

# I. Inappropriate Dancing

## A. Introduction

When you become a Christian, everything takes on a new perspective.

*2 Corinthians 5:17*

The mature Christian considers what the Bible has to say about every activity in life and conforms to it. This is not as easy for young Christians and teenagers who are easily led by popular trends or typical behavior among their peers.

Dancing is one of those activities to which a Christian needs to give serious thought. Questions will naturally arise:

- What exactly is dancing?
- Is anything wrong with dancing?
- Are certain kinds of dancing acceptable to God?
- Is all dancing sinful?
- Should I attend a dance?

We will try to answer these concerns as logically and scripturally as possible. We will also be frank and open about what will prove to be a somewhat sensitive subject. It is not our goal to shock or embarrass anyone, but we need to be clear and direct about what the Bible calls sin.

You may have heard sermons about this subject with all kinds of reasoning on the matter. For this study, our approach will be the same as for all issues in Christian morality. This lesson will clearly state the subject at hand, present Bible principles at play, and challenge the reader to make the proper spiritual application in daily life. Human reasoning, conjecture, prejudice, and stereotyping should not be allowed to cloud our thinking on the matter.

## B. What Is Dancing?

According to Merriam-Webster, the noun and verb forms of "dance" are "a series of rhythmic and patterned bodily movements usually performed to music; to move or seem to move up and down or about in a quick or lively manner." That covers a pretty broad range of activities. With a definition this general, dancing could include:

- Children playing leap-frog or musical chairs
- Ice skating and roller skating
- Gymnastics and other athletic activities
- Aerobic exercise routines
- Square dancing and line dancing
- Ethnic dances, such as clogging or polka
- Ballroom dancing, such as a waltz or tango
- Modern dance, such as the twist or the jitterbug
- Theatrical dancing, such as choreography, ballet, or tap dancing

Like painting, sculpture, or music, dancing has become an art form used for the expression of feelings and emotions. Cultures and societies have used dance to express joy, jubilation, and victory. It has been used to arouse people both to love and to war or to seek the favor of gods. It is even sometimes used for mere entertainment and exercise.

These things are not sinful on their own (with the exception of seeking to please a false god). There is nothing wrong with expressing your feelings, having fun, or exercising in a number of different ways. We would have no scriptural basis to make a blanket statement that all or a certain kind of dancing as listed above is wrong in every circumstance. Our study will ultimately show that any sinfulness of dancing will be derived not from a specific scriptural decree for the prohibition of dancing in some form but on the basis of the principles of godliness.

Let's turn our attention now to the Bible.

## C. Dancing In The Bible

The Bible makes several specific references to dancing and some indications of dance-like behavior. We'll take a look at some of these now.

*Exodus 15:20*

At the defeat of the Egyptians, Miriam and the women dance and play timbrels while praising God.

*Exodus 32:19-25*

When Aaron makes the golden calf, the people dance around it with a lack of self control.

*Judges 21:21-23*

Dances were used in ancient marriage rituals.

*2 Samuel 6:14*

David dances in worship at the return of the Ark Of The Covenant

*Psalms 149, 150*

Dance in worship is prescribed.

*Ecclesiastes 3:4*

There is a time to dance.

*Matthew 11:16, 17*

Jesus makes an application from the dances of little children at play.

*Mark 6:22-25*

The dancing of Herodius' daughter was so provocative, Herod makes a rash and tragic vow.

*Acts 3:8; 14:10*

When healed, those who once were lame went about leaping and rejoicing.

Our observation of the references sited in scripture shows us that sometimes dancing is associated with wholesomeness and sometimes it is associated with wickedness. Note the distinction:

### In wholesomeness:

- Dancing is seen in the Bible as sometimes a means of expressing joy or simply having fun.
- Dancing is seen in Old Testament worship and praise to God.

### In wickedness:

- Dancing is seen in the Bible as sometimes a part of uncontrolled behavior, as in the idolatry in Exodus 32.
- Dancing is seen as being provocative and a part of vileness and deceit, as when Herod lost his composure through the compelling dances of the girl in Mark 6.

So how are we to know when dancing is sinful? For this answer, let's turn again to biblical instruction concerning lust.

