

Body Piercing - A Return to Paganism

By Dr. Peter Hammond

In some of the most unexpected places we are confronted by a revival of the old tribal practices of body scarification, body piercing and body mutilation nose rings, eyebrow rings, belly rings, tongue studs, multiple earrings, nipple rings, tattoos and other disfigurements are more than an identifiable sub-culture – it is all part of an aggressive fashion statement which is challenging the Christian Church." Do not cut your bodies ... or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord." Leviticus 19:28

Unfortunately, most Church leaders have remained silent on this practice, even while some youth leaders and Bible College students are giving themselves over to body modification.

"Priests must not shave their heads ... or cut their bodies. They must be holy to their God and must not profane the Name of their God ... they are to be holy."

Leviticus 21:5-6

As Christians, we are called to be holy, set apart and different from the world, consecrated to God. "Everybody's doing it" is hardly an argument to justify Christian involvement. The very fact that pagans practice body piercing should be a compelling enough argument against Christians being conformed to the world.

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." *1 Peter 2:9*

The Scriptures are clear that we must treat our bodies with respect, they are not our own to do with as we wish. They belong to God, who made them and who purchased them with His own blood. Our bodies are to be temples of the Holy Spirit. We are to glorify God with our bodies.

"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ Himself? ... Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, Who is in you, whom

you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honour God with your body." *1 Corinthians 6:15, 19 – 20*

On the other hand, the Bible records how pagans abused their bodies. The false prophets of Baal "slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom until their blood flowed." (1 Kings 18:28).

The demon possessed man of Gadara cut himself with stones and ran around naked (Mark 5:5). It was the custom of the Ishmaelite men to wear gold earrings. (Judges 8:24).

Biblically, a pierced ear is a public indication of permanent slavery. When the Hebrews were led out of slavery in Egypt by Moses, they were urged "take off the gold earrings ... so all the people took off their earrings ... These are your gods, O Israel." Exodus 32: 1-3

After God spoke to Jacob, he instructed his household to get rid of their idols and purify themselves. Along with their stone idols, they buried their earrings.

"So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes' ... so they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them." *Genesis 35:2*

This has always been the response of pagan people when they've embraced the Gospel of Christ. From Papau New Guinea to the Amazon jungle, pagan tribes engage in body scarification, earrings, nose rings, tongue studs, multiple piercings and tattoos. Once converted to Christ, however, these tribes abandon all these body modification practices.

"Fear the Lord your God, serve Him only ... Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; for the Lord your God ... is a jealous God and His anger will burn against you ... Do not test the Lord ... Be sure to keep the commands of the Lord your God and the stipulations and decrees He has given you. Do what is right and good in the Lord's sight, so that it may go well with

you ... in the future, when your sons asks you, 'What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord your God has commanded you?' 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand ..." *Deuteronomy 6:13 – 21*

It is completely inappropriate for a Christian man to wear an earring – the mark of slavery. What may be appropriate for a woman is not necessarily appropriate for a man. What is practiced by the world is seldom acceptable for a Christian.

"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather serve one another in love." *Galatians 5:13*

"Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover up for evil." *1 Peter 2:16*

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." *Galatians 5:1*

If something is prevalent and accepted in the world, that alone should be a compelling argument against Christians adopting their fashions and fads. We are called to be different. We are to honour God with our bodies.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will." *Romans 12: 1-2*

Our bodies matter. They are to be presented to God as holy offerings – in a way that pleases God. We are not to follow the example of the pagans. Making holes in our bodies is hardly respecting them as temples of the Holy Spirit. Permanently disfiguring our bodies is blatant rebellion to our Creator and Redeemer.

"Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul." *1 Peter 2:11*

Part of the Biblical description of a harlot is that "she decked herself with rings and jewelry ... but Me she forgot, declares the Lord." (Hosea 2:13)

"For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin."

Psalm 36:2

"Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord."

Lamentations 3:40

To draw attention to ourselves with these excessive fashion statements is hardly in keeping with the Biblical commands to be humble and modest (Proverbs 21:4; 1 Timothy 2: 9 - 10).

"Your beauty should not come from outward adornment ... instead it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit."

