

Feature Article: JAT266

## UNDER THE NEEDLE: AN ETHICAL EVALUATION OF TATTOOS AND BODY PIERCINGS

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### SYNOPSIS

Decorating one's body with tattoos and piercings is a recent cultural phenomenon with ancient roots. The morality of these practices should be evaluated according to their effect on the four aspects of the image of God—(1) structural, (2) functional, (3) relational, and (4) teleological.

Some within the Christian community consider tattoos and body piercings to be a desecration of the image of God on the basis that they (1) violate the believer's conscience and God's Law, (2) mutilate the physical body, (3) hinder unity within the church, and (4) glorify the ungodly and vulgar. In contrast, other believers consider them to be a demonstration of the image of God on the basis that they (1) exhibit artistic beauty, (2) express the free will of the believer, (3) create diversity within the church, and (4) can be a means to express spiritual truth.

Tattoos and body piercings are in themselves neither moral nor immoral. In biblical cultures, tattoos and body piercings were symbols of ownership by, devotion to, identification with, and protection by a deity or master. Depending on which deity or master these symbols represent, therefore, tattoos and body piercings either may desecrate or demonstrate the image of God. Believers who are considering tattoos or body piercings first should be led by their consciences, then should consider the effects that such symbols will have on their physical bodies, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual lives.

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*"I Didn't Make You Like This."* I returned home from Sid's Tattoo Parlor to find my father standing in the kitchen with a horrified look on his face. Without saying a word, I took off my shirt and signaled for him to help. As he peeled the blood-marked bandage from my back, my father's horror soon turned to lament. With tears trickling down his face, he sobbed, "I didn't make you like this." These words of disapproval from my beloved father hurt worse than the raw markings on my back. I felt rejected and didn't know what to do, so I got in my car, drove to the edge of town, and began to pray. As my earthly father's voice echoed in my mind, I began to ask my heavenly Father if I had made the wrong decision to go under the needle.

Tattoos and body piercings have never been as popular as they are today. I suspect many people have had experiences similar to mine—they have gone under the needle and gotten tattoos or body piercings, only to have their new "decorations" met with skepticism and wonder. Most skepticism is based on permanence and placement. Temporary tattoos and ear piercings do not usually produce concern, yet permanent tattoos and unusual body piercings can produce a negative, visceral response. Further, many within the Christian community object to tattoos and body piercings on the basis that they are unnatural and therefore immoral.

As tattoos and body piercings continue to gain popularity within mainstream culture, I believe it is important for the Christian community to evaluate critically the morality of such “decorations.” Are tattoos and body piercings intrinsically (i.e., in themselves) immoral? What is the basis for determining their morality? What, if anything, does the Bible say about these “decorations?” Does God view with approval those who are tattooed and pierced? Or does He view us with disapproval, saying, “I didn’t make you like this”?

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF TATTOOS AND BODY PIERCINGS**

Tattoos and body piercings are not unique to contemporary culture. For example, in 1991, a 5,000-year-old corpse (later named Otzi) was found frozen in a glacier with several tattoos imprinted on his skin.<sup>1</sup> A 4,000-year-old clay figurine from Iran was discovered to have multiple ear piercings.<sup>2</sup> The Pentateuch reveals that in approximately 1400 BC tattooing and body piercing were well-known practices in ancient Israel and among its Mesopotamian neighbors (Exod. 32:2–3; Lev. 19:28). Furthermore, a remarkable number of first-century Greek and Roman writers mention the prevalence of tattoos, and the second-century historian Herodian even described the people of northern Britain as “Picts” after the open display of their body markings.<sup>3</sup> Throughout church history, tattoos have also been referred to in edicts, councils, and personal correspondence among clergy.

