. 382, 372-373. It “refers to a tattoo for protection against the spirits of the dead,” and that the basic meaning of the verb is, “to incise, inscribe,” which is similar to engrave, and that originally it meant to inscribe on “stone or metal.”

⁷ Brown, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 508.

⁸ Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, p. 397: “a writing, a mark.”

Harris, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. I, p. 458: “a mark, perhaps a tattoo.”

Koehler, *The Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Accordance), vol. 2, page 504: a “mark on the arm...inscription...tattoo.”

Hebrew to English Dictionary, n.p. (Accordance electronic ed.). A “tattoo mark.”

⁹ [Tzarich Iyun: Jews with Tattoos](#) by Rabbi Dr. Ari Zivotofsky.

¹⁰ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary On The Old Testament*, vol. 1: *The Pentateuch* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), p. 603.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

It's more than interesting to realize that Egypt, where the Hebrews had been for four centuries, used tattoos much the same way that the world uses them now—as a display or “expression of self.” As prevalent as tattooing oneself in a pagan mourning ritual for the dead, the primary reason God speaks of it is so Israel doesn't follow the Egyptians in their tattooing themselves “for any reason.”

This answers and silences the debate over if the prohibition not to tattoo only applies if an ancient Hebrew got it to mourn for his dead. In God's eyes it didn't matter what the reason was for getting a tattoo. God would not be pleased if a Hebrew got a tattoo because he thought “it was cool.” Even if the Scripture prohibition was only against mourning the dead, how can an observer, a Christian or Jew, know that ‘your tattoo’ isn't there because you're mourning your dead? If so, where does God make that distinction in His Word?

How God sees that reasoning is best understood by using another prohibition, not to use one's container to gather a neighbor's grapes:

“When you come into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container.” (Deuteronomy 23:24)

If a man comes in and gathers his neighbor's grapes, but uses someone else's container, does that mean that it's alright with God? So it is with getting tattoos for a purpose other than mourning the dead.

Also, there isn't a single Scripture qualifying tattooing after the prohibition. In other words, if God thought that tattoos were OK, as long as they weren't done for mourning your dead, God doesn't say so. God says to Israel of the Egyptians, where they had just come from:

“According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you must not do! And according to the doings of the land of Canaan where I am bringing you, you must not do nor shall you walk in their ordinances!” (meaning their ways; Leviticus 18:3)

If God looks approvingly upon tattooing one's body, why don't we see a verse in Scripture that affirms that, especially as He's prohibited it in Lev. 19:28? Tattooing is not of God—it's of the pagan world. Adam and Eve weren't created with tattoos. It's wrong to do it for the dead and it's wrong to do it for any other reason because it's a desecration of one's God given body. As Mark Hemingway puts it, “tattoos are a kind of corporeal vandalism.”¹³

Some Christians use their tattoos of Christ or biblical scenes and/or Scripture as a tool for evangelization. Silently evangelizing the world by tattooing a ‘picture of Jesus’ on one's neck may be a noble idea, but a noble idea that neither Peter, Paul nor Jesus used, and they could have. “Following Jesus” means to emulate and be like Yeshua in all our ways. The Apostle John, 60 years *after* the resurrection, wrote that Christians are, “to walk just as He walked” (1st John 2:6). The Lord Yeshua never had a tattoo, and neither did any of His Apostles. Also of no small significance is the fact that for the last 2,000 years mainstream Judaism and Christianity have forbidden tattooing.

God didn't want ancient Israel to *imitate* the pagan peoples. Placing a tattoo on one's body is a desecration (mutilation) of what God has given to the Christian, whether one does it for mourning rites or for any other reason. A tattoo brings undue and carnal attention to one's self even if one is using it for evangelistic purposes. The end never justifies wicked means. Seeking to lead one to Christ does not justify marking one's body with artistic designs of Jesus or the Apocalypse or even with Scripture verses.

