

What Does The Bible Say About Tattoos and Stuff?

The Old Testament law commanded the Israelites, "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](#).) So, even though believers today are not under the Old Testament law ([Romans 10:4](#); [Galatians 3:23–25](#); [Ephesians 2:15](#)), the fact that there was a command against tattoos should raise some questions. The New Testament does not say anything about whether or not a believer should get a tattoo.

We do have this command in [1 Peter 3:3–4](#): "Whose adorning let it not be that outward *adorning* of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But *let it be* the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, *even the ornament* of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.": Granted, this passage is directed at Christian women, but there is a principle here that fits: namely, a person's external appearance should not be the focus of our attention. Much effort goes into "elaborate hairstyles" and "fine clothes" and jewelry, but that's not where a woman's true beauty lies. In the same way, tattoos and body piercings are "outward adornment," and we should be careful to give more effort to the development of the "inner self," regardless of our gender.

In relation to tattoos and body piercings, a good test is to determine whether we can honestly, in good conscience, ask God to bless and use that particular activity for His own good purposes. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#)). The New Testament does not specifically command against tattoos or body piercings, but it also does not give us any reason to believe God would have us get tattoos or body piercings.

An important scriptural principle on issues the Bible does not specifically address is if there is room for doubt whether it pleases God, then it is best not to engage in that activity. [Romans 14:23](#) reminds us that anything that does not come from faith is sin. We need to remember that our bodies, as well as our souls, have been redeemed and belong to God. Although [1 Corinthians 6:19–20](#) does not directly apply to tattoos or body piercings, it does give us a principle: "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."

This great truth should have a real bearing on what we do and where we go with our bodies. If our bodies belong to God, we should make sure we have His clear "permission" before we "mark them up" with tattoos or body piercings.

What If The Tattoo Is Of A Christian Nature?

Beyond the general theme of this article, there is the question of Christian tattoos. Do the same principles apply to tattoos that are of a Christian nature, such as a cross, a Christian slogan, or even a Bible verse? Some Christians have found that having tattoos gives them more credibility, and thereby more possibilities of evangelism, with some groups of people. So what about Christian tattoos?

Obviously, a tattoo of a cross is "better" than a tattoo of a flaming skull, naked woman, or demon. Having a tattoo saying "Jesus saves" could indeed be a conversation starter with some people who would never approach a preacher wearing a suit and tie. **The question is not necessarily "is getting a tattoo a sin?"** The question is more "is getting a tattoo a good and necessary thing to do?" [1 Corinthians 10:23](#) declares, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.." Christian tattoos may be "permissible," but are they beneficial and constructive?

In [1 Corinthians 9:22–23](#), Paul exclaims, "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you." Becoming all things to save some is perhaps the only good possible reason for getting a Christian tattoo. If having a tattoo genuinely opens doors for evangelism that would otherwise be closed, getting Christian tattoos would likely "qualify" under Paul's "becoming all things" qualification. At the same time, it is frankly difficult to envision a scenario in which having a tattoo would enable a greater possibility of evangelism. If a person will not listen to you due to a lack of a tattoo, it is highly unlikely that such a person would genuinely listen due to the presence of a tattoo.

With that said, the biblically based conclusion would seem to be that Christian tattoos are permissible, but it is highly questionable whether they can be considered beneficial and constructive. A Christian considering getting a tattoo should pray for wisdom ([James 1:5](#)) and ask the Lord to provide pure motives and discernment.

Tattooing For Jesus?

The custom of scratching the arms, hands, and face as tokens of mourning for the dead is said to have existed among the Babylonians, Armenians, Scythians, and Romans, and is practiced today by many others in all nations. It is sometimes accompanied by shaving the hair from the forehead. See Lev. 21:5; Deut. 14:1; Jer. 16:6; Jer. 48:37. The Orientals are very fond of tattooing. Figures of birds, trees, flowers, etc. are carefully and painfully marked in the flesh. It was connected with idolatrous practices in the days of Moses. It is still connected with idolatry today in many circles. Others use tattooing as a form of bodily adornment to satisfying eccentric desires. The concept, practice, and people involved in tattooing are definitely of the world and the fashion of the world. See I John 2:15-17.

Since most churches today have rejected the Bible's command to separate from the world (1 John 2:15-17), it is not surprising that most churches are deeply infected with worldliness. The average church member watches worldly PG-13 and R-rated movies, listens to worldly rock & roll or country-western music, and dresses in worldly immodest unisex fashions.

Now we find that the average "evangelical" church member thinks there is nothing wrong with tattoos. A recent survey found that "75% of young conservative Christians believe tattooing is a valid spiritual expression" ("For the Love of God," *The Vancouver Sun*, Vancouver, British Columbia, Feb. 1999). Reporter Douglas Todd of *The Vancouver Sun* visited the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Langley, British Columbia, and found that tattoos are the newest "in thing" for Vineyard Christians. Amy Bonde, who is a staff member at the Vineyard in Langley, has a large Celtic cross tattooed on the small of her back. Encircling the cross are Hebrew letters that allegedly mean, "I am my beloved's, and he is mine." Bonde says the tattoo signifies that she looks upon Jesus Christ as her "lover." Another Vineyard member, Peter Davyduck, has a tattoo of the word "SIN" on his ankle. He says this is a message to "judgmental Christians that everyone is a sinner and should be accepted in spite of it."

The Vancouver Sun report notes that the tattooing represents "a sign of a seismic shift in evangelical Christianity, which has been associated for most of this century with harsh rules about controlling one's body: no dancing, no long hair on men, no pants on women, no drinking, no dancing, no jewelry and certainly NO TATTOOING."

The Old Testament plainly forbade tattooing.

"Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD" (Lev. 19:28).

"They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh" (Lev. 21:5).

Then, as now, tattooing was associated with idolatry and paganism. Amy Bonde admits 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.

The Bible has a lot to say about what a Christian can and cannot do! The apostolic instructions to the churches contain many "dos and don'ts." The Christian is to love not the world (1 John 2:15-17), is to serve God in reverence and fear (Heb. 12:28), is to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11), is to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:12), is to abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22), is to walk circumspectly (Eph. 5:15).

The average church today emphasizes liberty, fun, and self-esteem; whereas the Bible emphasizes holiness, dedication, and sacrifice. Not only is the Christian to avoid things that are obviously evil, but he is to avoid things that would cause offense to others even if those things are in not necessarily wrong:

"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Romans 14:21).

The Christian is to live his life to please others instead of himself. Ecumenical Christians, though, do not care if they offend others with their rock music and worldly appearance. They protest that they have liberty to do as they please. This is carnal

rebellion, and it is the attitude that lies at the heart of apostasy. Those who desire to throw off restrictions upon their lifestyles are not following the Bible but their own self-willed lusts. They are fulfilling 2 Timothy 4:3-4:

"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."