Tattoos started to gain prevalence in the United States when Samuel O’Reilly patented the first electric tattoo machine in 1891, which was based on an embroidering machine invented by Thomas Edison.<sup>4</sup> In the twentieth century, tattoos and body piercings drew the attention of the public media. In 1936, *Life* magazine created a stir with an article that claimed one in ten Americans was tattooed.<sup>5</sup> Current estimates on just how many people are tattooed or pierced vary widely, but the Mayo Clinic reports that approximately 20 million Americans are tattooed and an even larger number have body piercings.<sup>6</sup> A nationwide Harris Interactive Poll found that 16 percent of all adults have at least one tattoo. The highest incidence of tattoos was found among Americans age 25 to 29 (36 percent) and those age 30 to 39 (28 percent).<sup>7</sup> Among university students, it was reported that 23 percent had one to three tattoos, and 51 percent had one or more body piercings, aside from earlobe piercings for women.<sup>8</sup> According to *U.S. News and World Report*, tattooing is the country’s sixth fastest growing retail business, growing at the rate of one new tattoo parlor opening its doors every day. One estimate has 30,000 tattoo and body piercing artists working in the United States with at least eight major tattoo magazines being published regularly.<sup>9</sup>

## **A BASIS FOR ETHICAL EVALUATION**

Does the Christian community have a basis on which to evaluate the morality of tattoos and body piercings? Yes. In the first chapter of the Bible, humankind is described as incredibly unique. God decreed His creative will when He stated, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen. 1:26).<sup>10</sup> The Hebrew word translated “image” is *tselem*, which means “something cut out.”<sup>11</sup> *Tselem* is often used in the Old Testament to describe things such as people, coins, statues, and tumors that resemble or represent something else.<sup>12</sup> The Hebrew word translated “likeness” is *demuth*, which means “similitude” and comes from the root meaning “to be like.”<sup>13</sup> In this context, therefore, *tselem* and *demuth* indicate that humankind resembles God and is like Him. This similarity and likeness is traditionally called the *image of God*.

### **Four Aspects of the Image of God**

Theologians have identified four aspects of the image of God in which humans were made: (1) structural, (2) functional, (3) relational, and (4) teleological. Each aspect indicates a particular trait that makes humans uniquely like God.

(1) The *structural* aspect of the image of God indicates that humans have the capacity to know, to reason, and to make moral decisions (Gen. 2:16–17). (2) The *functional* aspect indicates that humans are to operate as God’s representatives on earth by ruling over nature (Gen. 1:26; 2:5). (3) The *relational* aspect of the

image of God indicates that humans have the capacity to mirror the unity within the Trinity through relationships with God and other humans, and (4) the *teleological* aspect indicates that humans are created to glorify God through making visible His character.<sup>14</sup>

Much attention has been directed toward identifying only the spiritual implications of the image of God, while unfortunately neglecting its physical implications.<sup>15</sup> I agree with Herman Bavinck's affirmation that these four aspects of the image of God encompass the entire person, spiritual and physical: "Man's body also belongs to the image of God...The body is not a tomb, but a wondrous masterpiece of God, constituting the essence of man as fully as the soul."<sup>16</sup> Since the physical body is included in the image of God, the morality of decorations added to it—including tattoos and body piercings—must be evaluated according to their effect on these four aspects of the image of God.

### A DESECRATION OF THE IMAGE OF GOD?

Traditionally, Christians have viewed tattoos as immoral on the basis that they desecrate the image of God.<sup>17</sup> Proponents of this view say: (1) Tattoos desecrate the structural aspect of the image of God because they violate our consciences (Rom. 2:15) and God's Law (Lev. 19:28). In reference to his tattoo, one Christian writes, "With my depraved and back-slidden mind, I justified an abomination to God Himself, who instructs us through His divine law not to print any marks on our bodies (Lev. 19:28)."<sup>18</sup> (2) Tattoos desecrate the functional aspect of the image of God because they mutilate the body that is supposed to be nurtured and sustained, making it vulnerable to infection. (3) The relational aspect of the image of God is desecrated by tattoos because they hinder unity within the body of Christ and violate the consciences of fellow Christians (1 Cor. 8:9–12). Psychiatrist Armando R. Favazza summarizes: "Many people—especially those belonging to non-conformist groups—get tattoos to demonstrate their defiance of traditional authority....Many studies link multiple tattoos with antisocial personality, [and] an increased incidence of assaultive behavior."<sup>19</sup> (4) Lastly, the teleological aspect of the image of God is desecrated by tattoos because they glorify the ungodly and vulgar, as well as convey narcissism, defiance, and arrogance—vices that are inappropriate for Christians (1 Pet. 3:3). Jean-Chris Miller, author of *The Body Art Book*, supports this point by stating, "Death and darkness have always been a classic tattoo theme—skulls, snakes, demons, and spider webs are all conventional tattoo imagery."<sup>20</sup>

