



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

DANCING an ancient sin rearing its head once more.



"But it is by no means conceded that this condemnation of public dancing is without scriptural warrant, and sustained only by ecclesiastical opinion. Few practices, which have become current since Bible days, are so fully and expressly condemned by the Bible as is this. No competent archæologist will risk his credit by denying the following facts : that modern dancing ie. the dancing of free males and females together for amusement, was unknown in the decent society of Jews (as of the ancient heathen); that the only dancing mentioned with allowance in the Bible was religious, choral movements, in which the sexes always danced alone, and that the dancing of females for the amusement of a male presence, like that of Herodias' daughter, was uniformly recognised as too notoriously indecent to need any new condemnation. Hence all attempted use of the Bible cases as precedents for modern dancing are simply preposterous. And that the canon of Scripture should close without any additional prohibition, in express words, of our modern dancing, is exactly according to that plan by which God has legislated for his church in all other points of modern sin. Why is it that no church session, if called to discipline a man for the trespass of wantonly cutting a telegraph wire, or the crime of displacing a railroad bar in front of a passenger train, would expect to find a prohibition in express words against these forms of sin? Every child knows the answer: because telegraphs and railroads had not then been invented, and God's uniform plan is not to place on the page of the Bible, in Bible times, precepts which must be wholly unintelligible to the generation to which the Bible was given. But his plan was, so to prohibit sins which were current in those generations as to furnish all honest minds parallels and precedents which would safely guide them in classing the sins of later invention." The Dancing Question — Works of Robert L Dabney, Vol. 2, pages 569-570.

Gospel ministers have been required to show that participation by Christians in mixed dancing is wrong. This demand has been made of Free Presbyterian Church ministers, in the wake of the recent Presbytery statement condemning line dancing. Such demands are indicative of the times in which we live. The relationship between Christians and dancing has rarely been in dispute in the history of the church and no spiritually minded Christian has ever been an advocate of such activities. I wish to reiterate the Christian's opposition to dancing.

1. DANCING IS CONTRARY TO GOD'S CALL FOR US TO BE SEPARATE FROM THE WORLD.

Christians are called upon to be separated from "worldly-mindedness." We must not be conformed to the sinful ways of the world. *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which*



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is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God, Romans 12:1-2. To engage in dancing is to breach that line of demarcation between the Christian and the world. Dancing was once the favourite pastime of many of God's people in their unregenerate days. But we are commanded to cease from such things now that we are saved. This is the essence of Peter's call. *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, 1 Peter 1:13-14.*

A Presbyterian minister, Rev. B. M. Palmer, of Columbia Presbyterian Church in South Carolina, said the following in a sermon preached on June 17th, 1849. "If there are pleasures which the world, alienated from God, has stamped and chosen as its own; pleasures which peculiarly express the vanity and darkness of the natural mind; pleasures which bind men as ungodly together in fellowship and sympathy—from these pleasures professing Christians must wholly abstain, if they would keep their garments unspotted from the world. Now the dance, the opera, the theatre, the race course, et id omne genus, fall exactly into this category. They have been appropriated by the lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, as their peculiar portion—they bear the stamp of the mint in which they have been coined—they are acknowledged badges of a worldly profession, and, in some sort, sacraments of allegiance to the Prince of the power of the air. We just as naturally infer that one who mingles in them is worldly in his tastes and pursuits, as that one who goes to the Lord's Table is a professed follower of Jesus. But above all, do we profess to be the followers of Him, whose style and title on earth was the Man of Sorrows? Do we profess to bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus; and have we been to the communion table expressly to remember Him in His death, and to have fellowship with Him in His sufferings? Oh! tell it not out to earth, lest it rend again the very rocks and break once more the slumbers of the dead—a **dancing disciple of a crucified Redeemer!!**"

2. THE BIBLE IMPLICITLY DENOUNCES THE DANCING PRESENTLY BEING DEFENDED BY SOME.

It has been said by some that the Word of God does not specifically denounce dancing. Consequently, to denounce it is to go beyond the Bible, the sole authority of the believer, and to curtail the proper exercise of Christian liberty. They are wrong. Does the Bible denounce arson, gambling, slave-trading, theatre-going, pornography? Not specifically, but who is there who will contend that such things are therefore permissible? It has to be said that there are those Greek scholars who would contend that when Paul spoke of *rioting*, Romans 13:13, the Greek word he uses, *komos*, could well be translated *dancing*. This is true also of the same word as it appears in 1 Peter 4:3 and is there translated as *revelling*. Pindar, the Greek poet, is understood to have so employed the word. (An arrow against profane and promiscuous dancing, ministers of Christ at Boston, 1684.)

The sacred writers could not list every sinful indulgence in which mankind would engage throughout its long history. Therefore, there are expressions employed which are all-embracing and which clearly refer to sins not specifically mentioned in God's Word. Here is an example. *Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornica-*



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tion, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God, Galatians 5:21. The use of the phrase “and such like” indicates that Paul’s list of the works of the flesh is incomplete and that every manifestation of it is not listed, but anything bearing any likeness to such activities as are listed should be considered as a work of the flesh. Does dancing not come under the term “and such like”? I certainly believe it does, especially when we consider the references to dancing in the Word of God.

