

Tattoos, Piercings, Body Modifications

- I. This study seeks to steer between extremes concerning the care and government of the body.
- II. God has written into human nature a principle of nourishing and cherishing (treating with tenderness and affection) one's flesh. **EPH 5:29.**
 - A. Mind that this text implies an unnatural hating of one's flesh is commensurate with not nourishing it or cherishing it.
 - B. We should steer clear of idolizing the body (**PHIL 3:19**) as if our lives must be dedicated to a sensual religion of the outward man. **1PE 3:3-4 c/w PRO 11:22.**
 - 1. Bodily exercise means little in contrast to godliness. **1TI 4:7-8.**
 - 2. Christ had no form, comeliness or beauty that ignited desire. **ISA 53:2.**
 - C. Yet we should also be cautious about callously disposing of *natural affection*. **2TI 3:1-3.**
 - 1. Even under the bondage of corruption there is relevant instruction from the very nature of things. **1CO 11:14.**
 - 2. Same-sex intercourse merits condemnation not only because the written revelation (both testaments) forbids it, but also because it is contrary to the revelation God has put in nature. **ROM 1:26-27.**
 - D. Scripture speaks positively of soundness of body and mind. **ACT 3:16; 2TI 1:7.**
 - 1. If a healthy, intact body is not a positive model and of no significance at all to God, then Christ wasted much time and effort on healing people's infirmities.
 - 2. At some point, the deliberate abuse of one's own body contrary to nature or necessity represents a break from rational soundness of mind. **MAR 5:5, 15.**
 - E. One does not attain unto a more pious Christianity through deliberate neglect of the care of the body. **COL 2:23.**
- III. Christians need to consider that their bodies belong to God. **1CO 6:19-20.**
 - A. Whereas we have great liberty in Christ as touching the body, we are not its potentate.
 - B. We are still not supposed to eat blood. **GEN 9:4; LEV 3:17 c/w ACT 15:20.**
 - C. Though we are not under dietary law (**1TI 4:3-4**), yet we are not to be brought under the power of even lawful appetites (**1CO 6:12-13**). Gluttony and drunkenness are wrongs of excess consumption of lawful things. **PRO 23:21.**
 - D. Liberty sometimes has to take a back seat to expediency. **1CO 8:13.**
- IV. I strive to magnify the New Testament of Jesus Christ in my teaching.
 - A. It is the Spirit's ministration that embraces liberty. **2CO 3:17; JAM 1:25.**
 - B. I do not want to burden Christians with inapplicable O.T. Laws (which not even the Jews could bear). **ACT 15:10.**
 - C. When I come across something of potential application from the Old Testament, I first of all determine if there is a clear N.T. continuation that we should respect. An example of this is the consumption of blood, mentioned above.
 - D. I reckon that there are certain things forbidden by Moses' Law that are not specifically mentioned in the N.T. but that doesn't universally mean there is no application for us.
 - 1. Bestiality (**LEV 18:23**) is not specifically addressed in the N.T.
 - 2. But such a sin falls under the categorization, "...and such like..." (**GAL 5:19-21**) and is condemned by the general rule that sexual connection is only for marriage of man and woman. **HEB 13:4; EPH 5:31 c/w 1CO 6:16.**
 - E. I reckon that there were laws given to Israel to distinguish them from other nations as God's covenant people and that such laws were not binding upon the Gentiles. One

example of this was the sabbath law. **EXO 31:13-17.**

- F. There were O.T. laws which forbade Israel from adapting pagan religious principles and customs to the religion of God (**DEU 12:30-31**) and we are likewise bound.

1CO 10:20-21.

1. Gentile superstition not only drove them to sacrifice children but also to the mutilation of their own bodies to impress their idol deity. **1KI 18:27-28.**
2. Their superstitions were sometimes reflected in their personal habits which contributed to spread of disease. **EXO 15:26; 23:25; DEU 23:12-13.**
3. However, not everything that pagans did was automatically wrong, as when the Egyptians embalmed their dead and put them in a coffin. **GEN 50:2-3, 26.**
4. The Gentiles were justly repelled by parent-child sexual connection. **1CO 5:1.**

- G. There were O.T. laws which commanded or permitted surgical alteration of the body.

