

American Council of Christian Churches  
80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, October 19–21, 2020  
Hardingville Bible Church, Monroeville, NJ  
Resolution on Christians and Tattooing

Tattoos originated from paganism and idolatry, serving as displays of worship, self-expression, fashion, or identification of status.<sup>1</sup> Once nearly an exclusive practice of the unsaved,<sup>2</sup> increasing numbers of professing Christians are getting tattooed to creatively express themselves, to remember significant events or individuals, or even to witness for Christ.

Most Christians who get tattoos follow a decision-making process determined by their desire for one. Instead, Christians must first follow Christ's will for their lives and his plan for witness and testimony in this world. The life of Christians must be consistent with and expressive of the deliverance Christ bought for them with his precious blood. Through Christ, God mercifully delivers sinners from the power and dominion of sin, the world, and Satan in their lives.

God's mercies demand that Christians honor God with their entire life, including their bodies (Rom. 12:1–2). A Christian's body does not belong to himself; it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Because the indwelling Spirit owns the Christian's body, everything done with the body must glorify God. God is glorified when his character is reflected, and his commands are obeyed. Christians' bodies are not canvasses for self-expression but temples of God for worship and service. This is not just a New Testament expectation. God gave revelation to Israel to direct their life and worship as his people, including prohibitions against modifying bodily appearance in accordance with pagan practices (Lev. 19:28; 21:5; Deut. 14:1–2). Though such commands are often dismissed as inapplicable and irrelevant, the God who gave them desired that the external appearance of his people would not imitate pagans. Christians should not be tattooed because tattooing does not honor the temple of the Lord, their bodies.

Christians are to be marked by Christ-like character and actions (Matt. 5:16; Rom. 8:29; Phil. 2:15; 1 Pet. 2:12), growing more like Christ and less like the world (Rom. 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 3:18; 7:1). The Lord says that character and

reputation are better than anything in this world (Prov. 22:1; Eccl. 7:1). A believer may have knowledge and wisdom, but a foolish decision can do great damage (Eccl. 10:1). Christians should not be tattooed because tattooing is inconsistent with Christ-like character.

Christian men and women must be modest (1 Tim. 2:9; 3:2; Titus 2:2, 5). *Modest* means moderate, decent, and proper, not bold, self-assertive, or drawing attention to oneself. Christian modesty in appearance draws attention to a life of Christ-like character (Phil. 2:15; Titus 2:10; 1 Pet. 3:1–6). Christians should not be tattooed because tattooing immodestly draws attention to the body.

Christians must yearn to imitate their God (Eph. 5:1), not the world (1 John 2:15–17). Believers have a new nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and must be controlled by the Spirit through his Word (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18). Saints should not be controlled by the yearnings of their sin nature for the things of worldly culture; their desires must be the same as the Lord's. Christians should not be tattooed because tattooing imitates the world, not their Savior.

Christ commands how Christians should faithfully witness for him: clearly proclaim the gospel message while depending on the Spirit's power for effectiveness (1 Cor. 1:18–2:5); pray for God to work (2 Thess. 3:1); live a Christlike life (1 Pet. 2:11–12); and worship biblically (1 Cor. 14:24–25). Christians must not adapt worldly means to witness for Christ (1 Cor. 2:1–4; 2 Cor. 4:2), because the medium is part of the message. Tattooing the body to witness for Christ yokes belief with unbelief. Our witness should be separated from unbelief and cleansed from the world, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor. 6:14–7:1).

Therefore, the American Council of Christian Churches at its 80th Anniversary, October 19–21, 2021, at Hardingville Bible Church in Monroeville, NJ, resolves to teach Christians that tattooing is contrary to their position in Christ and the worthy character he expects in them (Eph. 4:1, Col. 1:10, 1 Thess. 2:12). We will encourage believers, including those having already received tattoos, to honor the Lord by modest lives and fervent hearts that reflect his likeness and obey his commands. We will lovingly admonish saints that the best way to testify of Christ is by faithful gospel ministry, which includes living a holy life in a dark world.

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<sup>1</sup> Cate Lineberry, "Tattoos: The Ancient and Mysterious History," *Smithsonian Magazine*, January 1, 2007. Accessed October 5, 2021; <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/tattoos-144038580/>.

<sup>2</sup> W. Mark Gustafson noted in 1997 that "tattoos still retain for most of us a certain poke-in-the-eye quality. The strong, predominantly negative reactions which tattoos often elicit from the untattooed—and which seem based primarily on a lingering, perceived association with degradation, criminality, and deviance—persist." "*Inscripta in fronte*: Penal Tattooing in Late Antiquity," *Classical Antiquity*, 16:1 (April 1997), p. 79. This demonstrates that 25 years ago tattooing was not yet accepted in the mainstream of life as it is now; its current acceptance is a very recent phenomenon.



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