

A Study Of Moral Issues: Dancing

Introduction. Ephesians 4:1 says, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.” This is a high and holy calling or vocation. Walking worthy means avoiding many of the common moral issues that torment Christians. This lesson will examine several scriptural problems with dancing, with the intention of making us holier people.

I. *Dancing In The Bible*

A. Dances of religious devotion.

1. Dancing is not inherently wrong or immoral, or else God could not have condoned it. In the Bible, dancing was an expression of religious enthusiasm and praise to God (Psalm 149:3; 150:4). Dancing was also a traditional form of celebration among the Jews (Judges 11:34; 1 Samuel 18:6; Psalm 30:11; Ecclesiastes 3:4; Luke 15:25). On occasion, God’s people would dance for joy over some great and notable event:
 - a) After crossing the Red Sea, the children of Israel danced (Exodus 15:20).
 - b) When the ark was brought to Jerusalem, David danced (2 Samuel 6:14).
2. Such dancing cannot be compared with the modern dance. These dances more resembled stately marches, with no sexual overtones. They were never performed for amusement. They were always performed in the open daylight, men with men, and women with women.
 - a) “While the mode of dancing is not known in detail, it is clear that men and women did not generally dance together” (H.M. Wolf, Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, II:11-12).
 - b) “Even on those occasions where both sexes participated in the sacred professional dances, they always danced separately” (Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary, p. 276).

B. Dances of sinful merrymaking.

1. Since the dance is a flexible medium, and is capable of expressing a broad range of human emotions, it can also be used to portray what is suggestive and lewd. The children of Israel danced in a depraved and unrestrained fashion before the golden calf. In the absence of Moses, they had quickly reverted to paganism, with all its attendant emphasis on sexual promiscuity and immorality (Exodus 32:19-25; 1 Corinthians 10:5-7).
2. The daughter of Herodias danced before Herod, and her seductive charms were so great that the king rashly promised to give her anything she desired. This kind of dancing was filled with sexual overtones, designed to subdue the reasoning of the mind and arouse the lust of the flesh (Matthew 14:6-8).

II. *What Is Wrong With The Modern Dance?*

A. It appeals to human sensuality.

1. In his book, *World History of the Dance*, Curt Sach studies the background of dancing. He says that all dances, like any other art form, attempt to say something. The steps, positions, and movements are designed to convey a message. According to Sach, the whole range of modern dances are

designed to express “lovemaking.” George Bernard Shaw called dancing, “A perpendicular expression of a horizontal desire.”

2. The Encyclopedia Britannica confirms this by stating, “To a certain extent all dancing is sexually stimulating ...”
 3. Dancing’s charm is based on sex appeal. Dr. Leta S. Hollingsworth, professor of education at Columbia University, confirms this view. Although she approves of dancing, she still says that dancing “affords a partial satisfaction to the sex impulse which (among adolescents) cannot as yet achieve full and specific expression ...”
 4. Someone might respond, “Dancing has sex appeal. What’s wrong with that?” It is true that the sexual relationship is a gift from God, and in and of itself it is not evil. Yet, God-given desires also have God-given boundaries. Within the relationship of marriage, sex is beautiful, glorious, and fulfilling (Genesis 2:24; 1 Corinthians 7:1-4; Hebrews 13:4). Outside the relationship of marriage, sex is sinful (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 5:3-5; Colossians 3:5).
 5. On March 13, 2004, school officials in Bend, Oregon had to stop a dance early because the student’s moves got a little too racy. Mary McDermott, a teacher and Bend High School’s activities director, said, “Quite honestly, it’s like having sex with your clothes on.” “There’s no other way to dance besides being up against the other person,” said Matt Baker, 17, a senior. “It’s just the way people dance these days.” Baker said it was unfair for students to pay \$10 to get into the dance, only to soon have it end. “There were no clothes coming off or anything,” he said. But the school had heard plenty of parental and community complaints about inappropriate dancing, McDermott said. “At some point you have to take a stand and send a message to the kids and say this is not okay,” said Marshall Jackson, an assistant principal. Amen!
- B. It is lascivious and lustful.
1. Lasciviousness has to do with a lack of proper restraint of the desires of the flesh. In general, it describes actions that tend to produce lust. Consider the following definitions of the word “lasciviousness” (*aselgeia*):
 - a) Strong defines it as “licentiousness, filthy, lasciviousness, wantonness.”
 - b) Arndt and Gingrich define it as “licentiousness, debauchery, sensuality ... give oneself over to debauchery ... live licentiously ... follow the inclination to sensuality ... Esp. of sexual excesses sensuality ... indecent conduct ...”
 - c) Thayer defines it as “unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness, wantonness, outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence ... plural ‘wanton (acts or) manners, as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females, etc.’”
 - d) Vine adds that the word denotes “excess, licentiousness, absence of restraint, indecency, wantonness ... the prominent idea is shameless conduct.”
 2. Anything, therefore, that produces lewd emotions, creates evil thoughts, or excites unlawful sexual desire is lasciviousness. Without question, dancing is dangerous for a Christian. Dancing arouses emotions that can have a rightful fulfillment only within the marital relationship. It is sinful for persons not

