

Removing Your Tattoos

EPH 4.17-24

Bryon Widner is a recovering racist.

Born in Albuquerque, NM. Parents divorced when young. Was runaway & was bullied. Became skinhead – (~ age 14) – violence, shaved head & combat boots earned respect & fear. Late teens/early 20s, moved to Indiana. Early 2000 (early 20s), met Brien James in Indianapolis; both arrested (charges dropped) for assault at a skinhead party.

Joined Outlaw Hammerskins (2001), moved to Lafayette, IN. Founded Hoosier State Skinheads. A founder of Vinlander Social Club, most violent skinhead org in USA. Credo was version of Odinism (Viking religion named for Norse god Odin); preaches that path to heaven (Valhalla) = die fighting for your race. Alliance w/ Blood & Honour USA. Reputation as heavy drinker, easily provoked brawler. Notorious recruiter & enforcer for Vinlanders; cut victims' faces w/ straight razor. By age 30 (ca 2007), spent 4 yrs in jail.

Number of tattoos grew w/skinhead activity. Across right knuckles was "HATE." Base of neck, "Blood & Honour." Swastikas on scalp. "Thug Reich" on belly. Warrior rune on face = willingness to **kill** for his race. Heavy black arrow above right eye = willingness to **die** for his race.

2005 (May) met Julie Larsen, single mother of 4, late 20s, at Nordic Fest (annual Memorial Day Klan rally in Dawson Springs, KY (E of Eddyville in W Ky). She was living in Ironwood, MI (extreme NW Michigan, on peninsula, near WI border); he was in Sidney, OH (W-C Ohio, N of Dayton). Began calling one another.

Married about 7 mos later (Jan 13, 2006). By this time both were having doubts about involvement in White Supremacy mvmt. She saw skinhead men sexually abusing underage girls @ Nordic Fest. He was beginning to enjoy family life. Son Tyrson (named for Norse god of Justice) born Nov 2006.

Summer 2007 got drunk @ Vinlander outing. Collapsed, hospitalized; Julie found him, took home. She wanted Vinlanders gone; they pressured. Once attempted suicide. Late 2007, Vinlanders issued ultimatum; Widner resigned. Began trying to piece together normal life. Still received threats from Vinlanders. Could not find job because of reputation & appearance. Considered self-removal by acid. Really depressed.

Already (spring 2007) she contacted Daryle Lamont Jenkins, 43-yr-old black man, runs anti-hate org in Philadelphia. Referred to T J Leyden, former neo-Nazi skinhead Marine, left mvmt in 1996. Referred to Joseph Roy of Southern Poverty Law Center (Montgomery, AL civil-rights group). Met in MI (March 2007).

Spring 2008, moved to TN, near Julie's father. Rented a country house, joined a church, got odd jobs. SPLC found donor who put up \$35,000 for plastic surgery for Bryon. June 2009, met Dr Bruce Shack, plastic surgeon @ Vandy. June '09-Oct '10 had 25 procedures (every 2-3 weeks) using laser. Resulted in intense pain, swelling – Widner says worst he ever felt (even worse than being beaten up when locked up in jail w/ several black men). Writhed in pain for days; cried like a baby.

Eventually removed tattoos on face & neck. Other racist tattoos being covered. Easily sunburns; has migraines; pigmentation problems. Have moved to undisclosed location, under police/FBI watch. Now has GED; taking classes @ community college; still have financial problems.

Story serves as an excellent illustration of changes we undergo as Christians. **Condition** of becoming a Christian is repentance. **Consequence** is transformation. First, is a decisive break w/ past; other is the slow, painful process that results. Our text describes this.

Old Man & New Man – Ephesians 4.17-24

1. What they were (v 17-19)

a. Old Self

- i. **Futile** (ματαιος – vanity; emptiness; futility) – cf Ro 1.21; good = bad
 - ii. **Dark** – cf Ro 1.21; cease to think of things as wrong
 - iii. **Excluded** (απαλλοτριω – alienated; treated as an alien)
 - iv. **Ignorance** – self-induced; the cause of their alienation
 - v. **Hardened** (πωρωσις – hardening, covering with stone) – insensitivity to truth
 - vi. **Callous** (απαλγεω – become callous, feel no pain) – insensitivity to wrong-doing
 - vii. **Immoral** (sensual; impure; greedy) – evidence of their callosity; cf Ro 1.24
- b. **Like a computer virus** – invades the most critical parts of a computer. Nothing else works because the main components can't work.

2. What they were becoming (v 20-24)

a. New Self

- i. **Relearned** (learned, taught) – contrast ignorance of old self
- ii. **Truth** (basis of learning; only in Jesus) – contrast darkness and futility; “Jesus” implies some knowledge of his life & character
- iii. **Lay aside** (αποπιθημι – put off, remove, as a garment) – what it means to know the truth in Jesus – put aside the old immoral ways
- iv. **Put on** (ενδυσω – get into, enter into, as clothing) – new self
- v. **Renewed mind** (inside out)= ανανεωω = literally, to make new in the sense of being recent; emph present reality of salvation; just as sin began inside, its ending must begin inside
- vi. **Holy** (righteousness; holiness; truth)

b. Note

- i. Be in reality what they were in calling
- ii. Let the creator recreate his creation
- iii. Change from within

Paul's Applications – Ephesians 4.25-5.20

1. **From lies to truth (4.25)** – cf Zch 8.16;
2. **From anger to control (4.26f)** – cf Ps 4.4; My anger v your temper
3. **From thief to worker (4.28)** – we can steal by taking something; or by not giving what is due
4. **From filth to edification (4.29-32)** – Do our words bless or embarrass?
5. **From darkness to light (5.3-14)** – Note “silly talk”, cf Mt 12.36
6. **From foolish to wise (5.15-20)** – “There is no resurrection for killed time.” We are sometimes like people who wait through 2-3 green lights just be sure it's safe

On the Removal of Tattoos

1. **Conscious choice to acquire** – We don't become habitual sinners by accident.
2. **Painful process** – Pain slowly eats at us, destroying our humanity.
3. **Conscious choice to remove** – Must make a clean break.
4. **Painful-er process** – Removing sin & the selfish nature behind it is just plain hard!
5. **Lengthy process** – Not an overnight process.
6. **Goal-oriented** – We must have a plan.

Conclusion – Bryon Widner is a recovering racist. All who are in Christ are recovering sinners. The day you obeyed Jesus as Lord, you made a clean break from your past. But the marks of sin remain, and require a slow, painful removal process. Where are you in this process?