Israel was to be holy to her God and the tattooing or the imprinting of images upon their flesh, in either mourning rites for the dead (a pagan ritual) and/or to keep evil spirits away, or because “it's in,” is not the path of holiness that God wants for His people. If it were it would be written somewhere in Scripture that we should tattoo ourselves.

The Jewish Study Bible states for Lev. 19:28 that Jews were *not to copy* the practices of the pagan peoples around them, and they add that the placing of tattoos on their bodies by the pagans was an attempt to actu-

¹³ [We All Need to Admit that America has a Tattoo Problem](#) by Mark Hemingway.

ally bring up their dead:

‘The acts prohibited...are *extreme* expressions of grief and mourning (see Dt. 14:1-2; 1st Kings 18:28); as they are associated with conjuring up dead spirits and the gods of the netherworld; *they are not to be copied from the pagan peoples*. Similar restrictions are placed on priests (see 21:5).’¹⁴

Why would anyone want to *cut into their flesh and place ink in it*? To think that people today do it voluntarily for ‘self-expression’ reveals the sickness and sinfulness of the carnal mind. Tattooing has the same effect on the body, whether it’s done for mourning the dead or for sophisticated reasons—the person is having their body marked up, mutilated, defiled and desecrated. Scripture calls us to, “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1st Thessalonians 5:22 KJV). The reason why the ancient pagan peoples tattooed themselves was both for mourning rites and non-mourning rites.

The Christian understanding is also that tattooing is alright because Mosaic Law has been done away with by Jesus. These teachers think that Christ ‘freed Christians from the Law,’ and so they desecrate the Sabbath and themselves by also eating unclean animals that the Lord Jesus never ate nor authorized for them to eat.¹⁵ Their thinking about Mosaic Law is totally askew because they have been deceived by the great Deceiver (Dan. 7:25; Rev. 18:4). Following those who declare tattooing is alright with Jesus, because Mosaic Law isn’t for Christians, is like a blind man asking another blind man to help him down the road. They’ll both end up in the ditch:

“And Jesus spoke a parable to them: ‘Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?’” (Luke 6:39 NKJV)

Nowhere does God state that tattooing is acceptable under any other conditions and since we that know the prohibition is not only for mourning, for it to be acceptable to God for other reasons He would have to state so or authorize it. He never does, though. Therefore, having a tattoo in relation to say, one wanting to display how pretty or macho one thinks it would make them look in the 21st century, is not biblically justifiable.

Looking at it from the perspective of the biblical beard is also insightful. It’s God’s will that the ancient Hebrew male was not to trim nor mar the edges of his full, untrimmed beard to mourn the dead (Lev. 19:27). Would it then be alright with God if the Hebrew trimmed or even cut off his beard if he did it for personal reasons other than mourning rites? Of course not because God wanted all Hebrew (and Christian) men to have full, untrimmed beards.¹⁶ That was the way He made men, in part, to distinguish them from women. The effect of tattooing, but not for the dead, is conceptually the same. The person is *disfiguring* the body, whether with cuttings and tattoos, or the cutting of a full, untrimmed beard.

A second perspective in reference to tattooing is Xmas—should a Christian celebrate Xmas if he isn’t worshipping Tammuz, but Jesus? Although there isn’t a specific reference in the Bible to *not* celebrate Xmas,¹⁷ the whole tenor of what it means to worship God, *and not to worship Him the way the pagans do*, is clearly seen.¹⁸

¹⁴ Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Michael A. Fishbane, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible*, (Accordance electronic ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 1830.

¹⁵ See [Law 102, No Longer Under the Law?](#), [Take the Quiz! Five Quick Questions about the New Testament](#), and [Grace, Holiness and the Pharisaic Church](#).

¹⁶ See [The Biblical Beard](#) for why a Christian man should have a full, untrimmed beard (Lev. 19:27), which is just one verse in front of God prohibiting tattoos.

