

## **Looking for Truth in a Tattooed World**

By [Eric Barger](#)

It is no secret that over the past decade there has been an explosion of tattoos and body piercings in our culture. While the information here is intended to help Christians make sound decisions from a biblical worldview, hopefully these words might also help lead others away from tattoo parlors and toward the Lord. Also, I have written and re-written to edit this down to fit printable page size for one 8.5x11 sheet, so be aware that there is much more to be said on this subject than space here allows.

In times past, tattoos were reserved for a very small number of people. The word tattoo represents the Samoan word meaning "open wound." The ancient origins of this practice could go back before the seventh century b.c. and are related to religious ceremonies and traditional rites of passage. Through the centuries, tattooing has been the most common way of marking prisoners. The British tattooed deserters and Hitler's thugs so marked those interned in concentration camps during the Holocaust. Always accompanied with negative connotations, tattoos were seen primarily on sailors, homosexuals, Hell's Angel biker-types, gangs, and assorted criminals.

But now, that has all changed. The stigma has faded and what was once clearly disdained by many cultures has become fashionable. Tattoo artists have sprung up in communities large and small to keep up with the demand. Tattoo and body piercing parlors are indeed everywhere and, according to a 2006 survey taken by the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology an estimated 36% of Americans aged 18-29 now sport tattoos.<sup>1</sup> A Harris Interactive poll conducted in January 2008 concluded that 14% of all adults in the United States have a tattoo, with the highest incidence (25%) found among gays, lesbians and bisexuals.<sup>2</sup>

Tattooing is a craze, to say the least, and the demographics of those currently craving tattoos seem to have no bounds. Though most states have age limit laws concerning tattoos, now pre-teen girls across America are either begging to be tattooed or just going behind their parents' backs to attempt acquiring "body art." Aiding the craze is the fact that a majority of sports, music, and movie stars have them. It is unquestionably the trendy mark of being "cool" and is accepted in many circles today. Often accompanied by body piercings, tattoos have become status symbols, and even the identifiers of a new generation.

### **So Christians think . . . ?**

Don't suppose that everybody in the church is on the same page concerning tattoos and piercings. The Internet is replete with sites defending tattooing as not only acceptable but preferable for Christians. Some justify tattooing for believers by discounting Old Testament passages such as Leviticus 19:28 ("Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the Lord"). These people would claim that simply because the passage is Old Testament "law" it has no application or bearing whatsoever in the life of the Christian today! While we do not live under the Mosaic law, biblically-minded Christians indeed should glean information and godly insight on how to live life as we examine the Old Covenant. There are also some Christians who are making stands completely against the growing tattoo/piercings culture, but are doing so in such a way as to never come close to effectively communicating with tattoo advocates. As well-intentioned (and even right) as some in opposition may be, heavy-handed legalism such as "a tattoo is a ticket to Hell" is likely to do little in making substantial progress in communicating truth on this highly charged issue. Regardless, make no mistake that there is a sizeable faction of folks claiming to be Christians who are lobbying in favor of tattoos today, including some who may even claim that tattoos are witnessing tools. Though I haven't personally seen it yet, it is not outside the realm of possibility that some church somewhere may at

some time elect to offer discount coupons for "Christian" tattoos in their Sunday bulletins!

So, with such a shift in the supposed public perception and accessibility of tattoos and with such completely differing opinions in the church, what position should the Christian take? While I am not intimating that merely having a tattoo is a sure sign of eternal destruction, please carefully consider the following points.

### **Everybody's Doin' It . . .**

Though I do not want my words here to be divisive in themselves, I know that this topic is itself polarizing - especially if you have a tattoo. It's either love 'em or hate 'em, and I don't want to fail to point out that what is said here is in no way intended to inflict guilt on someone who has already marked his or her body in this way. Once you've done it - it's done and cannot be undone without considerable doing! We all make bad decisions, and though many may want to justify something like this, one common statement kept coming up while I was researching this. Over and over, again and again, people said, "I wish I hadn't done it." Though tattoo removal is possible, it is expensive, painful, and sometimes not completely successful. What I am trying to get across here is that before anyone allows a tattoo to be inscribed on his or her body, they need to weigh the decision carefully and possibly go against the culture and peer pressure that factor into this issue.

Studies and surveys also show that a person who tattoos himself is immediately handicapped for employment. While an NBA star or #1 NFL draft pick can probably tattoo themselves all he likes, the person looking for an accounting career may find that his or her position at the office may be hamstrung by tattoos - if indeed they are even able to land the job they are seeking.