Many of the same arguments are used to support the view that body piercings are immoral. Proponents of this view say: (1) Body piercings desecrate the structural aspect of the image of God because they are an unnatural addition to the physical framework of the body. (2) They desecrate the functional aspect of the image of God because they mutilate the body. (3) Body piercings desecrate the relational aspect of the image of God because they hinder unity within the body of Christ and violate the consciences of fellow Christians. (4) Piercings desecrate the teleological aspect of the image of God because they are ostentatious (1 Tim. 2:9) and may indicate psychological and behavioral maladies. In her book, *In the Flesh*, Victoria Pitts writes, "Practices such as piercing, scarification, and branding are linked to anorexia, bulimia, and what has been called 'delicate self-harm syndrome,' which is an addictive, repetitive, non-decorative form of skin cutting, usually on the arm or legs. This is considered an expression of absolute hatred or anger."<sup>21</sup>

### A DEMONSTRATION OF THE IMAGE OF GOD?

A small minority of Christians disagrees with the traditional opinion and believes tattoos are moral on the basis that they are a demonstration of the image of God. Proponents of this view say: (1) Tattoos are a demonstration of the structural aspect of the image of God because humans are created with the ability to recognize artistic beauty and decorate themselves accordingly. Miller identifies aesthetics as one of the many reasons why people get tattoos.<sup>22</sup> (2) Tattoos are a demonstration of the functional aspect of the image of God because humans have the free will to do what they want with their bodies (1 Cor. 6:12). Miller, again, bluntly states, "It's your body and you can do what you like with it."<sup>23</sup> (3) The relational aspect of the image of God is demonstrated by tattoos because they create diversity within the body of Christ. Amy Krakow begs for unity among humankind when she exclaims that tattoos are "just ink; body

art. Not some scarlet letter telling the world we're wanton criminals, sexual perverts, biker scum, sailors, soldiers or just plain weird."<sup>24</sup> (4) Lastly, tattoos demonstrate the teleological aspect of the image of God because they are a medium by which a Christian can communicate God's character. A. Gell expresses the external as well as internal communicatory nature of tattoos by stating, "The inside-facing and the outside-facing skins are...one indivisible structure, and hence the skin continually communicates the external world to the internal one, and the internal world to the external one."<sup>25</sup>

Many of these same arguments are used to support the view that body piercings are moral. Proponents of this view say: (1) Body piercings demonstrate the structural aspect of the image of God because humans are able to decorate themselves in a way that they view as aesthetically pleasing. (2) They demonstrate the functional aspect of the image of God because humans have the free will to do what they want with their bodies (1 Cor. 6:12). (3) The relational aspect of the image of God is demonstrated by body piercings because they create diversity within the body of Christ. (4) Piercings demonstrate the teleological aspect of the image of God because they are a medium by which a Christian can communicate God's character.

### RELEVANT BIBLICAL PASSAGES

The Hebrew word *qa' aqa'*, translated "tattoo," appears only once in the Old Testament, in a prohibition: "You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:28). *Qa' aqa'* is commonly defined as a "cut, incision" or "gross cutting of the skin," yet within this context it most likely refers to painting or scarring of the skin.<sup>26</sup> It is unlikely that *qa' aqa'* refers to self-mutilation, since that concept was already referred to earlier in the verse in the prohibition against cutting one's body. I believe the cultural context helps explain this prohibition against tattoos. During this period, tattoos signified ownership and devotion, since a common practice in Babylonia and Egypt was to tattoo a slave with his owner's name or the name of a god. Tattooing and self-mutilation also were religious mourning rites connected with the Canaanite fertility god.<sup>27</sup> Theologian Gerhard Kittel explains the idolatrous nature of tattoos in the Israelite culture: "When a person was tattooed he became dedicated to the god and became its servant, as well as came under its protection, so that he should not be harmed."<sup>28</sup> Tattoos, therefore, were associated strongly with idolatry and were prohibited because Yahweh's exclusive claim of ownership and devotion is incompatible with the false-god cults.