¹⁷ Read Jeremiah 10:1f., and see if ‘Xmas tree’ doesn’t come to mind. Also, read what God says about worshipping Him (cf. Dt. 12:2-4).

¹⁸ In Dt. 12:28-32 the Lord says not to worship Him the way the pagans do (and Xmas is certainly pagan in its origin and how it’s kept today; see [Christmas—Its Origin](#)). It also states that we’re not to add to His Words and the celebration of Xmas, as noble of an idea it is to celebrate the birth of Christ, is certainly adding to the holy words and holy days of God (see Lev. 23).

Tattoos and Jews

Aside from the commandment against tattooing (Lev. 19:28), a modern reason why Jews (and Christians) should not tattoo themselves is seen by what the Nazis did to six million Jews and many Christians only 80 years ago, from 1939-1945. MJL writes,

“The Jewish world has a longstanding aversion to tattoos. Even among largely secular Jews, the taboo against body ink remains powerful...attributed...to the tattooing of (Jewish) concentration camp inmates during the Holocaust.”¹⁹

Jews were branded with numbers (tattoos), tortured, brutally beaten, starved to death and murdered. Of course, people getting tattoos today aren't in concentration camps and they're willfully doing it to themselves—Nazis aren't holding growling German shepherds by them, with other Nazis aiming machine guns at them and threatening them with death. Today tattoos are said to express one's individualism, but Rabbi Ari Zivotofsky throws *intent* “out the window,” when he says, “with regard to the prohibition (against tattoos), *intent* is immaterial.”²⁰ In other words, because God forbids it in association with death and idolatry, it doesn't mean that one can do it if it's not for pagan mourning rites. One is forbidden to tattoo himself even if he's not worshipping idols and mourning the dead.

God speaks of the Holocaust tattoos (numbers tattooed or imprinted on the arms) when He says through the Prophet Isaiah:

“And so it shall be, instead of a sweet smell there will be a stench. Instead of a sash, a rope. Instead of well-set hair, *baldness*. Instead of a rich robe, a girding of sackcloth, and *branding* instead of beauty.” (Isaiah 3:24)

The Nazis branded or tattooed those in the Camps. It wasn't a blessing. It was a horror, and so 'self-ex-

See [First Sheaf](#) for when Christians are to celebrate the Lord's Resurrection. It has nothing to do with Easter.

See [The Feast of Trumpets](#), p. 7f., to realize that Xmas (Dec. 25) isn't the time when Christ was born, and that God has already given us a day to celebrate the birth of His Son.

¹⁹ [The Tattoo Taboo in Judaism](#) by MJL.

From [The Holocaust: Non-Jewish Victims](#) by Terese Pencak Schwartz: “Thousands of Catholic priests and Christian pastors were forced into concentration camps. A special barracks was set up at [Dachau](#), the camp near [Munich](#), Germany, for clergymen. A few survived; some were executed, but most were allowed to die slowly of starvation or disease.”

From [The Gentile Holocaust](#) by Thomas Craughwell: “On August 22, 1939, one week before the Nazi invasion of Poland, Hitler gave the Wehrmacht their instructions: ‘Kill without pity or mercy all men, women and children of Polish descent or language.... Be merciless. Be brutal. It is necessary to proceed with maximum severity. The war is to be a war of annihilation.’ And in many respects it was precisely that. Approximately 6,028,000 Poles—22 percent of the country's population—perished during World War II. Of these victims, 5,384,000 died in prison, death camps, raids, executions, the obliteration of ghettos, epidemics, starvation, overwork or ill treatment. The extermination of Polish Jews remained the first priority. In the meantime, those Polish Christians who were not herded into the death camps could be used as slave labor. Once the Third Reich's victory was complete, the Poles themselves would be eliminated. The accounts of those first days of the invasion of Poland make chilling reading. In the western provinces, 531 villages and towns were burned and 16,376 civilians, most of them Christians, were murdered. The first victims in the town of Bydgoszcz were a group of Boy Scouts, aged 12 to 16. They were lined up against a wall in the market square and shot. When a priest rushed forward to give them last rites, he was shot, too. Another hundred boys were rounded up on the streets of Bydgoszcz and massacred before the town's Jesuit church. The Jesuits were herded into a stable with the town's Jews, where they were all beaten and humiliated by the Nazis...Food rations in Nazi-occupied Warsaw were allotted by race: 2,613 calories per day for a German, 699 for a Pole and 184 for a Jew. Only a flourishing black market kept the Poles alive. Also, “the Nazis burned, shot, starved and worked to death three million Ukrainian Christians.”