A 2007 survey by Vault, a company that publishes career information, states that 85% of employees say tattoos and body piercings impede a person's chances of finding a job, let alone a career.

The Vault survey discovered that workers with tattoos can expect over 42% of co-workers to have lowered opinions of them. Additionally, while only 18% of those with tattoos believe that body art has hindered their careers (with .06% saying it helped), the Vault survey indicated that 66.9% of persons with tattoos conceal them while at work.<sup>3</sup>

### **A Real "Stand-Out . . ."**

Many argue that a tattoo is a way of making a statement or being an "individual." No, not really. Those of us in the original 1960s hippie movement (such as myself) made those same rebellious and lame statements about long hair, bell bottoms, and marijuana. The fact is that marking and piercing one's body surely doesn't separate anybody from the crowd. But it goes a long way toward identifying a person in some negative ways. Regardless of how popular sporting a tattoo may be in some circles, just having them can include some very detrimental consequences.

Being tattooed or piercing a body part doesn't mark you as a leader, either. Instead, it merely identifies you as yet another follower. The cold fact is that the majority of those who make the decision to be tattooed before maturing and giving long and calculated thought to doing so will sooner or later likely regret it. But again, please hear my heart. If you have a tattoo - and what I have said already rings true to you - these words aren't intended to rub salt in the wound (no pun intended) or to somehow pronounce eternal judgment on you.

If you don't already have one, I suggest that before you follow others in this fad

you stop and carefully examine this craze in context of the prophetic end-days in which we live. A tattoo from a tattoo parlor will not send you to Hell, but one in the future just might. More on that later.

Consider the following, as even the pro-tattoo website SacredInk.net sounds this warning:

Tattoo is a significant life-choice and should be only entered into with a great deal of forethought. Some questions to ask if you are young and considering a tattoo are:

- Am I legally of an age to get a tattoo?
- If I live with my parents, would my parents support my decision?
- Would I be defying the authority God gave my parents over me at my current age?
- Would I still want this particular image when I get older?
- What if my future mate wouldn't like having to see this image for a lifetime?
- Would this tattoo be in an area of my body that would be plainly visible? - Many people do unfairly judge people with tattoos as being "second-class."
- Would this image bring God glory?
- Do I feel fully convinced that tattoos are allowable for Christians?"<sup>4</sup>

The underlying issues raised here need to be considered:

- Are we not the Temple of the Holy Spirit? (I Cor. 3:16, 6:19)
- Is there something wrong with the way God created us without tattoos/piercings?
- Would tattooing affect or influence your future spouse or even your children?

- Is getting a tattoo actually more about defying authority (spirit of rebellion) than about having the actual tattoo itself?
- Are Christians who defend and promote tattooing coming from a truly biblical viewpoint, or are some defending tattoos because they have marked their own bodies and want others to join them in their often rebellion-laced decision?

God did not originate tattoos. When one thinks of things being done "on earth as they are in heaven" (Matt 6:10), it is hard to imagine a tattoo parlor behind the pearly gates! I feel confident that there will be no tattoos in Heaven.

Christians who advocate for tattooing need to look around at not only who they are identifying with, but also at the associated health risks. In 2001, research done by the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center indicated that those who received a tattoo in a commercial tattoo parlor were nine times more likely to contract hepatitis C than people who did not mark their bodies.<sup>5</sup>

Many in our culture live only for the pleasure of the moment, and just as I once thought nothing about the future, having one's body inscribed with permanent ink is a decision that will, in many cases, last a lifetime. Without even discussing what a particular tattoo may represent (i.e. occult symbols, naked bodies, etc.), just having one may sooner or later turn from exhilaration to despair. It did so for All-Star outfielder Josh Hamilton of the Texas Rangers.

Hamilton's story is one of mountaintops and valleys. From the number-one pick in the 1999 Major League Baseball draft with a four million dollar signing bonus, to hopeless drug addict, estranged from his wife and family, Hamilton marks the beginning of his downward spiral by "hanging out with the wrong people in tattoo parlors" where he was first introduced to cocaine. During a recent interview, Hamilton repeatedly reiterated the price of the fateful decision he made to have

himself tattooed.<sup>6</sup> He related that associating with the wrong people and being in the wrong place was completely influential in his fall into drugs and then out of baseball for three years in 2003. Finally, at his lowest point, Hamilton showed up on his grandmother's porch asking for a place to stay. Though at first glance she didn't even recognize that it was Josh, she took him in, helped him clean up, and began presenting the gospel to him. Accepting Christ as Savior, Hamilton successfully battled through the demonic dreams and night sweats brought on from drug withdrawal, and fought his way back to baseball - and his wife. Victoriously, in 2007 he was elected to the American League All-Star team and amazed fans during the All-Star Home Run Derby.