1. Circumcision was required of males from the days of Abraham. **ROM 4:11.**

a. This was a token of covenant relationship to God not meant for public viewing.

(1) Mind that inward circumcision (**ROM 2:29**) is similarly an “invisible” token of spiritual covenant relationship to God.

(2) That which proves this relationship to God is not a visible mark but rather the manifestation outwardly of the inward circumcision by faith and good works. **GAL 5:22-23.**

b. False religion’s grand deity demands body modification that is visible. **REV 13:15-17.**

2. A willing bondman was marked by a bored ear. **DEU 15:17.**

3. There were permissible nose-jewels and earrings.

ISA 3:21; NUM 31:50-54; PRO 25:12.

a. earring: A ring worn in the lobe of the ear for ornament; often used for a pendant or ‘drop.’

b. nose-jewel: A valuable ornament worn in or attached to the nose.

c. Compare **ISA 3:21 w/ PRO 11:22.**

4. It would therefore be an overstatement to affirm that God has always forbidden all modifications to the human body.

- V. This brings us to **LEV 19:28**, “Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD.”

- A. This chapter is sprinkled with commands and principles that are still relevant to us. Consider **vs. 11-12, 16-18, 26, 29.**

- B. But there are also elements here which pertained distinctly to Israel under the Law Covenant. **vs. 5-10, 19-25.**

- C. **LEV 19:28** is addressing the curious superstitious customs that were foreign to Israel whose God owns the issues from death. c/w **DEU 14:1; PSA 68:20.**

1. Their God was the God of Abraham to Whom death was no obstacle to promises. **HEB 11:17-19.**

2. They should have known that God receives His own upon death of the body. **LUK 16:22.**

3. Bodily resurrection was their true hope. **ACT 26:6-8.**

4. They (nor we) should not sorrow as others who have no such hope. **1TH 4:13.**

- D. If the printing of marks UPON them were an unqualified prohibition that is binding upon us, it would condemn also something as simple as a ball-point pen marking or the outline of a surgeon’s target area on the body. Similarly, an unqualified prohibition on any surgical

procedure could be concluded from **DEU 14:1**.

- E. Since print means “To impress or stamp (a surface) with a seal, die, or the like...” and if **LEV 19:28** is setting forth a universal proscription against printing marks on men, then the Holy Spirit chose an inappropriate figure to describe the divinely protected class of **REV 7:3; 9:4**.
- F. Without associating **LEV 19:28** with heathen superstitions, one could easily fall into the error of vain asceticism, per **COL 2:20-23**.
- G. tattoo: To form permanent marks or designs upon the skin by puncturing it and inserting a pigment or pigments: practised esp. by many Malayo-Polynesian peoples; also by some ancient nations, and by individuals (e.g. seamen) in developed countries since the 18th c.
 - 1. Tattooing is not just marking UPON the body, it is PERMANENT marking by PUNCTURE and INSERTION of pigment.
 - a. “Puncture” is not the same as “cut.”
 - b. “Cut” is “to gash, slash,” which is “to cut or wound with a sweep or stroke of a sharp weapon or instrument.”
 - 2. **LEV 19:28** says nothing about permanent insertion of pigment by puncture.
 - 3. From the standpoint of commandments, I cannot conclude that tattooing is automatically condemned. My research in secular sources even indicates that it has been done to identify someone as a freeman, not a prisoner or slave (for his own protection and advancement).
 - 4. But remember that not everything lawful is expedient. **1CO 10:23**.
- H. It is interesting that the definition of *tattoo* shows that it is a practice only relatively recently brought into developed (aka, Christian-influenced) countries.
 - 1. It may be stated as a general observation that the further a culture falls away from the true knowledge of God, the greater will be the tendency to dishonour the body which was made by God, for God. **ROM 1:21-25**.
 - 2. At some point, sensible people have to draw a line as to how much of darkened heathen culture should be adopted and mainstreamed.

