

Dear Mickey,

Thank you for writing us at Christian Questions Radio. You wanted to know if tattoos were sinful. You said that you have them and would like to get more.

In the Old Testament we learn that self-mutilation was a common practice among false religions. 1 Kings 18:24-29 describes a ritual in which those who worshipped the false god Baal slashed themselves with swords and spears. Because of the traditions of pagans, God made a law against this sort of practice. Leviticus 19:28 says, "You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the LORD." When we look at the context of this scripture (Leviticus 19:26-31) we note that God is speaking to his covenant people Israel telling them to abstain from the religious practices of the surrounding nations, which would lead them away from him and toward false gods. The "tattoo marks" of verse 28 are not referring to body décor but to marking oneself with cultic religious worship. Tattoos were clearly related to false religious practices.

Today's tattoos are much different from those described in the Old Testament. In our culture they are a means of self-expression and personal decoration. Although tattoos may have a history in ancient ritual and false religion, in our cultural context they do not denote a connection with evil or false faith. They are basically done for ornamentation.

A further reason to believe Christians are free to tattoo their bodies is that Christians are not bound by Old Testament laws in order to be in a right relationship with God. We are no longer bound by restrictive dietary laws, hairstyles or wearing clothes from two different fabrics. Although some might feel that modifying the body with tattoos somehow defiles God's creation, if this were true it would not be right to pierce ears or have cosmetic surgery. Getting a tattoo is a deeply personal choice that falls into the category of personal appearance and is connected to the freedom of the believer. We, as Christians, are not under the Law for our good standing with God. Our right standing comes from our declaration that we are sinners and our faith that Jesus' incredible sacrifice paid the debt we owed once for all. "Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." (Galatians 3:24-25)

Are tattoos sinful? No, we believe they are not. The tattoo of today may describe images that merely please the wearer, or they may have deeper meaning. Many Christians utilize tattoos as a way of giving glory to God and witnessing their faith to others. All of the above having been said, we realize that tattoos are not for everyone and may even be offensive to some Christians who have a different viewpoint on this subject. Therefore, the Apostle Paul cautions, "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak." (1 Corinthians 8:9)

Because you are a Christian you have a responsibility not only to yourself, but to others as well. Therefore, choose your tattoo pictures wisely. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)

We hope we have answered your question. Be sure to sign up for CQ Rewind at www.christianquestions.net. The service is free without obligation and will provide you with scriptural perspective on many questions and topics.

Sincerely,

Christian Questions Radio