Janusz Tadeusz [Kusociński](#) (15 January 1907–21 June 1940) was a Polish athlete, winner in the 10,000 meters event at the 1932 Summer Olympics. He was 37 years old.

²⁰ [Tzarich Iyun: Jews with Tattoos](#) by Rabbi Dr. Ari Zivotofsky

pression' is not an option because even though tattoos aren't usually numbers, numbers marked, engraved or imprinted on one's arm is certainly a form of tattoo.²¹ The Nazis could have also engraved the design of their Swastika after those numbers to indicate that the Jews were their property. Many wicked people actually have the Swastika imprinted on them, and no one would argue that it isn't a tattoo. The point here is that the numbers imprinted on the arms of the Jewish people were also tattoos.

Baruch Davidson writes that God doesn't want the Jewish people to defile their bodies by tattooing themselves, which is a form of mutilation and defilement:

“The human body is G-d's creation, and it is therefore unbecoming to mutilate G-d's handiwork. It is especially unbecoming for members of G-d's chosen nation to mutilate their bodies.”²²

“In ancient times, it was customary for idol-worshippers to tattoo themselves as a sign of commitment to their deity—much like an animal that is branded by its owner. On many occasions the Torah forbids practices that emulate pagan customs, considering that following their traditions is the first step towards subscribing to their idolatrous beliefs and services.”²³

Jews are not free to tattoo. For an excellent movie on the Holocaust and the tattoo numbers that were branded on the arms of the Jewish people by the Nazis, see [The Devil's Arithmetic](#). It's free on Amazon Prime. Also, read the book, *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* by Heather Morris, a New York Times Bestseller (New York: Harper) 2018. It's about a Jewish man whom the Nazis used to tattoo the numbers onto the Jewish people (and others) who came into Auschwitz, and who fell in love with one of the Jewish women whom he had tattooed.

There were also many Christians who were numbered or tattooed by the Nazis who also died horrible deaths in the concentration camps of WWII. Therefore, Christians should be sensitive to the pain of others.²⁴ whether of the actual Jewish or Christian people who died or survived the camps, and their descendants and relatives. This includes all the Jewish people living today, for all Jews share a common bond with each other, and so a Christian should not have a so-called “Christian” tattoo on his or her body, out of deference and love toward these people. Also, this is a terrible “witness” to a Jewish person.

Jesus Christ was, and still is a Jew (Mt. 2:2; 27:11; Luke 23:3; Jn. 18:33; Heb. 13:8; Rev. 22:16), and so all Christians have a Jewish King-Savior who has died for them, and so they should see the Jewish people as their unsaved “cousins.” Paul said he would give up his eternal life for his Jewish people if it would help them come to Christ and he admonishes Gentile Christians to help them to come to Jesus (Rom. 9:1-5; cf. Rom. 1:16; 11:f.). It would be a stumbling block for a Jewish person to be evangelized by a Christian with tattoos.

Tattoos and Women

The New Testament teaches that women should dress modestly (1st Tim. 2:9).²⁵ Having tattoos on a woman's body draws carnal attention to the woman, which in most cases is what that woman wants. Why

²¹ See [The Devil's Arithmetic](#) with Kirsten Dunst and Brittany Murphy. It's an exceptional film about the change of attitude that a teenage girl has about tattoos and the Holocaust once she's transported back in time to a Holocaust camp. It's free on Amazon Prime.

