

# SHOULD A CHRISTIAN DANCE?

The world labels dancing a "pleasure." On the other hand, some claim the Bible condemns dancing! Read God's answer — from the Bible — in this revealing article.

by Albert J. Portune

DOWN through the centuries, many a starry-eyed girl and pink-cheeked young lady has anxiously and with great expectation dressed in her nicest gown in anticipation of the inspiring music and gay atmosphere of an evening of dancing. Many a young heart has thrilled with joy as he stepped out on the ballroom floor to lead his lady in the colorful, moving, laughing parade of dancing couples.

Yet, in thousands and thousands of other lives, the mere thought of dancing feet and dancing hearts has brought to mind other thoughts of SIN, LUST and EVIL. Dancing, for many, has *always* seemed a SIN! The very thought of men and women moving together to the intricate steps of the dance has been synonymous with *evil, fornication* and illicit relations.

Is dancing a sin?

Would God want us to dance?

## Dancing in the Bible

First, let's be willing to seek the truth from God and to "prove all things" (I-Thes. 5:21). Let's remove all prejudice and honestly look into the Bible — the Word of God — and find the answer. If dancing is a sin, then surely God will show us the plain truth in His Word. If it is not a sin, then some will have to clean up their minds and seek God's mind instead.

The Bible has much to say about dancing! But what it has to say may surprise you. Notice what God inspired in His Word: "*There IS . . . a time to dance*" (Eccl. 3:1,4). So there *is* a time

to dance! But *what kind* of dancing, and *where*?

Notice the examples in your Bible.

After God had delivered the children of Israel by parting the Red Sea, we find that the people *danced* in rejoicing before God. "And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with *dances*" (Ex. 15:20).

David, the King of Israel, danced before the Eternal while bringing the ark to Jerusalem. "And David danced before the Eternal with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod" (II Sam. 6:14). On this very *joyous* occasion, when the ark of the Eternal was being brought to Jerusalem, David *danced* before the Eternal wearing the linen ephod of the office of priest.

There are many other examples of the use of dancing as an expression of joy and worship before God. All these examples certainly should be sufficient to demonstrate that dancing *as such* was approved by God.

Consider what Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* says: "The religion of the Israelites was . . . predominantly social and joyful. It found its aesthetic expression in a merry sacrificial feast, which was the public ceremony of a township or clan. Then, the crowds streamed into the sanctuary from all sides, dressed in their gayest attire, marching joyfully to the sound of music. Universal hilarity prevailed; men ate and drank and made merry *together, rejoicing* before their God. To such a

religion, *dancing* would be a *natural adjunct*" (*Dictionary of the Bible* by Hastings, article, "Dance").

We may find this joyful fellowship with God expressed in the very words of the Bible when God ordained the annual Holy Days to be observed by ancient Israel. During the Feast of Tabernacles, the last Festival of God's sacred year, the people were told to "keep a feast . . . and *rejoice* before the Eternal seven days" (Lev. 23:39, 40). God's people are actually to express their *worship* of God in singing and in the dance! "Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise his name in the DANCE: let them sing praises unto him with timbrel and harp" (Psalm 149:2, 3). Again in Psalm 150, verse 4, Israel is to "praise him with the timbrel and DANCE."

## What Form of Dancing?

The Bible nowhere gives the exact type of dancing that was performed upon these joyous, festive occasions. But, the important key to remember is that these examples clearly show that God does not *condemn* DANCING — which is the rhythmic moving of the body to music.

Certainly, for a people who knew their God and rejoiced before Him — even worshipping Him in the dance — there could be not the slightest feeling of condemnation of dancing as a wholesome recreation as well.

Therefore it ought not be surprising to find dancing in the Bible not associated solely with the religious service,

but also as a function of a godly society and a free act of recreation and proper enjoyment.

The Prophet Jeremiah, speaking of the world tomorrow, shows how *all* will rejoice in the dance. "Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the *goodness* of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil . . . and they shall not sorrow any more at all. *Then* shall the *virgin* rejoice in the dance, both *young men and old* TOGETHER: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow" (Jer. 31:12-13). God knows that happy, rejoicing people will want to dance together — in the *right way* — as one of the truly joyous expressions of human fellowship.

#### Christ's Example

Many of us have read Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. Here is an inspired account — told by Jesus Christ Himself — of the right use of social dancing. We are familiar with this parable of the father whose son had been wayward and spent all his substance in sinful practices in a faraway city. The son had come to himself, at last, and had returned in a repentant attitude to his father's house. The great *rejoicing* occasioned by his return was highlighted by music and DANCING. "Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and *dancing*" (Luke 15:25).

This was not a RELIGIOUS OCCASION! This was a social occasion, of festivity and spontaneous rejoicing. Dancing was a central part of the celebration.

Notice further, when the elder son became angry, how he describes the activities that were going on: ". . . and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I *might make merry with MY FRIENDS*" (verse 29).

