

Tattoos and Piercings

A decade ago I asked a teenage girl what she anticipated most with the arrival of her eighteenth birthday. Her excited response was, "I'll be able to get a tattoo!" This caught me off guard. I didn't realize how strongly tattoos had trended into our culture. This was not the trend when I turned eighteen (1975). Today the trend may even be more popular than ten years ago. Piercings have stepped up in popularity too!

I am asked the question, "Does God approve or disapprove of tattoos and piercings?"

Every decision, including tattoos and piercings, needs to consider God's will. *"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him"* (Col. 3:17).

This is God's business because our bodies belong to Him. *"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"* (1st Cor. 6:19-20). If someone thinks they can tattoo, pierce, or mutilate their body to any extent because it's "their body," it's wrong. It is not our body to do with as we please.

Some, but not all, who are pro-abortionist or sexually immoral use the justification, "my body – my choice." I do not relate tattoos and piercings in every sense to abortion and sexual immorality; only in the case where justification for tattoos and piercings come under the heading, "my body—my choice." Such items are not just a matter of personal choice and what is legal in our state. We must first seek God's approval.

There must be some limits in place, otherwise gross disfiguring would not be out of order. There are limits. God set limits.

For example, God permitted servants to have a pierced ear if they voluntarily committed themselves to a lifetime of servitude. (Exodus 21:1-6). God commanded circumcision, a surgical altering of the flesh, for the males of Israel (Gen. 17). The Israelites were forbidden to have

tattoos or cuttings in their flesh (Lev. 19:28). This is found in the context of forbidding an association with idols. Idolatrous people would eat blood, consult mystics, prostitute their daughters, and mutilate their flesh with cuttings and tattoos (1st Kings 18:28). We are not under the Law of Moses, as were the Israelites, but in a spirit of serving Christ in this present age, we should not have fellowship *"unfruitful works of darkness"* (Eph.5:11). Tattoos or piercings, as with any part of our lives, must not indicate fellowship with evil works. There are limits.

Limits relate to expediency. Influence must be considered. For the sake of influence, foods, hairstyle, clothing, and jewelry are spiritually governed with a sense of expedience. Tattoos and piercings would be no less governed in that they affect the body and appearance. (1st Cor. 6:12-13; 8:1-13; 10:14-33; 11:1-16; 1st Tim. 2:9-10) We can say these are matters of personal conscience, but therein we must not water down the seriousness of making sure our conscience serves God and properly influences others. We will be held accountable for having a good conscience. *"Whatsoever is not from faith is sin."* (1st Tim. 1:5; Rom. 14:23). I must ask, "Will God's rights, and will opportunities to project God's image with my body be prevented by my choices of appearance?"

We will be limited if we resist peer pressure. We must not conform to the world (Rom. 12:1-2). We must not allow ourselves to be pressured into cultural uniformity. This might come in the form of an expectation of friends, a trending fashion, or even a dare. We might be trying to look powerful or popular, like entertainers or athletes. If culture is driving this decision, we must look for better reasons for such a permanent outcome.

There are limits, pragmatically, for the sake of employment. We are commanded to provide for our own (1st Thess. 4:11-12; 1st Tim. 5:8), thus we must be mindful that tattoos limit job opportunities. In some jobs, unless tattoos can be covered, employment will not happen.

We must be limited in choices which have permanent ramifications. Christians must avoid being brought under the power of anything (1st

Cor. 6:12). This is taught in the same context of “*you are not your own...therefore glorify God in your body.*” Making permanent marks or piercing ourselves may or may not make us a slave to our past decisions. A tattoo may seem like strong option for a young person, but twenty years later, in retrospect, it could lose its power.

We must limit our actions because of our influence. Little eyes are watching us, wanting to be like us. It could even influence peers to follow us, thinking if they see it in me, it must be good for them. The Apostle Paul restricted his diet as he considered the conscience of his brother in Christ. He said, “*if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble*” (1st Cor. 8:13). Paul did not condemn the food itself, but in the event that such food caused an evil outcome, Paul avoided it. The same some be considered regarding tattoos and piercings. We need to have an eye for our future opportunities to glorify God.

Some may think tattoos and piercings can be used to prove our Christian identity. In first century Galatia some were compelling others to be circumcised; hence to have a bodily mark which showed one’s righteousness. Paul said a different kind of mark could help prove such. He said, “*I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus*” (Gal. 6:17). This could have been Paul’s involuntary marks from beatings and stoning’s inflicted by his persecutors (Acts 14:19; 16:22-24; 2nd Cor. 11:23-27). It could have been the spiritual fruit seen in Paul: i.e. “love, joy, peace, longsuffering...” (Gal. 5:22-24). In other words, marks which are the work of man’s hands, do not prove one’s spiritual identity.

So! Do we have permission for “Christian tattoos and piercings?” Not specifically. I believe one can have piercings or tattoos which do not exceed God’s limits, in which ramifications are regarded. However, this is no reason to rush out get them! Even beyond God’s limits there are plenty of personal reasons not to get them; i.e. appearance, health, and possible regrets. I know of no one who regrets not getting a tattoo. Conversely, I know of many who regret getting one. Look at the guidelines of God and proceed with scripture, conscience and prayer.

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