²² [Why Does Judaism Forbid Tattoos?](#) by Baruch Davidson. See Siftei Cohen to Lev. 19:28; Rashi to Dt. 14:1; Responsa Tzitz Eliezer 11:41.

²³ Ibid., from Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Idolatry 12:11.

²⁴ The Second Commandment states that Christians are to love their neighbor as themselves (Mt. 22:35-40), and so loving a Jew would mean that a Christian would not have a tattoo, for they are a reminder to Jewish people of the Holocaust where more than six million Jews were murdered; one and a half million being Jewish children from new born infants to ten years old. “Love” cannot be spelled without “consideration for the other.”

would anyone today get a tattoo unless they wanted people to see it? Of course, there are tattoos that women (and men) get that are only viewed by a certain few in the light of the bedroom, but the point is that people want them to be seen. The motivation to have tattoos is not of Jesus, but of the flesh. The following is a testimony from a young woman, who later came to regret it:

“When I was in high school I really wanted to get a tattoo and a body piercing. So, during high school I got a body piercing (in my bellybutton). Shortly after I graduated from high school I got a tattoo. Neither action was well thought out, but more of a spur of the moment thing...So, I ended up getting something I thought I would want for the rest of my life on my ankle. Now, about five years after I got my tattoo I have a scar where my body piercing was and a tattoo that I wish I didn’t have.”

“I got a navel piercing and tattoo *just to be different and cool*. After a while of having both, I didn’t care much about showing them off. It really surprised me in a way when people would point to me and ask me about my tattoo. It started to annoy me that when certain people noticed my body piercing or tattoo, I suddenly had become more cool in their eyes. I felt like they liked me more, only after they had found out that I was the type of person who would have a body piercing or tattoo.”²⁶

“Shortly after I got my tattoo I realized that a lot more people from many different groups of society were getting body piercings and tattoos. The trend of tattoos and body piercings was becoming popular among more and more people regardless of what group they were in (i.e. the ‘rebellious’ crowd, as well as the more average straight laced group of people). After a few years I got sick of my body piercing because *so many other people were doing the same thing*. Then it came down to deciding whether I wanted metal or a scar. I chose the scar. Here’s why:”

“After I was touched by the Lord I was told by a friend that body piercing and tattoos were wrong because the Bible said so. I was immediately defensive and confused. I wanted to follow the Lord and do what was right in His eyes. So, while I was with my friend one time we decided to look it up in our NIV Bibles for ourselves. We found Leviticus 19:28: “Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord.””

“We couldn’t find anything that directly said you should not pierce your body. In fact, I was surprised to see in certain parts of Scripture that women wore nose rings in the Old Testament. For instance, Abraham’s servant gave Rebekah a nose ring as a gift when he knew he had found the right wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:34-51 NIV). I believe, however, that nose rings were common in their culture, just as common as earrings have been in American culture for a long time. Therefore, there is not the same reasons behind Rebekah wearing a nose ring as someone in America might have today.” (i.e. for rebellious reasons and/or to be different.) “It would be as simple as her being given earrings today.”

“I decided to pray about whether it was right for me to have a body piercing and tattoo. During the time I was praying and seeking God about this the Lord led me to Scriptures such as 1st Corinthians 6:19:”

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

²⁵ Ask for my PDF, The Bible’s Dress Code.

²⁶ In biblical days women wore clothes that covered their entire body. There were no arms or legs exposed as that was immodest. Even harlots covered their entire bodies, dressing in different colors, etc., but they didn’t expose their bodies. In other words, there would be no reason to get a tattoo on say, one’s thigh, back, neck, ankle or arm, etc. because no one would see it, other than the person having it (cf. Gen. 9:20-24).

“I was also convicted by 1st Corinthians 3:16:”

“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.”