Here again, we do not have a record of the exact type of dancing that was being performed, but we certainly can see that God does not condemn the *right kind* of dancing as a free form of recreation and joy in a *godly* society.

Dancing also has long been associated with the marriage festivals in

Israel. There are many historic accounts among the annals of the Jews of dancing in connection with wedding feasts. It is still a common practice among the Jews today.

It was, no doubt, to just such an occasion that Jesus came in Cana when He performed His first miracle of changing water into wine so that the marriage feast would be a successful and joyful occasion of rejoicing (John 2:1-10).

#### Why Has Dancing Been Labeled Sinful?

There are examples, however, in the Bible, where dancing was put to a *sinful use*. One of the classic examples of this is in the wilderness of Sinai where the children of Israel provoked God by dancing and rejoicing in a *lustful* fashion before a false god. Let's notice this account in Exodus, the 32nd chapter. We read in the seventh verse, "And the Eternal said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have CORRUPTED themselves."

While Moses had been up on Mt. Sinai receiving the holy Law of God, the children of Israel had turned from serving God to the worship of idols and to the evil practices they had learned in Egypt. God says, in verse 10, "Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation."

God was angry at what He saw!

As Moses came down the mountain and approached the camp, he saw the golden calf that the children of Israel had made and he observed the *DANCING*: "And Moses' anger waxed *hot*, and he cast the tables out of his hands and broke them beneath the mount" (verse 19).

Here is a classic example of the *wrong* kind of dancing. What was it about this dancing that was evil and wrong? This is explained as we continue in this chapter. "And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto you, that thou hast brought so great a *sin* upon them? And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on *MISCHIEF!*" (Verses 21 and 22.)

Now notice carefully verse 25, "And when Moses saw that the people were *naked* . . . Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me" (verses 25 and 26).

Can you see why this dancing was wrong? Can you see what was the intention and desire of these people? They had set their minds on evil! They had set their minds to lust one for the other and commit all sorts of acts of lewdness and fornication and adultery. Notice verse 6 of this same chapter: ". . . and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." These *people* had turned the art of dancing into evil.

This type of dancing is sinful!

Another example of the wrong kind of dancing is given in Matthew's gospel when Salome came in and danced before Herod and pleased him. History tells us that Herod was a sensual and lewd ruler. Salome deliberately aroused the sensual and sexual desires of Herod through intricate dances and movements of her body. It was upon this very sorry and shameful occasion that John the Baptist lost his life — because of the lustful behavior of a young woman.

Now we can begin to see why dancing has become labeled as sin by many people in this world and by many religious groups and denominations. Sinful men from the very beginning of time — who have not wanted to obey God's laws, but on the contrary have wanted to obey their own lusts and devices — have always sought means of gratifying the lusts of the flesh and stimulating their bodies to wrong uses.

In the same way men have taken alcohol, food and many other things and used them in the *wrong way* and have sinned in the sight of God and been condemned by Him. It is the same with dancing! God has revealed the proper use of dancing from the very beginning! However, some men perverted dancing and used it as a means to stimulate the lusts of their bodies and the desire to be near the opposite sex and to lust after them.

THIS GOD CONDEMNS!

Because *men* have taken the right use of dancing — that God has given as a means of spontaneous rejoicing and

clean recreation — and have turned it into something evil and a means of evil expression, *this does NOT mean that the proper use of dancing is wrong!* Absolutely not! In fact, many a person too self-righteous to dance has been an adulterer! When we understand the proper use that God intended of dancing, we will see that it is a wonderful and uplifting recreational activity.

### The Right Understanding

Certainly it is true that in the dance halls and on the dance floors of this nation there are many who *sin* through the *wrong use* of dancing! However, this does not make dancing, as such, wrong. The *intents* and *lustful desires* of the people participating in the dances is the sin — even when they are *not* dancing!

Jesus Christ gives us the *key* to right understanding. Jesus said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever *LOOKETH* on a woman to *lust* after her hath committed adultery with her already *in his heart*" (Matt. 5:27, 28). Jesus Christ did not condemn *looking* at a woman! What He condemned was *lusting* after her in the heart. Dancing was originally given by God as a free expression of joy and rejoicing. The fact that men have turned the use of dancing into a means of gratifying the flesh is no condemnation of the right form of dancing.

### What Is Sin?

We need to ask ourselves — WHAT IS SIN? Many have attempted to label dancing as sin. Some few have even gone so far as to say that it is sin if a woman shows as much as an inch of her arm above the wrist or as much as two inches of the leg above the ankle.

The idea is that if man is placed in a situation where there is no temptation — where there is absolutely no opportunity for sin — then man will not sin. This is absolutely ridiculous! Removing the temptation does not remove the sinful *nature* that is in man. What we must understand is that we sin in *attitude* and in the *mind* as well as in deeds. It is not the thing itself

that is sin, it is the *use* of the thing that may be sin.