Some rabbinical sources suggest that the prohibition was limited only to heathen, idolatrous, and superstitious tattoos.<sup>29</sup> For example, rabbis believed that the master who marks his slave so that he does not run away is exempt from the prohibition in Leviticus 19:28, and the Tosepta records a rabbinic prohibition that only forbids tattooing the name of another god.<sup>30</sup>

Judging by the number of biblical references, it seems apparent that body piercing was an established custom among the Israelites. These decorations were primarily worn for aesthetic reasons, yet they too represented ownership and status. Royalty, brides, and the nation of Israel are all described as being adorned with nose rings (Gen. 24:47; Isa. 3:21; Ezek. 16:12) and earrings (Isa. 3:19; Ezek. 16:12). These decorations were worn not only by women, but also by men and children (Exod. 32:2; Judg. 8:24).

Similar to tattoos, body piercings may have had an idolatrous connotation. For example, when Jacob renewed the covenant with Yahweh, his household "gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which they had and the rings which were in their ears" (Gen. 35:4). Unlike tattoos that were prohibited in the Pentateuch, however, body piercings were prescribed. Exodus 21:6 and Deuteronomy 15:17 both indicate that a master was to pierce the ear of his slave to symbolize ownership and permanent servitude.

Tattoos and body piercings are not mentioned in the New Testament. In Galatians 6:17, however, Paul exclaims, "From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus." The Greek word translated "brand-mark" is *stigma*, which was a mark pricked, in or branded on, the body.

Similar to tattoos within the Mesopotamian culture, a *stigma* denoted ownership and devotion, as well as identification. In the Greco-Roman world, property such as animals, slaves, criminals, and later soldiers carried these marks. Recruits to the Roman army were most likely tattooed on the hand with the abbreviated name of the emperor, whereas criminals and slaves were marked on the forehead with their offense.<sup>31</sup>

The meaning of Paul's "brand-marks" cannot be answered with complete certainty. Historically, a tattoo was a source of imagery and exaggeration in literature. In the fifth century BC, a slave in Aristophanes' *Wasps* effectively complains, "I'm being tattooed to death with a stick." The humor seems to lie within the similarity of a tattoo to the black and blue marks left by a beating.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps Paul was using "brand-marks" as a metaphor referring to his bruises, welts, and scars—the visible signs of the mistreatment he received as a slave of Christ (2 Cor. 11:23–29; Acts 14:19).<sup>33</sup>

Paul's brand-marks further served as signs of his devotion to, and ownership by, Jesus. Just as tattoos symbolized devotion to, and protection by, a god, no one was able to harm Paul—the slave and property of Jesus—and go unpunished.

### **Symbolism throughout the Old and New Testaments**

Other biblical passages also describe literal and figurative markings and writings on the body that may symbolize ownership or devotion to a master. In Genesis 17:11, God instituted circumcision as a symbol of the covenant between Abraham and Himself. For Israel, the Shema (Deut. 6:4) was to be remembered as if it were permanently marked on their hands and forehead (Deut. 6:8). The prophet Isaiah proclaims that one day people will write on their hands, "Belonging to the Lord" (Isa. 44:5), and in reference to Jerusalem, God Himself states, "Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands" (Isa. 49:16). The prophet Ezekiel describes a mark that an angel will set on the foreheads of the faithful to protect them from the sword of the avenging angel (Ezek. 9:4, 6).

The infamous mark of the Beast in the book of Revelation is described as a mark that the ungodly receive on their foreheads or hands as a symbol of their devotion to him (13:16–17). The faithful receive a different mark on their foreheads: the name of God or Christ (14:1; 22:4).

To summarize, the Old and New Testaments both indicate that tattoos and body piercings are symbols of ownership, devotion, and identification. These symbols denote protection by the deity or master to which they refer, and retribution toward anyone who harms those who bear them.

### **THE AMORALITY OF TATTOOS AND BODY PIERCINGS**

A survey of these biblical passages reveals that tattoos, body piercings, and permanent markings are not essentially immoral; rather, they are merely symbols that indicate ownership, devotion, and identification. I believe that tattoos and body piercings, therefore, are neither intrinsically moral nor immoral; they are amoral. This is because they neither inherently desecrate nor demonstrate the image of God, though they have potential to do either. I believe that:

1. Tattoos and body piercings do not inherently desecrate the structural aspect of the image of God because they do not inherently violate the conscience of a Christian. The prohibition against tattoos in Leviticus 19:28 is part of the Law that Christ has superseded (Eph. 2:5). Christians are free from the Levitical Law and are now under the law of Christ, which does not reiterate the prohibition against tattoos.<sup>34</sup> The timeless principles related to tattoos and body piercings remain: God's people are not to be idolatrous or to imply devotion to false gods through their bodily decorations or adornment.