## D. The Sin Of Lasciviousness

In our study of morality, we have many times used the works of the flesh as a starting point. Let's review:

*Galatians 5:19-21* Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Once again, we focus on the word "lasciviousness." It's a big word and not one you hear on the radio every day. We've considered its meaning before; let's look a little deeper. The original word in Greek is ASELGEIA and is translated as follows in Galatians 5:

- "lewdness" (New King James)
- "sensuality" (New American Standard)
- "debauchery" (New International)

- "licentiousness" (Revised Standard)
- "lasciviousness" (King James)

Literally meaning "without restraint," J. H. Thayer defines this as unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness, wantonness, outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence, and continues to describe it as "wanton acts or manners as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females, etc." Moreover, English synonyms are as follows:

- Lustful = "usually intense or unbridled sexual desire"
- Lewd = "sexually unchaste or licentious"
- Licentious = "lacking legal or moral restraints; especially disregarding sexual restraints"

Lasciviousness is condemned in scripture as that which defiles a man.

*Mark 7:21-23*

*1 Peter 4:2, 3*

Anything which excites the lust of the flesh whether by words, bodily movements, or unchaste touching is therefore considered sinful.

Note that, by definition, the sin of lasciviousness would condemn any form of dancing that would involve either of these two characteristics:

### **1. Indecent bodily movements**

Lasciviousness is applicable to any form of dance that, outside the bonds of marriage, would provoke lustful thoughts by bodily movements. This will include any dancing that draws visual attention to those body parts pertaining to sexuality. This condemns the typical popular fast dance that involves swirling and gyrating the hips, buttocks, and pelvis and shaking the breasts.

### **2. Unchaste handling of males and females**

Lasciviousness is applicable to any form of dance that, outside the bonds of marriage, would involve touching body areas that are sensitive to sexual stimulation. This will include any dancing that brings couples too close or touching in full frontal contact. This condemns the typical popular slow dance that involves a full body embrace for long time with swaying and rubbing the bodies together.

These are basically the very kinds of modern dancing that are typically engaged at many high school proms, sock hops, holiday parties, discotheques, and nightspots. The sin of lasciviousness rules out this kind of dancing, and the faithful Christian will not participate.

Lasciviousness enters into not only popular modern nightclub dancing but can actually enter any of the styles or forms of dancing previously listed. For example, the hokey pokey of childhood games is innocent enough when a foot, elbow, or head-bone is the body part "shaken all about." When the dance calls for the "tail-bone" to be shaken all about, it crosses the line. We may think it's cute and harmless for children to do this, but we are effectively teaching them this kind of bodily movement in dance is okay for them when they get older.

Dancing can send a very powerful message and hold a strong influence upon us. We have seen in scripture where dancing aided the loss of self-control, lowered inhibitions, and resulted in irreverent behavior (Exodus 32:25). Scripture has also shown us that dancing can cloud our thinking and provoke us to do things we would not normally do if we were not otherwise distracted by desires of the flesh (Mark 6:22). It is very easy for young couples struggling to remain pure while unmarried to engage in unlawful sexual activity after being so strongly stimulated with dance.

## **E. The Sin Of Lust**

Though we may not actively participate in lascivious dancing, we may still sin by watching others do so. This is lust. In the original New Testament language, the word is EPITHUMIA and defined by Thayer as desire, craving, longing, desire for what is forbidden, lust. Lust is a passive sin: just a look and an unlawful, unwholesome desire. The problem is that lust, unchecked, will always look for a way to move into action, fulfilling the unlawful desire.

The arousal of lust within us is clearly condemned in scripture. Be certain of this: if scripture condemns it, it is sin:

*Matthew 5:28*

*Romans 13:13, 14*

*Galatians 5:16*

*Ephesians 2:2, 3*

*2 Timothy 2:22*

*Titus 2:12*

## **F. Guilt By Participation Or By Association**

The question usually comes to a high school teenager: "Should I go to the prom?" This question has effectively already been answered. What are you going to do at the prom? If you will go to engage in dancing that our study has shown causes lust, you will sin. If you will go and watch others dancing lustfully, you will sin.

Granted, all such events have different situations. Perhaps the event includes a dinner and a time for conversation. These are certainly wholesome activities. Perhaps also when the dancing occurs, the setting will allow you to distance yourself from it. On the other hand, maybe not. If inappropriate dancing is basically all that is going on, you need to ask yourself what you're doing there.

The Christian life is lived in the middle of a sinful society; sin is all around us every day. We can simply walk down the street in public and be among people cursing, drinking, and dressing immodestly. We would have to live as hermits to avoid all such association. However, know that there is a difference between incidental association and deliberately and unnecessarily placing yourself in the midst of sinful activity.

For a similar example, I may go to a restaurant that serves liquor. However, the establishment not only serves liquor but also food, and not everyone there is drinking. No one will doubt my conviction as a Christian if I eat there, even though some around me are drinking. Conversely, consider going to a bar where basically all they serve is liquor and people are there for that purpose alone. A faithful Christian would be out of place there, even if he abstained from drinking.