“I felt that I had harmed my body by tattooing it and piercing it. I passed out when I got my body pierced and came close to passing out when I got my tattoo. Basically, I went through a lot of pain to look cool. I felt that it was wrong for me to have pierced and tattooed my body, especially because of the reasons behind both—vanity and pride. Between vanity and pride and harming my body that the Lord had created I knew that I had sinned. Now I can see that I was not honoring God with my body by piercing it and putting a permanent mark on it. Although I was able to remove my piercing, my tattoo is not something that I can just wash away. It is on my leg to stay. I know the Lord has forgiven me. His grace and love are so amazing. I was living a sinful, ungodly life and then I found the Lord...The point of this testimony is to share how I was convicted of sin in my life...If we love Him, we will obey Him.”²⁷

What is the purpose or underlying motivation of having a tattoo? Rebellion to authority? Defiance of social norms? Vanity and pride? “To tell people” that you’re a unique individual? Could it be “to be holy?” Mark Hemingway writes:

“If tattoos were once an act of rebellion against cultural norms, now they are a well established norm...many people still get them laboring under the delusion that they’re a hallmark of individualism. The desire to use visual signals on your skin to proclaim yourself unique to people you don’t even know can’t be terribly healthy.”²⁸

“Imagine having a favorite T-shirt. Now imagine having to wear that shirt every day for the rest of your life. At some point it would cease to be your favorite T-shirt, right?”²⁹

“Ever see an old guy with lots of tattoos? Tattoos sink deeper into the skin over time and fade, to say nothing of what happens when your skin inevitably starts to sag or you incur sun damage from years of walking around shirtless to show off your ink. That awesome technicolor screaming eagle on your chest could end up looking not much different than a pre-school watercolor. Oh, and when the tattoo ink starts breaking up as you age, it has a nasty habit of traveling through your body and turning up in your lymph nodes. They’re not important, right?”³⁰

Tattoos and Rebellion

David Cloud speaks of tattoos not being as innocent as people would like to think. He sees a direct reference to idolatry:

“Tattooing is still intimately associated with idolatry, paganism, moral debauchery, and rebellion. An article by Clay Thompson in the Pacific News Service for July 27, 1996, was titled, Pagan Fashion’s New Frontier—Facial Tattoos. Note that the author, who in this article makes no claim to be a Christian, associates tattoos with paganism. He connects it with a ‘new reverence for pagan beliefs.’ A prominent book on tattooing is Pagan Fleshworks...by Maureen Mercury and contains photos by Steve Haworth, identi-

²⁷ [What The Bible Says About Tattoos](#) by Betty Miller.

²⁸ [We All Need to Admit that America has a Tattoo Problem](#) by Mark Hemingway.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

fied as ‘the foremost body modification artist in the United States.’ ‘Body modification’ is the practice of burning, inking, cutting, piercing, and otherwise desecrating one’s God-given body.”³¹

“A July 2003 survey of more than 2,000 people in the United States, reported...that among women who get tattoos, 34% ‘feel sexier,’ and 29% overall ‘*feel more rebellious.*’ One woman, interviewed by the *Vancouver Sun*, admitted that she got a tattoo ‘*partly out of rebellion* against the normal Christian stereotype of, ‘You can’t do this, you can’t do that.’ She admits that her mother did not want her to get a tattoo and did not like it.³² Another Vineyard member, Peter Davyduck, who has a tattoo of the word ‘SIN’ on his ankle, says this is a message to ‘judgmental Christians that everyone is a sinner and should be accepted in spite of it.’ Note the rebellious attitude in this statement. Every born-again Bible-believing Christian knows that everyone is a sinner, but this does not mean that it does not matter how professing Christians should live.”³³

The Christian is to live his life to *serve* others instead of himself. Contemporary-style Christians though, do not care if they offend others with their rock music and worldly “unkept” appearance. They protest that they have liberty to do as they please. This is carnal rebellion...Those who desire to throw off restrictions on their lifestyles are not following Jesus, but their own selfish lusts. Cloud writes,

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *after their own lusts* shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” (2nd Tim. 4:3-4)

“For the born-again Christian, tattooing is graffiti on someone’s else’s temple. The following is a testimony of Pastor Charlie Haddad who got tattoos before he was saved:”

“I was a professing Christian for 24 years (Catholic) and growing up I was hanging out with some Muslim friends. Some of them got tattoos of a sword and the moon. I then thought I wanted to get a cross and the face of Jesus, and I did, one on each shoulder. Looking back I got them out of pride; it was more of religious pride.”