Tattoos further demonstrate the structural aspect of the image of God because humans are created with the ability to recognize beauty and decorate themselves accordingly.<sup>35</sup> Surely the appreciation of beauty is very subjective and beauty may truly lie in the eye of the beholder. Whatever one's personal opinion of beauty, however, tattoos are legally considered to be art. On November 12, 1982, then governor Jerry Brown announced that tattoos are officially designated as art in California.<sup>36</sup> Tattoo artists and body piercers are also classified by the U.S. Department of Labor in the tax bracket A194—Artists, Performers, and Related Workers.<sup>37</sup>

2. In general, tattoos and body piercings do not desecrate the functional aspect of the image of God. Tattoos permanently mark the body, but I do not think they can be classified with body modification or

mutilation, which irreversibly alters the functional structure of the body.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, most body piercings are temporal and can be removed without causing permanent damage.

In addition, tattoos and body piercings are not proven to cause disease. During the Old Testament period, tattoo and scarification instruments were presumably a source of disease and infection. A common theme within the holiness code is that many of the laws were given to prevent the Israelites from experiencing illness. God's prohibition against tattoos in Leviticus 19:28, therefore, may have been His gracious means of disease prevention. Current tattooing and piercing techniques, which include one-time-use needles, individual ink pots, latex gloves, autoclave equipment, and stainless-steel instruments and jewelry, have all but eliminated the spread of disease. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, no data exists that indicates that exposure to tattooing and body piercing alone places people at increased risk for Hepatitis C or HIV.<sup>39</sup>

3. Regrettably, tattoos and body piercings can desecrate the relational aspect of the image of God to the extent they hinder unity within the body of Christ and violate the consciences of fellow Christians. In 1 Corinthians 8:1–13, Paul exhorts Christians to painstakingly avoid violating a weaker brother's conscience. Bible scholar David Lowery explains this passage: "Paul did not say that a knowledgeable Christian must abandon his freedom to the ignorant prejudice of a 'spiritual' bigot. The 'weak brother' was one who followed the example of another Christian, not one who carped and coerced that knowledgeable Christian into a particular behavioral pattern."<sup>40</sup> The apparent principle is that Christians are to be watchful of their actions to prevent knowingly compelling a weaker brother to violate his conscience. Applying this principle to our discussion, if a knowledgeable Christian by getting a tattoo or body piercing will compel a weaker brother to do the same and thus cause the weaker brother to violate his own conscience, Paul instructs the knowledgeable Christian simply to refrain for the sake of unity.

4. Tattoos and body piercings may desecrate or demonstrate the teleological aspect of the image of God, depending on the focus of their symbolism. Since tattoos and body piercings are amoral symbols that indicate ownership, devotion, and identification, the morality of these decorations depends on their intended meaning and the deity or master to which they express devotion. If a person were tattooed or pierced simply to look ostentatious or to portray something odious and offensive, this would clearly desecrate the teleological aspect of the image of God (1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:3).

Tattoos and body piercings, however, also have the potential to communicate the character and truths of God to an external world, as well as remind their bearers of the truths that these decorations symbolize. Just as tattoos and body piercings symbolize that their bearers are devoted to a master or god, they also remind their bearers to whom they belong. Christians throughout history have been tattooed with Christian symbols as an indication of ownership and devotion to Christ. Procopius of Gaza, writing at the end of the fifth century, says that many Christians chose to be marked on their wrists or arms with the sign of the cross or the name of Christ. Mark Gustafson writes, "Religious tattoos were in use at the same time that institutions of political authority were using tattoos in a punitive sense."<sup>41</sup> In late antiquity and the Middle Ages, punitive tattooing was as frequent as in the classical Greek and Roman eras, yet orthodox Christians willingly had themselves tattooed with the emblems and name of Jesus.<sup>42</sup> These examples indicate that tattoos had begun to take on a new meaning within the Christian community: they went from identifying a person as a criminal or the property of an earthly master to an expression of devotion to Christ. Body piercings likewise have taken on new meaning within the Christian community as a reminder to the pierced that Christ was pierced for them.

