

# BODY PIERCING AND TATTOOS

*Danny L. Box (Deceased)*

The fads of teenagers can run from the ridiculous to the absurd. In my teenage years (1960s), the fad was Mohawk haircuts, long sideburns, swallowing goldfish, and fast cars. In the 70s we saw the young people with peace signs, long hair, and psychedelic clothing. The 80s brought about even more changes, as did the 90s. All of these fads were considered “weird” and shocked the parents of that day, but it soon passed and there was no permanent damage from it.

But today, the situation with some of the fads can be quite different. More and more of our teenagers are boasting of their “body art” and their “piercings.” As we look all around us we can see more and more young and old alike with multiple holes in their ears, noses, navels, nipples, eyebrows, lips, tongues, cheeks and even in their private parts. What was once associated with “punk” rockers, bikers, and prison inmates is now popular with untold numbers of our young people in all walks of life.

When asked why they have subjected themselves to these procedures, many young people give the following as their reasons. Some say they got “pierced” or “painted” to make a fashion statement. Some say they wanted to experiment with how it would look. Others stated they got a tattoo or pierced some part of their body because they thought it would be sexually stimulating, while still others admit that they were pressured into it by their peers. But regardless of the reason, what most young people (and even older) fail to realize is that body piercing and tattoos brings with it all sorts of potential problems that have to be dealt with.

Body piercing and tattoos are invasive procedures. This is a procedure that breaks the continuity of the skin which is the body’s defense mechanism against disease. When the skin is broken, by whatever means, all types of bacteria can enter, leading to potential exposure of different kinds of blood-borne diseases. Even if the person doing the procedure is a reputable professional operator there are still some risks involved. The most serious potential medical complications include infections such as hepatitis B and C, HIV, and syphilis as well as staph and strep infections. In a recent issue of *Emergency Medicine*, a monthly publication written for and by emergency room physicians, Dr. Charles Stewart, an emergency room physician who practices in Colorado, summarized the various complications that he had seen resulting from tattoos and body piercings. They are as follows:

**ALLERGY:** Most common are allergic reactions to the jewelry inserted in the piercing, or allergies to the dyes used in the art work. The allergy typically results in a weeping, crusting, itchy wound. At times these allergies can become severe and even life threatening.

**INFECTION:** Almost as common and potentially far more serious, are the infections, which result in redness, swelling, tenderness, pain and often swelling of nearby glands. When sterile technique breaks down, bacteria and viruses can be introduced into the blood stream, including the hepatitis B virus that can cause chronic hepatitis and liver cancer, and HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. In people born with heart valve disorders, bacterial endocarditis, a potentially deadly infection of the heart can result. Piercing the nose can result in a staphylococcal infection and piercing the ear can result in a pseudo-mononucleosis infection. Even tetanus is a risk in people who have not had an immunization in the last 10 years.

**UNSIGHTLY SCARS AND INJURY:** Some people develop large, ugly scars called

keloids. These may have to be surgically removed. Also, if piercing jewelry catches on something, the tissue can be ripped away. Piercing of the tongue can result in permanent numbness, difficulty talking, loss of taste and breathing problems if swelling becomes severe. The jewelry inserted in a pierced tongue can cause teeth to fracture or the lining of the mouth to become chronically inflamed.

**MOVEMENT AND REJECTION:** The jewelry may move causing the hole to become thin and narrow, or even enlarged, causing scarring, inflammation and prolonged healing. Stress is a common cause, for example, when the jewelry is under pressure or friction from clothing, or the piercing has been placed in an area of the body that changes shapes with body movement.

**PAIN:** Pain is often associated with the procedure itself, whether a piercing or a tattoo. But sometimes during the procedure, a nerve can be damaged which leads to an increase in pain and discomfort. This pain may last from just a few hours, to days and even weeks. Also, an infection in the nerves can occur and cause a severe, and sometimes permanent disability.