Though we cannot control what other people around us are doing, God still calls us to be an example.

*Philippians 2:15*

## **G. Acceptable Dancing**

So are there any kinds of modern dances that are acceptable for Christians? The answer is a simple and qualified "yes:" any dance that does not involve lasciviousness or any other enticement to sin. This would include the following:

- Dancing in privacy that arouses sexual desire between lawfully married couples
- Dancing that involves steps and turns without lewd movement, unchaste touching, or indecent exposure
- Dancing that involves arm and head motions that do not cause lust
- Dancing for physical exercise that does not involve licentious behavior

This may include a good number of modern dance forms, such as clogging, line dancing, square dancing, polka, gymnastics, and some ballroom dances. However, before casting yourself into these activities, consider these dangers:

### **1. Dangers and pitfalls**

Dancing often presents a temptation for inappropriate dress. For example ballet and gymnastics are typically performed today wearing apparel that is indecent due to tightness to reveal detail of bodily form or scantiness to be inadequately covered. Take the moral stand that, if you choose to become involved in these art forms that are otherwise not lascivious, you will always do so dressed modestly as a Christian should.

Dancing that only involves harmless stepping with innocent arm and head movements is perhaps safe enough when engaged only with diligent Christians. However, for example, consider what can happen if engaged in otherwise clean line dancing with others not so diligent. It takes only a little extra bodily movement for them to turn it into something lustful, and then, there you are in the middle of it. Be careful not to set yourself up for a bad situation.

Some ballroom dances are not lustful in nature. The waltz, for example, performed with discretion, is such an example. However, if dancing with someone other than your spouse, it so very easily becomes more than you bargain for, if the stance becomes too close or the hand position becomes too familiar. If you cannot keep this in propriety, it can become sin in an instant. It would be better to stay away from needless temptation. Furthermore, if the first song is a waltz,

what will you do if the next is a tango? Being one of the most provocative dances, there's hardly a wholesome way of performing it.

## H. Excuses Used To Justify Lewd Dancing

### 1. "Dancing may arouse other people, but I don't react that way."

Someone may say this to justify going to a dance just to watch. To begin, the sincerity of such a statement could be legitimately called into question. We need to be completely honest with ourselves. Do not deceive yourself into thinking you are so strong morally that immoral behavior does not affect you. The very fact that it doesn't indicates a problem. Even if you are not caused to lust when watching lewd dancing, you're watching others sin, and that should bother you. If you derive any enjoyment from the sins of others, you have sinned, yourself.

*Romans 1:32*

### 2. "I can't control what other people think."

This demonstrates a selfish and inconsiderate attitude that always assumes the problem is someone else's. Just because we can't force a person to think right, that is no reason to encourage them to think wrong. We have a responsibility not to contribute to another's moral corruption; we must not be a stumbling block.

*Matthew 18:6, 7*

### 3. "Nothing is wrong with it if it is closely supervised and done in moderation."

Sin supervised is still sin; sin does not become less sinful if regulated. God does not make allowances for us to sin with moderation. Can we practice sin as long as we don't go overboard? This is absurd.

### 4. "Dancing to me is just a way of getting good exercise."

If you wish to dance for exercise, it is completely possible to do so without lewdness. There are many alternative forms of exercise that do not excite the lusts of the flesh in yourself or others.

### 5. "Dancing is approved in scripture."

You will never find lasciviousness and fleshly lust approved in scripture. When Jephthah returned home from war, his daughter met him dancing for joy. The text would suggest the dance she performed was neither lewd or lustful. This is the kind of dancing approved in scripture.

*Judges 11:34*

### 6. "Everyone does it."

From the outset, we established that what everyone else in world is doing is not our standard for moral behavior. Those of us claiming to be godly will take a stand against lewd dancing, even if it makes us appear to be oddballs of society.

## I. Conclusion

We can be sure of two things concerning lust:

- It is wrong to have fleshly lusts in our hearts.
- It is wrong to conduct ourselves in any way as to excite fleshly lusts in others.

We can be sure of two things concerning lewd dancing:

- Observing it causes fleshly lust in our hearts.
- Performing it excites fleshly lusts in others.

The conclusion is obvious: lewd dancing is sinful.

Dancing is as natural a behavior as walking and talking. In fact, a small child who is not yet even able to speak or walk on his own will twitch his legs and wave his arms when he hears music. This does not justify lascivious behavior. God always expects us to keep all natural urges under control and gives us legitimate and wholesome outlets for them all.