Sin is the transgression of God's Law (I John 3:4). We transgress God's Law when we lust and commit sinful acts such as fornication and adultery. If an individual has a sinful and lustful nature, prohibiting dancing for this man is not going to keep him from sinning! On the other hand, if a man is a Spirit-filled Christian and seeking to obey the Eternal God in everything, then he will be able to dance properly, eat temperately and do all *lawful* things before God properly. If a man wants to lust sinfully after a woman, he doesn't have to go to a dance. Jesus Christ said that it is he who *looks* upon a woman to LUST after her who has committed adultery in his heart. According to the reasoning that men have used in the world concerning dancing, society ought not to allow women to walk down the street lest men look at them. The Mohammedans have practiced this very thing — and hidden their women under black veils and white sheets! But their men still sin!

Can we all *get the point*?

### Modern Dancing

The Bible leaves the form of dancing to each people. The mode of dancing utilized in the various nations of the world depends a great deal on their *culture*. The type of dances utilized in Germany, France, England or the Scandinavian countries — that are native dances — may differ very greatly from the dances we use in the United States or dances that may be practiced in the other regions of the world.

The American dance culture began in early years with certain folk dances such as square dancing, the Virginia reel and other so-called "round dances" like the European polka and waltz. These dances are the natural cultural dances of America. Through the years these dances have progressed to our modern ballroom-type dancing which involves such steps as the fox trot, the two step, the waltz and certain other modern dances.

Just as dancing in ancient Israel progressed along certain cultural devel-

opments, dancing has developed in America and is the means of dance expression used by the American people. The development of dancing has followed similar patterns in England, France and many other countries. However, in other countries the dance has taken somewhat different patterns. Folk-type dancing in other parts of the world uses mechanics that differ somewhat from American-type dancing.

No matter what country we are in, however, we can find good and bad uses of the dance — regardless of what kind it may be. In every country there are those who improperly use dancing as a means of exciting their lust and perhaps to get acquainted with someone of doubtful character to carry on illicit sex relations. However, among those who understand and practice the right use of dancing, dancing can be used properly and correctly in the sight of God.

There is absolutely nothing dirty or filthy or sinful in pure and right dancing. It is only the *degenerate mind*, which is thinking on evil things, that will assume that men and women dancing together are lusting after each other. Proper dancing is an art, not a sin.

### Wrong Forms of Dancing

Perhaps one of the thoughts that has most provoked the condemnation of dancing is the position utilized in some dances. The *proper* position for dancing is *not an embrace*. In modern dance steps a man's right arm is placed at the woman's back and his left hand holds her right hand in order to guide and direct her in the movements of the dance. The woman's left hand rests on the man's right shoulder to steady her. In proper and correct ballroom dancing there is *no* other bodily contact between the two individuals. This is the right and proper position for dancing and is actually the only means in which the dancing steps may be executed properly.

Certainly it is true that there are many who degenerate this dancing position into nothing more than a lustful embrace. Many can be observed on dance floors in embraces which are everything *but* the proper position for dancing. This is *NOT* dancing! Simply

because some take the occasion of dancing to practice *love-making* in a public place is no condemnation of the right use of the dancing among the people of God. The proper dancing position is not and never has been an *embrace*.

Dancing among the people of God is one of the most refreshing and uplifting of activities. This kind of dancing creates an atmosphere of friendliness and wholesomeness mixed with spontaneous joy and Christian fellowship that is indeed one of the blessings of God. There is no place for any couples off in a dark corner dancing in a lustful and passionate way. Rather, you will find everyone sharing together as a *Christian family* the joys of group recreation and joyful, physical activity through the right use of social dancing.

Jesus Christ will never condone two

people embracing each other in a sinful and passionate way during a dance. The kind of dancing Christ approves cannot excite sex and lust in any way.

#### Social Dancing Not Commanded

God does not *require* you to dance socially! Dancing is not a requirement for the Kingdom of God and certainly there will be some who will not take to dancing just as some do not take to other sports or recreations. God does not *force* you to dance if dancing simply does not appeal to you. However, what is very important is your **ATTITUDE** toward dancing! If we continue to condemn as sinful and evil a practice that God approves, and even gives us as a blessing of rejoicing, then certainly we will be in a *wrong attitude*.

We should thank God that He has

given us this right understanding and perspective so that we are able to enjoy dancing, and many other things that are enjoyable and wholesome before God when done in the *right way*. It is only through the understanding and illumination of God's Holy Spirit that we are able to do these things *properly* and not allow them to become lustful or in any way to take away from our service to the Eternal God.

Let us all thoroughly understand this principle and teach our young people the truth about dancing — keeping them unspotted by the world. Let it never be said that God's servants haven't the character to make right decisions and resist the pull of the world with its dances. Let's have the character to use properly the blessings and opportunities God gives us in this physical life. □