

Christians and the Modern Dance: Old Timer's Scruple or Old Fashioned Sin?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from an outline by Mark Copeland)

Introduction:

- A. Lesson One was entitled: "Just Don't Tell the Preacher!" and addressed the matter of parents permitting their children to go to dances as long as they don't tell the preacher.
 - 1. One young woman observed afterward: "With all that TR has going for the kids, how can their parents set them up for failure like that?!"
 - 2. I had stated that I planned to do a lesson on the Christian and the modern dance. At the elders' suggestion, I have moved the presentation of the lesson from May 6 to April 15.
 - 3. We are going to consider the question of the Christian's participation in the modern dance; is it just a scruple of old fashioned Christians, or is it really a sinful practice?
- B. We will consider the following in this study:
 - 1. Dancing is a form of the sin of lasciviousness
 - 2. Dancing is universally recognized as an expression of overt sexuality
 - 3. Dancing does harm to a Christian's influence
 - 4. The modern dance is not endorsed in the Bible
 - 5. Answering those who defend Christian involvement in modern dance
- C. When one becomes a Christian, all old practices need to be considered in light of their compatibility with being a Christian
 - 1. 2Cor. 5:17
 - 2. This also applies to many social activities which before may have considered harmless, but one learns may not be proper for Christians
 - 3. 1Peter 4:2-3

I. THE SIN OF LASCIVIOUSNESS

- A. Lasciviousness is condemned as a work of the flesh - Gal. 5:19 (KJV, ASV)
 - 1. Translated "lewdness" in the NKJV
 - 2. Translated "sensuality" in the NAS
 - 3. Translated "debauchery" in the NIV
 - 4. Translated "licentiousness" in the RSV
 - 5. As that which defiles a man - Mark 7:21-23 (KJV)
- B. Lasciviousness defined
 - 1. The Greek word is aselgia, defined by Thayer as "unbridled lust; wanton acts or manners (including) filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females"
 - 2. The English word lascivious is defined as "exciting sexual desires; salacious"
 - 3. Anything which excites the lust of the flesh (words, bodily movements, unchaste behavior) is considered sinful; this applies to the stirring up of sexual desires and sensual pleasures outside the bond of marriage

4. The Bible recognizes there is a need and a place for sexual expression, but limits it to married persons - Heb. 13:4
5. Exciting and enticing of lust between those not married is sinful, condemned by Jesus in Matt. 5:28
 - a. It is wrong to lust for another person
 - b. It is equally wrong to arouse lust in another person

II. THE SIN OF DANCING

A. Non-Christians recognize dancing as inciting lustful thoughts

1. "The popular teen-age dances of the mid-20th century have no set steps; the dancers respond spontaneously to the beat of the musicians. The degree of satisfaction attained by young people "twisting" or "shaking" to the blare of amplified music in dance halls, further enlivened by psychedelic lighting, is different from the pleasure derived by their elders waltzing to the 'Blue Danube' - but it is only a difference of age and time. Fundamentally, both age groups are enjoying the pleasure of dancing in their own way. The end product is doubtless the same - physical pleasure in the activity of dancing and sexual awareness of a partner, whether embraced or half-consciously observed." - Encyclopedia Britannica, "The Art Of Dance", Vol. 5, p. 455-456 (1979 edition)
2. "...The social dance has usually been the result of joint physical exuberance and sex stimuli..." - Collier's Encyclopedia, "Dance", Vol. 7, p. 683 (1964 edition)
3. "Another motive for the dance is the sexual motive - the dance has always been used as a means of expressing sexual desire and as a means of wooing. We find this same sex motive in the modern ballroom dance, which has now degenerated into dull and stupid forms, but it is a legitimate opportunity for contact." - Dance We Must (1938, reprinted 1950), p. 6 (from a series of lectures given by Ted Shawn at George Peabody College For Teachers)
4. "All ballroom dancing in pairs looks toward intercourse. In this respect the Puritans were dead right. The development of no-contact dances has come about because one doesn't now need a social excuse to embrace a girl, but as an excitant it need not involve contact at all - in fact, dances like flamenco or the twist are far more erotic than a clinch because you aren't too close to see one another. At its best this sort of dance is simply intercourse by remote control." - The Joy Of Sex, Alex Comfort, p. 162 (1972)
5. The Roman orator Cicero says: "No man who is sober dances, unless he is out of his mind, either when alone or in any decent society, for dancing is the companion of wanton conviviality, dissoluteness, and luxury." - New Unger's Bible Dictionary (1988)
6. "Dancing: The vertical expression of a horizontal desire legalized by music." (George Bernard Shaw)