“I was a Christian only by name, thinking these tattoos would identify me as a Christian, (but) far from it, I didn’t know the Lord. Had I really known the Lord and wanted to walk in His ways and the way of His Word *I would have obeyed Him and written His Word upon my heart and not on my body.* I would have memorised and meditated on His Word instead of having a form of godliness (Prov. 3:3; 7:2-3; 2nd Tim. 3:5). I regret getting these tattoos, and I am ashamed. *I know it is not pleasing to the Lord.*”³⁴

An article entitled, *Should Christians Get Tattoos?*, says that tattooing is copying the world. Half a century ago only two types of people had tattoos: sailors, most of whom got their tattoos when they were drunk and ‘egged on’ by their friends who had already done the same carnal thing, and circus people (people on the outer fringe of society).³⁵

³¹ [Tattooing for Jesus](#) by David Cloud.

³² Ibid., ‘For the Love of God,’ *The Vancouver Sun*, Vancouver, British Columbia, Feb. 1999.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ [Should Christians Get Tattoos?](#) The association with stealing, a life of moral depravity and other forms of unethical behavior, and circus-carnival people is not without warrant.

Tattoos and Disease

Not many people who get tattoos stop and think about any side effects from them, but there are some serious health issues with tattooing:

“There are real health risks with tattoos. The Mayo Clinic warns, ‘don’t take tattooing lightly.’ They’ve resulted in severe allergic reactions, infections, unsightly scars, and blood-borne diseases like Hepatitis B and C. Tattooing deliberately opens (the) skin and exposes your blood to unknown bacteria. Tattoo parlors are not medical clinics, although they are puncturing skin and exposing blood.”³⁶

Tattoos and the Wrong People

Fritz Chery insightfully writes that Christians getting tattoos are not following Jesus as their Example, but are actually mocking Him, following the secular, anti-God crowd:

“A few decades ago tattoos were sinful in Christianity. Now as we get closer to the coming of the Antichrist, and more and more celebrities are getting tattoos all over their bodies, Christians want to follow. Tattoos are a mockery to God and one of the most ridiculous things ever is they even have ‘Christian’ tattoo shops. You cannot put the Christian name tag on something *that is pagan*.”³⁷ “God desires holiness not worldliness.”³⁸ (Rom 12:2; 1st Jn. 2:15, etc.)

Conclusion

The reason why people, Christians and non-Christians, get tattoos is to be seen; to be noticed; to be cool and rebellious. Christian pastors, employing LollyPop theology, open the pagan door for their flock to defile their God given bodies with tattoos. Saying that one is ‘free in Christ,’ is not a license to sin and to imitate the World of Darkness,³⁹ sin against God, others, and oneself. Tattooing is not godly nor holy, but exactly what Satan wants Christians to do—defile themselves. It not only leads one astray; it also leads hordes of impressionable young Christians to mutilate and desecrate their body. Truly, what God said through the Prophet Hosea applies to Christian pastors who validate tattoos and lead their flock astray:

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (of God). “Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me. Because you have forgotten the Law of your God, I also will forget your children.” (Hosea 4:6 NKJV)

If God had a prohibition against seeing pictures of nude men and women worshipping Satan, would it be alright to view pictures of nude men and women if they weren’t worshipping Satan? The same holds true against God’s prohibition against tattoos, whether for mourning the dead or for ‘just to be cool,’ because it’s a desecration and defilement of the human body.