Many people are putting their health on the line when they make the decision to decorate their body with either a tattoo or some type of piercing. For this reason, it is very important that people know the dangers and risks involved before the procedure is carried out. Because of the potential hazards to consumers, 33 states have already enacted laws which govern tattoo and piercing parlors, and many states are proposing even tougher legislation to regulate the “body art” business. Some of these tougher laws include; no one under the age of 18 may be permitted to be tattooed or pierced without parental permission (this does not include the piecing of ears); the parlors must use all disposable equipment including “paint pots” after each customer; the parlor, and especially the tables used must be disinfected after each customer; parlors must meet that state’s health department codes; and parlor managers must give detailed instructions on the care on the new tattoo or piercing, to prevent infection.

As a Christian, a minister of the Gospel, and a registered nurse, **I am opposed to body piercing and tattoos.** I understand full well that in the Old Testament times they had “body piercing.” In Exodus 21:6 we read of certain servants who, after working for their indentured time, did not want to be set free of their master, so they would pierce their ear to show that they were a servant for life. We also read that the golden calf made by Aaron was made from the earrings of the people (Exo. 32:2-4), and I know that Abraham’s servant gave a “ring for her face” to Rebekah (Gen. 24:47). I see nothing wrong with *ladies* having their ears pierced one time, this dresses them up, however, when they go to the extreme and have multiple holes in their ears they have gone from the fashionable to “gaudy.” As for “body art,” the Old Testament view of tattooing one’s self is plain and simple. One of the laws given by God to the children of Israel was instruction to not “print any marks upon you” (Lev. 19:28). These Hebrew words meant simply, “Don’t Tattoo Yourself!”

Please consider the following reasons why I believe that Christian teens (and adults) should not be caught up in this fad of decorating the body, either by piercing or tattoos; **1) The potential for injury or illness is there with every tattoo or piercing.** If we choose to go through with either of these, knowing the potential for problems, then we have willfully chosen to harm our body. Paul, in writing to the church at Corinth addresses this very fact when he wrote, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God,...If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.” (1 Cor. 3.16-17). He further wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 that this body is not our own but it is the temple of God and we are

to use it to glorify God, not to paint it up or decorate it to glorify the worldly things as so many are doing. **2) Body art and piercing bring attention to one's body.** People look and comment about the person that has multiple tattoos or piercings in their body and often times this is why people will decorate themselves, so people will look. It is almost assured that anyone that has multiple tattoos and body piercings has done this for the sole purpose of gaining attention. But Paul, by inspiration wrote that we are to adorn ourselves in "modest apparel, with shamefacedness" as a people professing godliness (1 Tim. 2:9-10). We cannot adorn ourselves with anything that will bring undue attention to ourselves and be pleasing to God. **3) "Piercings" and "paintings" are acts of defiance.** Oftentimes when a young person gets either a tattoo or a body piercing, they are doing it in an act of defiance against authority. It might be parental authority, governmental authority, or even religious authority, but for whatever reason, they shout out to those in authority, "Look what I did! I don't respect your rules." Paul, in writing to young people, said, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" (Eph. 6:1). He also wrote other passages that tell us that we are to be in subjection to those who have rule over us (Rom. 8; Heb. 2:8; 12:9). Anything we do that would violate or defy the authority of those over us is a clear violation of God's Word. **4) Body piercings and tattoos sends the wrong message to those around us.** As we said before, in times past, only bikers, "rockers," and prisoners would have multiple tattoos and numerous piercings of their body and we could tell who and what they were by their appearance. As a Christian, if you have tattoos and piercings, you are often lumped into this group, and people see you as a potential trouble maker or problem. This is not the way a Christian is to come across to the world. Didn't our Lord say, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Mat. 7:16, 20)? A Christian, young or old, is to be a "light to the world" (Mat. 5:16). They are to be one that the world can look to and see the influence of the Lord within them so that God will be glorified. Paul set the precedence for Christian youth when he wrote the following to the young man Timothy; "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation [manner of life—ASV], in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). We as Christians cannot do anything that might bring reproach upon ourselves, because this in turn, brings reproach upon the Lord and His church.

I would like to ask anyone who is thinking about getting a tattoo or a body piercing one question, **is it worth it?** Is it worth the potential health problems and years of misery? Is it worth the social rejection that face so many that "paint" and pierce"? Is it worth the family problems that result from disobedience to rules of home? Is it worth the permanence of carrying a mark on your body to your grave? It is hard to think of one advantage that a Christian could gain from having tattoos or body piercings, **So why do it?**