Tattoos and body piercings, then, are amoral on the basis that they do not inherently desecrate the image of God, but rather have the ability to demonstrate the image of God. Within the current Christian community, however, tattoos and body piercings unfortunately have had a divisive effect and consequently desecrate the relational aspect of the image of God. Unity within the Christian community is rare, yet important because it is a primary way to witness to unbelievers. Jesus prayed to the Father that all believers would "be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me" (John 17:23). Paul repeatedly reminds, encourages, and commands Christian communities to be united as well, since they are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26).

Is it possible that Paul's brand-marks mentioned in Galatians 6:17 may have violated the conscience of a "weaker brother" and caused disunity? Probably not, since they were involuntarily inflicted. Someone would only discover the meaning of Paul's marks if he explained it to them. The meanings behind tattoos and piercings need to be discussed and explained openly among Christians on both sides of the issue to preserve unity. I hope they will seek to understand one another's concerns and make appropriate conciliations. Those who believe tattoos and body piercings are a desecration of the image of God may have their conscience strengthened by realizing the spiritual truths that these decorations can portray; whereas those who believe tattoos and body piercings are a demonstration of the image of God may regulate their freedom in Christ by not decorating themselves to look like circus performers or walking tackle boxes.

### **"MOM, I WANT SLEEVES AND MY EARS GAUGED"<sup>43</sup>**

If you are a parent or involved in any form of youth ministry, I suspect you have been (or soon will be) faced with this ethical dilemma. I recommend advising any Christian who is considering getting a tattoo or body piercing to consider how these decorations may affect the four aspects of the image of God that they bear. Some questions to consider may be:

- (1) What is your motivation for getting a tattoo or body piercing? Would it violate your conscience or the consciences of your family members, friends, and fellow believers in Christ? Is it legal in your state and at your age to be tattooed or pierced?
- (2) Is the parlor you go to certified and clean? Have you seen other tattoos or body piercings that your artist of choice has done? Are you prepared to have this symbol permanently imprinted on you body? How will you feel about your tattoo in 20 years? Are you addicted to tattoos or body piercings?
- (3) What will your parents, spouse, or church members think of your tattoo or body piercing? Will it disrupt the unity within your Christian community? Will this decoration prevent you from accomplishing God's will for your life? Is the decoration auspicious? Are you able to cover it up?
- (4) Does this tattoo or body piercing symbolize something that is relevant to your relationship with Christ? Would it benefit or hinder your relationship with Him?

If the tattoo or body piercing (1) will not violate your conscience or the conscience of others, (2) will not cause permanent harm or disease to your physical body, (3) will not harm your interpersonal relationships, and (4) is symbolic of a spiritual truth that will benefit your relationship with Christ and your witness to the world, then I believe that it will not desecrate the image of God and you as a Christian are free in Christ to go under the needle.

### **NOTES**

1. Steve Gilbert, *Tattoo History: A Source Book* (New York: Juno, 2000), 11.
2. Paul Mason, *Just the Facts: Body Piercing and Tattoos* (Chicago: Heinemann Library, 2003), 8.
3. Terisa Green, *The Tattoo Encyclopedia: A Guide to Choosing Your Tattoo* (New York: Fireside, 2003), xi.
4. Jean-Chris Miller, *The Body Art Book* (New York: Berkley, 1997), 12.
5. Amy Krakow, *The Total Tattoo Book* (New York: Warner Books, 1994), 6.
6. Mayo Clinic staff, "Tattoos and Piercings: What to Know before You Go under the Needle," May 17, 2004, MayoClinic.com, <http://www.mayoclinic.com/invoke.cfm?id=MC00020>.
7. Joy Marie Sever, "A Third of Americans with Tattoos Say They Make Them Feel More Sexy," The Harris Poll #58, October 8, 2003, HarrisInteractive, [http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris\\_poll/index.asp?PID=407](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=407).
8. CNN/Money, "Don't Hide That Tattoo," May 31, 2005, CNN/Money, [http://money.cnn.com/2005/05/31/news/economy/challenger\\_tattoo/](http://money.cnn.com/2005/05/31/news/economy/challenger_tattoo/).
9. Margo DeMello, *Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 13.
10. All Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.
11. F. Brown, S. Driver, C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), s.v. "tselem," 853.
12. The Mormon view that humans bear a direct physical resemblance to God is incorrect, but it is difficult to reject based on the definition of *tselem* alone; rather, I reject the Mormon view of the image of God based on passages that indicate that God