As Christians we need to “rightly divide” the Word of God (2nd Tim. 2:15) and be discerning as to *what is right in God’s eyes* and what is wrong or sin.⁴⁰ What *did* Jesus do? He didn’t call attention to Himself with tattoos, but on the contrary, He gave the people the Word of God, etc. Jesus never had a tattoo (and

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ [Biblical Reasons Not To Get A Tattoo](#) by Fritz Chery.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Cf. Romans 6:1ff.

⁴⁰ Deuteronomy 13:18; cf. Dt. 12:8; Judges 17:6; 21:25.

they were certainly around in His day) because He would never have a tattoo nor allow it for His followers today because He is the *same today* as He was back then (Heb. 13:8).

Our *lifestyle* and how we present ourselves to the world and to our Christian Family is important. We are all examples to one another and what we do has ripple effects on many others, some of whom we're not even aware of. If God warned and prohibited ancient Israel from copying the ways of the pagans in Egypt and Canaan, how much more should we stay away from, and not imitate, the pagan ways of the world today? Tattoos are not for Christians because they are not Christian, but pagan. The Apostle Paul speaks to us today and says:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ***you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God***, which is your reasonable service. And ***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.” (Romans 12:1-2 NKJV)

The motivation for tattooing is ‘self-expression’ and an attitude of rebellion that says to the world, “I am an individual and I can do whatever I want, and no one, not even Jesus, can stop me!” It’s pride and ignorance walking hand-in-hand. It’s diametrically opposed to fully surrendering to Jesus and obedience to Him and His Way of living. We are not meant to be advertising billboards for the Devil, even if we have a tattoo that speaks of loving one another. Tattoos are an extremely pagan thing to do to one’s God given body, which is not ours, but the Lord’s temple. Tattoos have nothing to do with holiness, but with pride, rebellion and vanity. Non-Christian and secular Mark Hemingway writes:

“I refuse to believe even a sizable percentage of tattoos have been worthy decisions. For some select people, maybe tattoos are a small part of their grand plan to live life to the fullest. But the vast majority of people should be encouraged to lead exciting and meaningful lives without needing to, in some cases, literally tattoo their personal vanity and insecurity right on their forehead.”⁴¹

A tattoo defiles the body, whether it’s for the dead or “just to express one’s self.” If God thought tattooing was alright if one didn’t do it for “mourning the dead,” He would have written that into His Word so Israel could get them if they weren’t mourning their dead. Yet there’s nothing in Scripture to “counter” that. If it’s not alright to do it for the dead, it stands to reason that God doesn’t want Christians to do it “for the living,” either.

It isn’t the Holy Spirit that leads a Christian to get a tattoo—it’s the spirit of this World of Darkness. It’s been about 30 years that Christians have become “enlightened” to having tattoos, but since the time of Christ until 1990 all Christian and Jewish authorities forbade it. It’s funny, but really sad, that some Christian pastors teach that it’s alright to tattoo. They are ignorant of rightly dividing God’s Word and complicit in the degradation and defilement of their flock.

The New Bible Commentary states of Lev. 19:28 and the verses around it, saying:

“The main focus of most of this section is to exclude rites and practices associated with *pagan, Canaanite religion*, particularly those which were physically or morally *disfiguring*. Abuse of the body in the name of religion is a widespread human aberration. *The OT, with its high view of the goodness of the body as part of God’s creation, disallowed it. The NT reinforces the principle with the assertion that the Christian’s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit* (1 Cor. 6:19-20).”⁴²

The tattoo may seem “cool,” but doesn’t every temptation of Satan present itself that way?⁴³

⁴¹ [We All Need to Admit that America has a Tattoo Problem](#) by Mark Hemingway.

⁴² Christopher J. H. Wright, *Leviticus, New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*; ed. D. A. Carson, et al.; Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 147.

⁴³ This article was created on Oct 17, 2019 and last revised on Monday, March 25, 2024.