Josh Hamilton has become a walking testimony of God's great delivering power. He is also a billboard for what can happen to even the most talented and gifted who innocently start "hanging out" in tattoo parlors. One lingering reminder of just how low he had gone are the 26 tattoos that cover Hamilton's arms, torso, and neck, including one of Satan on his left elbow. Regardless of the Texas heat, when Josh takes the field he now goes out of his way to cover as much of his skin as possible to hide the hideous nature of the tattoos he acquired while heading toward the bottom. He now regrets getting every one of them.<sup>7</sup>

### **Why Now? - Preparing for "The Mark"**

Why has there been such an increase in both the acceptance of and the acquiring of tattoos during our day? When considered in the light of Bible prophecy, the explosion of tattooing and the exponential increase of thirst for demonic supernaturalism are, I believe, no accident. This is a calculated, demonic, end-time phenomena, the purpose of which is to desensitize as many as possible concerning markings on their bodies.

Just hours before finalizing this piece, I decided to have dinner and then give this

article one last read-through. While out of the office, I received a question emailed from a gentleman named Mike whom I've known for several years. He has never before communicated anything to me on the subject of tattoos - until tonight. If circumstances had been slightly different, this article would have been finished before receiving Mike's email. However, as I answered Mike's note (which shared his concern about a kid's tattoo machine his granddaughter had received as a gift) I realized that I was writing the finishing lines of the article as well. I wrote:

"Your timing is uncanny, Brother Mike. Tonight I am finishing the final edit of an article I'm writing for Southwest Radio Ministries. They want to format and print the first run of it this week. In three weeks they are airing a program that Brother Noah Hutchings and I pre-recorded some time ago on tattoos."

Though there is very little in Scripture dealing directly with tattoos, there is one somewhat controversial passage in Leviticus 19, the context about which both liberals and conservatives completely disagree. (Most of the arguments revolve around accepting an admonition not to mark oneself that comes from the law, in particular, Leviticus.) However, though the New Testament seems to be mute on directly addressing tattoos and piercings, you are exactly right in mentioning the rebellion factor involved. We also have the strong admonition to abstain from any appearances of evil (1 Thess. 5:21-22). (Think about some of the demonic, gang related, and just plain sick stuff that has been called 'body art.')

"But as important as issues like overt rebellion and demonic art may be, I believe an even bigger concern is the fact that the entire tattoo craze is methodically conditioning and preparing the mindset



of many in our world concerning the acceptance of a future mandated mark on their body. Now that a growing percentage of people have undertaken having themselves tattooed, would it be any stretch to imagine how much more readily these people might accept a similar mark which would provide them the ability to buy, sell and sustain life?

"Mike, for twenty years I have been saying that Satan's predicted Mark of the Beast could be a tattoo. Whether it's an implanted i.c. (integrated circuit) chip, a tattoo, or something we don't even know of at this point, it WILL be some sort of mark on the hand or forehead, and accepting it will doom untold millions to an eternity in Hell at the hands and direction of Antichrist.

For anyone who studies the end-times and biblical prophecy, I think it is a near certainty that tattooing is not some harmless, meaningless fad. To me, there is little doubt that the skyrocketing acceptance and popularity of tattoos and body piercing in these end-days is leading to a climax found in the thirteenth chapter of Revelation."

*And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore*

*and six.- Revelation 13:15-18*

## **Endnotes**

1. <http://www.aad.org/>
2. <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/>
3. <http://www.vault.com/surveys/tattoo/tattoo.jsp>
4. [http://www.sacredink.net/tattoo\\_and\\_the\\_bible/](http://www.sacredink.net/tattoo_and_the_bible/)
5. [http://www.pentecostalevangel.ag.org/News2002/4514\\_tattoos.cfm](http://www.pentecostalevangel.ag.org/News2002/4514_tattoos.cfm)
6. Interview on Hannity's America, Fox News Channel, Jan. 2, 2009
7. [http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2008/writers/albert\\_chen/05/27/hamiltono602/](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2008/writers/albert_chen/05/27/hamiltono602/)