- cannot be seen by humans (John 1:18) and that God is spirit (John 4:24). Furthermore, Israel was not to make graven images since they did not see the form of the Lord when He spoke to them from the midst of the fire at Horeb (Deut. 4:15).
13. Brown, s.v. "demuth," 197–98.
  14. I am indebted to Steven Tracy for his explanation of three different aspects of the image of God: *functional, relational, and visible* (which I term *teleological*). Steven R. Tracy, *Mending the Soul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 24–25. For a description of the *structural* aspect, see Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 70–71. For a further description of the various aspects of the image of God, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 445–49; and Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 520–29.
  15. Recently, more attention has been focused on developing a theology of the body. In his 1979 *Audiences*, Pope John Paul II began laying foundations for a theology of the body, repeatedly emphasizing the urgency of the task. Fifteen years later, Mary Prokes defined the theology of the body as the discipline that "reflects upon a faith understanding of the lived body and the material universe." See Mary Prokes, *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 26, 30. The theology of the body is clearly an issue that further needs to be explored and developed by the Christian community.
  16. Hoekema, 68.
  17. A recent phenomenon among upper-class women is cosmetic tattooing, conveniently termed "permanent beauty treatment," where eyebrows, eyelids, lips, and cheeks are tattooed for aesthetic reasons. To remain consistent, Christians who are opposed to tattooing must be opposed to permanent beauty treatment.
  18. Terry Watkins, "Tattoo: The Mark of Regret," Biblebelievers.com, [http://www.biblebelievers.com/watkins\\_tattoos/regret.html](http://www.biblebelievers.com/watkins_tattoos/regret.html).
  19. Armando R. Favazza, quoted in Gilbert, 159.
  20. Miller, 56.
  21. Victoria Pitts, *In the Flesh: The Cultural Politics of Body Modification* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 25.
  22. Miller, 29.
  23. *Ibid.*, 31.
  24. Krakow, 144.
  25. A. Gell, quoted in Mark Gustafson, "The Tattoo in the Later Roman Empire and Beyond," in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History*, ed. Jane Caplan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 25. James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.) (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), s.v. "qa' aqa'." Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. "stigma."
  26. James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.) (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), s.v. "qa' aqa'."
  27. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 7, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. "stigma."
  28. Kittel, 660.
  29. Gilbert, 150.
  30. Jacob Milgrom, *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 3A, *Leviticus 17–22* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1695.
  31. Kittel, s.v. "stigma."
  32. Aristophanes, *Wasps*, in *Loeb Classical Library*, vol. 2, trans. Jeffery Henderson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), line 1296.
  33. C. P. Jones, "Stigma and Tattoo," in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History*, ed. Jane Caplan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 10.
  34. If this is not so, Christian men violate the Law every time they shave (Lev. 19:27).
  35. Some may suggest that the structural aspect of the image of God, which allows humans to make moral decisions including personal adornment, must be governed by the functional aspect of the image of God, which opposes body modification. Many aesthetic treatments that may be considered body modifications, however, are accepted within the Christian community such as dental braces, reconstructive plastic surgery, circumcision, and hair removal. It seems more cogent in light of these to evaluate the aspects of the image of God individually.
  36. Krakow, 14.
  37. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Occupational Classification System Manual," October 16, 2001, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ocs/ocsm/comA194.htm>.
  38. It is for this reason that the Catholic Catechism does not prohibit tattoos. See "Catechism of the Catholic Church," under "Respect for the Dignity of Persons," Vatican, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P80.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P80.HTM).
  39. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Hepatitis C: Percutaneous Exposures in Other Settings," June 23, 2005, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/c\\_training/edu/1/epidem-trans-5.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/c_training/edu/1/epidem-trans-5.htm). J. F. Walvoord, R. B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983–1985), s.v. "1 Cor. 8:13."
  40. J. F. Walvoord, R. B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983–1985), s.v. "1 Cor. 8:13."
  41. Gustafson, 29.
  42. Jones, 13.
  43. A *sleeve* is a tattoo that entirely covers the arm from wrist to shoulder, and a *gauge* is the increment by which enlarged body piercings are measured.