1 Peter 3: 3 - 4

The present obsession of many with body modification is a revival of tribalism. It involves a painful initiation rite, which produces an identification with a certain tribe, clan or sub-culture. The Kacipo people in Sudan stretch their lower lips to fit a saucer-sized pottery and they stretch their ear lobes to create huge holes and long earlobes. Amongst the Nuba tribes in Sudan, multiple earrings, nose rings, body scarification and body painting are prevalent. The Dinka and Nuer tribes in Sudan are easily identifiable by the pattern of scars across their foreheads.

Amongst the Hindus - nose studs, belly rings, toe rings, tongue studs and eyebrow rings are common. Tattoos amongst the Amazon tribes identify the various members of a given tribe. In Papua New Guinea, all kinds of body scarification, tattoos and body mutilation distinguish the various tribes.

Among the tribes in Borneo, tattooing is mainly associated with head hunting (a visible sign of success) for men and the coming of age of women - in some cases it symbolizes their social status. Tattoos are part of the "rites of passage" and next to blackened teeth and long ear lobes, intricate tattoos on fingers, hands,

lower arms, thighs, calves, and feet served as important elements of beauty for women.

A pagan view on the subject: "A tattoo is a complex signifier: it signals class; it signals sexuality; and it has specific content as a signifier: a depiction of an animal, a person, an abstract tribal design. The most usual motifs are signifiers of power and masculinity... But what the tattoo signals above all is the power one seizes over one's own body... To be branded or tattooed shows also that you have the requisite guts to join the group. It is not the most extreme or painful form of initiation, but it serves as a sign of pain and hence of resolution." (Crispen Sartwell)

"Tattooing is often a magical rite in the more traditional cultures, and the tattooist is respected as a priest or shaman." (Michelle Delio, *Tattoo: The Exotic Art of Skin Decoration*, p. 73)

And in the same way, eyebrow rings, nose rings, multiple earrings, nipple rings, belly rings and tongue studs distinguish identifiable sub-cultures in New York, London, Paris and other capitals of what is meant to be civilization.

"The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves."

Isaiah 3:9

The interesting thing is that while so many Westerners rush into new age religions, body piercing and occultism, many millions in the tribes mentioned in Africa, South America, Asia and the Pacific islands, are being converted to Christ and are abandoning the body piercing practices of their pagan past.

It is very clear who are the Christians and who are the pagans in these mission fields. The pagans wear little or no clothing and they engage in a variety of body scarification, body piercing and/or tattoos. On the other hand, the Christians are easily identifiable – they wear clothes and they don't engage in any body modification.

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me." *Galatians 2:20*

Of course, some older people will still have the scars and the holes – testimony of the pagan past before they were converted – but all earrings, eyebrow rings, nose rings and such like have been removed. And their children are free from these pagan disfigurements. It is unheard of in these areas for Christians to voluntarily pierce or tattoo their bodies. In fact, they are shocked when Western men visit them with ponytails and earrings.

"You are the children of the Lord your God. Do not cut yourselves or shave the front of your heads for the dead, for you are a people holy to the Lord your God." *Deuteronomy 14: 1 – 2*

How then can we explain the widespread toleration and even practice of body piercing in far too many Christian Churches and even Bible Colleges and ministries in the West?

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. Do not deceive yourselves"
1 Corinthians 3: 16 – 18

Generally it starts off by assuming that if an earring is appropriate for a woman, then it is appropriate for men as well. Some women then reasoned that if men were going to wear an earring, then they would wear multiple earrings. And as so many in the world are wearing nose rings, eyebrow rings, belly rings, tongue studs, etc. then why shouldn't we?

"You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." *James 4:4*

As so many Christians have immersed themselves in pagan music, immoral videos and worldly amusements, it should not surprise us that so many of our

youth are indistinguishable from their non-Christian friends. The mind-rotting, brain-numbing, soul-destroying trash that fills the ears, eyes and minds of our youth should be sufficient explanation for the backslidden, immoral and un-Christian behaviour, which now even includes professing Christians disfiguring their bodies with pagan piercings.

"There is no fear of God before their eyes." *Romans 3:18*

It is time for Youth leaders and Pastors to study what the Scripture teaches on this subject and then to boldly, and without compromise, preach on these passages and call those people who are defiling their bodies to repent. We need to take God's Word seriously.

"Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." *2 Corinthians 7:1*

"May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus." *1 Thessalonians 5:23*