- married to each other to engage in those actions which inordinately stimulate their sexual desires (Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 4:17-19; 1 Peter 4:2-4).
3. "Lust" describes any strong desire or craving. The English word originally was a neutral term, but now it is mostly applied to sexual passion. The sexually oriented movements of dancing, the physical contact, and handling the bodies of the opposite sex encourages lust which leads to sin (James 1:14-15).
 - a) I try to be fair with dancing, and I believe that there are less lewd types of dancing, such as ballroom dancing or the Texas Two-Step/line dancing.
 - b) However, if I am not participating in these dances, I do not want men putting their hands on my wife, and I do not want to put my hands on another woman like that. If my wife and I are dancing, then I have to consider the effect of the environment on me and the effect of my influence on them.
 4. Outside of the relationship of marriage, such lust is sinful (Matthew 5:28; Romans 13:13-14). Many of the body movements involved in today's dances are highly suggestive, and often provoke lustful admiration from others, whether they are also dancing or merely watching. If any physical contact between a male and female causes one to have desires that are not proper, one must not engage in that practice.
- C. It is associated with evil.
1. Dancing results in a lowering of morals and a weakened spirituality. It is often the doorway to other sins. We should avoid anything so closely associated with evil (Matthew 7:15-20; 1 Corinthians 15:33; 1 Thessalonians 5:22).
 2. Besides provoking lustful desires, here is what can happen at a dance:
 - a) Some can drink alcohol resulting in drunkenness.
 - (1) "Revellings" or "carousings" is listed as a "work of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21.
 - (2) "Revel" is defined as "to rebel, carouse, a wild party or celebration." In 1 Peter 4:3, New Testament writers always associated dancing with sexual immorality and drunkenness (cp. Noah, Genesis 9:20-23; Lot, Genesis 19:30-38).
 - b) Some can wear indecent and immodest clothing.
 - (1) Every Christian must demonstrate a modest decorum in dress (1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:3-4).
 - (2) We need to be content to follow after what we are supposed to follow after (2 Timothy 2:22).
 - c) Some can commit fornication after the dance.
 - (1) To "flee fornication" means to get far away from it, not get as close as possible to it (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).
 - (2) But many kinds of dancing leads the one participating in it closer to fornication, not further from it.
- D. It destroys one's influence for good.
1. Marshall Keeble said, "A dancing foot and a praying knee are not found on the same leg."

2. We set a good example (Matthew 5:16; Luke 14:34-35; Philippians 2:15). The world is watching. Others are quick to notice any inconsistency between our creed and our conduct. Dancing destroys your influence for good.
 - a) From “A Teenager’s Answer to ‘Shall I Go to The Prom?’” by Sherry Burgess: “With a week and one-half to go, everyone at school was buzzing with excitement. Then, one night, I suddenly thought of an argument I just could not rationalize away: my sister! You see, I have a little sister who is 12 years-old. She is a Christian and is really trying hard. Although the whole school might not mind if I went to the Prom, and although no one else might find out, there would be one special person who would know for sure that I went — my younger sister. I imagined Melissa thinking as she entered high school, ‘If Sherry went to the Prom, then why can’t I go to this dance too?’ Suddenly, I wasn’t concerned only about my own soul, but was also the possibility of causing my little sister to stumble by my actions and being finally lost (Matthew 18:6).”
 - b) There have been Christians who have went to their Proms with non-Christian dates and did not dance. They went because it was the thing to do. Their picture was taken, and then put in the yearbook. From that day forward, any time someone saw that picture, they would assume that the couple danced at the Prom. What else would they conclude?
 3. Consider this another way. Every school-sanctioned dance must have a chaperone. Why would they need these if it were a wholesome activity? Could a Christian chaperone a dance? If you, as a parent, could not in good conscience, chaperone a dance, how could you let your children attend it? The very fact that some say, “I am just going to the Prom; I am not going to dance,” is clear evidence they are unsure (Romans 14:23; Psalm 1:1). If dances or the Prom is a wholesome environment, it would be right to engage in whatever took place there.
- E. It places a stumbling block before others.
1. Someone might say, “I can dance without any ill effects. It does not cause me to think dirty thoughts. It does not give rise to unlawful desires.”
 2. First of all, anyone who would say this is not being honest with themselves. However, for the sake of argument, let’s grant that they are being truthful. Now the question is, “What effect does dancing have on my partner?” We must avoid causing lust (Romans 14:13, 21; 1 Corinthians 8:9).

Conclusion. When a Christian obeys the gospel, his life is forever altered. God’s people are representatives of purity and holiness. I am certainly not against having fun, but the subject of dancing legitimately calls for a heart examination. Does dancing increase my love for God and His word? Does dancing increase my spirituality and make me a better Christian? Or does dancing arouse lustful desires within me or my partner? Does it serve as a starting point to baser desires? If Christ should return, would He be pleased with me for being at such a function? We are “children of light,” so take the designation seriously (Ephesians 5:8; 11 Thessalonians 5:5) and live in as holy a way as possible.