B. Common sense teaches that dancing is lustful

1. What would be your reaction if you saw an entire dance floor with people of the same sex dancing together?
 - a. If dancing was morally neutral with no sexual overtones, there would be no reaction at all

- b. Most would be surprised, suspecting they had stumbled into a "gay" dance
 - 2. If we would view that dance as an expression of gay sensuality, how can we deny that people of opposite sex dancing together is an expression of heterosexual sensuality?
 - 3. Both common sense and the testimony of people in the world confirm that dancing is an activity that has the arousal of sexual desire as its main appeal. Should Christians be making provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts?
 - 4. Rom. 13:14
- C. But almost without exception, those who desire to dance or allow their children to dance will raise some of these objections.

III. ANSWERING OBJECTIONS

- A. "Dancing may turn on other people, but I don't react that way."
 - 1. For the sake of argument, let's assume that some people either:
 - a. Do not have strong sexual urges
 - b. Or have grown spiritually to the point they can keep their urges under control
 - 2. The modern dance involves two persons
 - a. Even if one is not affected, the other usually is
 - b. In which case, the one claiming to be spiritual becomes a stumbling block to the other
- B. "I can't control what other people think."
 - 1. Just because we can't force a person to think right, that does not justify encouraging them to think wrong
 - 2. We have a responsibility not to contribute to another's moral fall
 - 3. Rom. 14:13, 21; 1Cor. 8:13, 10:31-32; Matt. 18:6-7
- C. "How can anything go wrong? It is closely supervised."
 - 1. Bodily actions may be well-supervised, but no one can supervise the inward thoughts
 - 2. Chaperons can inhibit only what happens on the dance floor.
 - a. What about afterwards on the way home?
- D. "Dancing is good exercise."
 - 1. There are many alternative forms of exercise that do not excite the lusts of the flesh in yourself or others
 - 2. Are you willing to become a stumbling block to others, just to get some exercise? Isn't that rather selfish?
- E. "Dancing is mentioned in the Bible."
 - 1. Are you equating the modern dance to dancing in the Bible?
 - 2. There are four categories of dancing mentioned in the Bible
 - a. Religious dances of the Old Testament - Ex. 15:20-21; 2Sam. 6:14
 - b. Expressions of great rejoicing - 1Sam. 18:6
 - c. The play of small children - Job 21:11; Luke 7:32

- d. Sexually enticing dances, like that of Salome before King Herod (the contemporary equivalent would be pole dancing by strippers) - Matt. 14:6
- 3. How do the first three categories justify Christians engaging in the modern dance today?
 - a. Would you use Salome's dance before Herod to justify Christian participation in the modern dance?
 - b. There is no trace in the Bible that men and women ever danced as couples
 - c. "While the mode of dancing is not known in detail, it is clear that men and women did not generally dance together, and there is no real evidence that they ever did. Social amusement was hardly a major purpose of dancing, and the modern method of dancing by couples is unknown." - Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia Of The Bible, "Dancing", Vol. 2, p. 12 (1977)
 - d. "Social dancing, as we now understand it, was almost, if not altogether, unknown in ancient times..." - Hastings Bible Dictionary, p. 550
 - e. "Women seemed generally to have danced by themselves. Of the social dancing of couples in the modern fashion there is no trace." International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, "Games", p. 1170
- 4. In fact, dancing in the form of mixed couples did not exist before the 12th Century A.D. - "There is no evidence of couples dancing together, however; that was to happen much later in Provence in the 12th Century." - Encyclopedia Britannica, "The Art Of Dance", Vol. 5, p. 452

Conclusion:

- A. Can Christians participate in the modern dance? There are two things we can be sure of:
 - 1. It is wrong to lust in our hearts after others - Matt. 5:28
 - 2. It is wrong to conduct ourselves in such a way as to excite lust in others; that is lasciviousness, which is condemned as a work of the flesh - Gal. 5:19-21
- B. That popular dancing involving unmarried couples is condemned, can only be denied:
 - 1. By those ignorant or lacking in understanding of the Scriptures
 - 2. By those hardened by the deceitfulness of sin
- C. "Because of its physical appeal, dance lends itself to erotic purposes and has been practiced to these ends by both sexes." - Encyclopedia Britannica, "The Art Of Dance"
 - 1. Rom. 13:12-14