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Dancing—A Sin?

“Is dancing a sin in view of Psalm 150:4 and Luke 15:25?”

Sin is easily recognized—that which is questionable is a weight (or a drag). Christians are told to “lay aside every weight, and the sin (small faith) which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1, 2). “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your Word” (Ps. 119:9). “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16).

You’ll be interested in the comments of the late Robert J. Little, (former Radio Pastor of Moody Bible Institute) to the question.

“The first mention of combining music and song in the worship of God seems to be Exodus 15:20, where Miriam and the women of Israel replied to the song of Moses with a kind of chorus, using timbrels (or tambourines) to accompany the music, while they also danced. This was not social dancing, and there was no mingling of men and women.”

From the time of David, music became part of worship (2 Sam. 6:15; 1 Chron. 23:5; 25:1-6), and was adopted into the Temple service from its first establishment (2 Chron. 5:12). The New Testament says nothing about the use of music in the church unless 1 Corinthians 14:7 be considered an obscure reference to it. But that passage seems to be speaking more of music accompaniment in heaven. For most of the Church, the use of music in worship has not been repugnant, although some groups do not permit it.”

On the contrary, Ellicott’s Commentary says:

“Dancing though adopted into religious worship by many nations, sanctioned by the present passage (Exod. 15:20), by the example of David (2 Sam. 6:16), and by expressions in the Psalms (149:3; 150:4), has never found an entrance into Christian ceremonial, unless among a few fanatic sects. The reason of this is to be found in the abuses which, through human infirmity, became by degrees connected with the practice, causing it to become unfit for a religious purpose. In the primitive times, however, solemn and stately dances were deemed appropriate to festival periods and religious rejoicings, and among the more moral tribes and nations had nothing unseemly about them.”

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In summary, we may note:

1. In the cases of the dancing led by Miriam (Exodus 15) and the dancing in which David participated (2 Sam.1 6), mixed groups were not involved; men and women were separated. The same was true of the kind of dancing described in Judges 21:19-21. Apparently men normally were not present.
2. The dancing was in many cases spontaneous, to express their unbounded joys and only their purity of motive kept it from becoming indecent, as seems clear from David's answer to the criticism voiced by his wife. However, this illustrates something of the danger of even such dancing, which was intended to glorify God and not to gratify any fleshly desire.
3. Where purity of motive and devotion to God were not the chief characteristics, the dancing soon degenerated into sin, as can be seen from Exodus 32:6, 19, 25.
4. Dancing, though practiced to a degree, was not incorporated into any divinely appointed ritual.
5. Apart from the direct references to dancing, the ethics of Christianity teach separation from a social custom which, if not usually corrupt, easily lands itself to moral collapse. Dancing can be dangerous, and even disastrous, spiritually.

Social dancing often excites fleshly desires which can easily lead to taking liberties which would not be taken at other times. Also one may submit to minor indignities while dancing which can be followed later by more overt acts. Since various forms of social dancing have been at times a prelude to immorality, it would seem that a believer would want to seek more spiritual ways of social pleasure. At the very least, it would seem to be a weight or "drag"—see Hebrews 12:1 again.

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