VI. The psychology behind willful mutilation/modification of the body is complex.

- A. First, if it is done in blind obedience stemming from superstitious religion (e.g. **1KI 18:27-28**), there is a definite sin issue involved. We are not to relate to our God thus.
- B. Sometimes body modification stems from a warped view of reality, or of self: people who are trying to punish themselves for their own perceived deficiencies out of what purports to be self-loathing (when in reality it is likely more a matter of someone who has a pride issue that won’t let them be satisfied with their circumstance). Self-love can masquerade as self-loathing and cries for help are too often expressed by desperate antics.
 - 1. The proper way for one to abhor himself is by repentance. **JOB 42:6**.
 - 2. One can find the fullness he needs in Christ (**COL 2:10; EPH 3:19**) and any self-satisfying pursuit according to the flesh is vain Adamic hiding.
 - 3. Sacrifice pride instead of your flesh and sanity. **PSA 51:17; ROM 12:1**.
- C. Sometimes body modification stems from rage against authority (parents, “the man,” the system, God). This is a form of rebellion *which is as witchcraft*. **1SAM 15:23**.
 - 1. Rebellion and witchcraft are both unlawful grasps for power.
 - 2. Some people are fooling with forces they may not have considered.
- D. Sometimes body modification/mutilation is merely an attention-getting gambit.
 - 1. This again is a manifestation of self-love. **2TI 3:2**.
 - 2. Better ways of getting attention are:
 - a. living godly and gaining approval of God and man. **ROM 14:17-18**.

- b. asking God boldly for the things that are truly good for you.
HEB 4:16; JAM 4:1-3; PSA 84:11.
- E. Sometimes body modification/mutilation is an expression of frustration when one doesn't get his way or get what he wants.
 - 1. This is pride of life (**1JO 2:16**) that can't accept not being sovereign.
 - 2. Always getting what one wants is the route to spoiling and the invitation of God's wrath and of self-destruction. **HOS 13:11; PRO 1:32.**
 - 3. Delighting oneself in God guarantees getting what you want since you will want the right things which God is willing to supply for your good. **PSA 37:4-5.**
- F. (A plea from someone deeply involved in the Body Modification Culture): "You see, it's dawned on me that perhaps we (the Bod Mod culture) have become much darker than we intended. We all in some way or another come into this "tribe" as it were, to rebel and fight on some psychological plane against someone or something, be it our individual parents, an establishment, or even society itself. We've come together to be with fellow rebels to find a voice, to be heard, to have an identity that is our own, to be loved and wanted, and to be a part of something.

"We are unique!" we've screamed. "We are individuals! We are powerful in our own right! We control our own destinies and choices!" we shout. "Let anyone TRY to condemn us for our individuality, our beliefs, our practices. Let them even TRY to say we're wrong or foolish or perverse!" we challenge. "How DARE they!"

My friends, I think perhaps our machinations have gotten away from us. It seems to me that we've allowed it to come to a point where we must stop and examine their arguments once again and reflect, "Could they be right?"

I think back on some of the things I've been paid to do to people (and done to myself) at their own request and I think if someone accused me of doing these things to them without consent it would be undeniable torture. The things done to captives in the Middle Ages as torture in the worst degree I now get hired to do. How far have we come in our own devices? My God, what is the next level of our self-defections?

Self-inflicted castrations, lobotomies, amputations, disfigurement of every conceivable nature, suspensions – we do these things to each other and ourselves without a second thought. Think about it unemotionally for a moment: People pay us to hang them from a hook or have a finger, breast, or penis cut off. This used to be the worst form of punishment and condemnation for the worst criminals. Could these acts truly be signs of a perpetually growing disease? Could the fact that our acts are becoming darker and darker, more and more grotesque be a sign that we are heading in the wrong directions?

These acts were once outrageous and horrid acts of torture, and yet we have people standing in line to have us do it to them?? What's next? Death? Will we continue so far in our devices that we will soon pay to be burned alive at the stake or dismembered? Will we bring back the rack and the gallows to achieve the next level of "ascension" or as the ultimate expression of rebellion?

You see, it starts so innocently, so pure with a simple labret or cage in the ear ... but in the tinniest [sic] increments it turns darker and darker until we are far beyond the innocence and purity of our beginnings. I've seen it a thousand times. I've performed it for others a thousand times. I've even done it to myself.

Some of you know and are familiar with the psychology of the "cutter" and their "cutting," but don't you see that's what we all in essence are? Ours is just a tad more socially acceptable form of the same disorder.

Oh, I've heard all the arguments against this statement. I've preached against it my whole life as a former cutter, but it's true. The statement is valid. It is the same disease. We need to realize that by destroying our bodies in bits and pieces, baby step by baby step, we are undermining the very reason so many of us are in this culture.

We are unique. We are special. We are powerful just the way we were born. Do we need a split tongue to prove it?? NO! Do we need brands or castration to show our individuality?? HELL NO!

We need our minds, our hearts and our souls and that's all! Each of us at birth was unique and powerful and special in our own right. Let's not destroy pieces of our beautiful bodies to prove what our own individual minds and voices can accomplish so much more powerfully and perfectly: "We have a place in society and we are all in our own way beautiful and unique!" (Name withheld upon request)

1. Sadly, I have no follow-up information on this individual as to whether he turned to God through Christ or continued to try to make sense of life without Him Who is life. **JOH 14:6.**
2. A cut here, a snip there, a tattooed arm, what next? Little fires can get out of control. **JAM 3:5.**
3. Suffice it to say that the religion of secular humanism which robs men of hope and purpose beyond the misery of this life has contributed to the plunge into darkness.

VII. There are other considerations for someone considering tattoos, especially for a Christian.

- A. Sometimes Christians get tattoos to reflect their "faith," images of the cross, Jesus, angels, etc.
 1. We are not to relate to God through images. **EXO 20:4; DEU 4:15-19.**
 2. Making images of heavenly things is too close to a "...voluntary humility and worshipping of angels..." (**COL 2:18**), worshipping the creature more than the Creator. **ROM 1:25.**
- B. If a believer really wants to let the world know that he identifies with Jesus Christ through the cross, instead of getting an image indelibly printed in his flesh, he should have the gospel indelibly imprinted in his heart so that the proof of his calling is a reformed mind (not a deformed behind). **PRO 3:3; 7:3.**
- C. Why ruin your flesh with foolish marks of Christ when you can have genuine ones? **2CO 11:23-25; GAL 6:17.**
- D. There are guidelines for us that extend beyond bare commandments.
 1. Does it have the appearance of evil (**1TH 5:22**)? Images of idol gods or nakedness or obscene language, etc. would certainly have the appearance of evil.
 2. Do I have doubts in my conscience about it? **ROM 14:14, 20, 23; 1TI 1:19.**
 3. Will it offend a brother so as to hinder his conversion or growth? **ROM 14:21; 15:1-2; 1CO 10:32-33.**
 4. Can I do it to God's glory in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ with thanksgiving? **1CO 10:31; COL 3:17.**
 5. Does it violate the rule of those who exercise legitimate authority over me? **EPH 5:24; COL 3:20, 22; HEB 13:17; 1PE 2:13-14.**

- E. Consider the implications of body modification (even tattoos) for employment opportunities. The greater the alteration of the body, the less likely you are to secure a respectable job.
- F. Consider the permanent nature of tattooing and some body modifications.
 - 1. It's easy to take the plunge but not so easy to undo it (and this is what likely keeps some from trying to get out of the darker lifestyle).
 - 2. Think about what a future spouse might have to say about your 'tat.'
- G. Consider the health implications of tattooing or "bod-mod."
 - 1. Are you sure that the pigment inserted is non-toxic and has no long-term ill effects?
 - 2. Want to fill your body with metal inserts, studs, etc.? What if you need an MRI some day? Do you know for sure that there are no chemical or bio-electric reactions created by metal in your body?

VIII. As your pastor, I cannot outrightly condemn all tattoos, piercings, modifications, etc. But I am not at ease in my conscience about some of these issues and cannot adopt a positive stance for such reasons as have been outlined above. As the governor of this assembly, I ask you to respect my oversight in this "grey" area.