There is a dancing in the Word of God with which I have no quarrel and that because God approved of it. *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*, Exodus 15:20. Here is dancing that was an expression of holy joy. It was women dancing on their own. The word dancing denotes movements far removed from the activities of a barn dance or line dancing. It is more reminiscent of children giving vent to youthful exuberance, a spontaneous skipping rather than a pattern of intricate and coordinated steps. It must be noted that it is linked to praising God. Such dancing our Presbytery has no quarrel with!

I might add, that such dancing is not what those who advocate line dancing and barn dancing are seeking. Do they dance to hymn tunes or psalm tunes? Do they lift up their voices in majestic praise to the Almighty? Even they would not be so bold in their effrontery to God as to mingle His name with their activities. No, it is the godless sound of the country and western wail that accompanies their reeling!

But the Bible also speaks of a dancing of which God does not approve. It is that which originated with the heathen nations and which God’s people foolishly imitated on occasions. *And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount*, Exodus 32:19. The word *dancing* in this verse carries the meaning of *weaving about*, since it is derived from a word linked to *embroidery* and *weaving*, used in Exodus 35:35. The image of the modern barn dance or line dance, with its reels and weaving about, springs to mind.

Of the same ilk as the dancing at the golden calf was the dancing of the Amalekites, 1 Samuel 30:16 and that of the daughter of Herodias, Matthew 14:6. This latter form of dancing did not meet with the approval of the Lord. That is clear in that 3000 of the dancers at the golden calf were slain by God’s command and all but 400 of the Amalekites perished under the swords of David’s men. As for heaven’s view of the wickedness of the daughter of Herodias, suffice that it was linked to the death of one of the greatest of God’s servants, John the Baptist, for us to estimate God’s view of the matter.

When the Moabites enticed Israel to sin it is believed that it was by the dancing of their maidens. As a result, 24,000 were slain at the dance in judgment, Numbers 25:1-9. Paul refers to such activities in 1 Corinthians 10:6-8. *Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play (dance). Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.* In the light of these considerations, who is there who



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will defy God and defend mixed or social dancing?

3. DANCING IS ESPECIALLY EVIL IN A DAY OF GOD'S CHASTENING

It is clear that such dancing, as is presently promoted, is ungodly, when we consider the times in which we live. Northern Ireland is presently enduring the consequences of apostasy and rebellion against God. The mainline churches have cast aside their allegiance to the Bible and those creeds which were formulated in times of reformation and revival in the past. The morals of society have reached an all time low in that not only are the vilest of sins condoned but they are subsidised from the public purse. Abortion, sodomy, the utter disregard of marriage — all of these and more are commonly practised without public reproach. We have the clear indication of God's judgment upon the land and upon the church, in that the wickedest of men have been elevated to rule over us and there has been a public endorsing of political policies that promise only the destruction of all that is good and decent, and yet there are professing Christians wishing to dance! What contempt for God and His righteous anger is shown by the Christian who desires to organise dancing and the right to indulge in it without censure!

What saith the Scriptures? *And in that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to morrow we shall die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the LORD of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord GOD of hosts, Isaiah 22:12-14.* The calamities that God sent to Israel were to promote repentance and make them recognise their sins. God called for a weeping and a mourning over sin by these judgments. But instead, Israel rejected the call of God and lived in utter disregard of God's wrath upon the land and His call for humility. That merry-making which may be shown to be unlawful, at the best of times, is outrageously so, at a time when God calls for mourning. It was iniquitous in God's eyes. Such, I believe, is the situation in Ulster today.

How can professing Christians demand the right to engage in such public frivolities and have them become acceptable at a time when the cause of Christ is in such reproach? This is evidence of a sinful sense of ease amongst professing Christians. *Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, Amos 6:1.* What was the evidence of this ease? The people were described as those that *lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph, Amos 6:4-6.* Does the demand for dancing and socials and formal dinners and increasing frivolity among Christians denote a right attitude in the light of God's afflictions upon Ulster? I think not. The question of Ezekiel 21:9-10 should be addressed by these dancers. *Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus saith the LORD; Say, A sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished: it is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter: should we then make mirth?*

God's people have often acted contrary to the spirit that God would have them adopt and it is clear that some are determined upon such a course today. The advocates of dancing amongst Christians have used verse 4 in Ecclesiastes chapter 3 to justify their dancing. *A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.* This does not



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say that dancing is lawful, that there is a time when it is right and proper to engage in it. Rather it is saying that there is a limit upon the time in which men have to engage in those activities in which they delight. For soon the time to dance will give way to the mourning. If this portion justified dancing then it justifies hatred as well, since verse 8 says that there is a time to hate. These verses merely contain man's observation of the changing times that continually pass over the nations of the world.

4. THE TESTIMONY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD THROUGHOUT THE AGES HAS BEEN AGAINST DANCING.

One of the most concise and widely accepted statements of the teaching set forth in the Bible is the Westminster Standards. They give the sum of the ancient testimony of God's people. What do they say on dancing?

Larger Catechism, Question 139: *What are the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment?*

Answer: *The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks, impudent or light behaviour, immodest apparel; prohibiting of lawful, and dispensing with unlawful marriages; allowing, tolerating, keeping of stews (brothels), and resorting to them; entangling vows of single life, undue delay of marriage; having more wives or husbands than one at the same time; unjust divorce, or desertion; idleness, gluttony, drunkenness, unchaste company; lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays; and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others.*

That statement, or its equivalent, was agreed to by Presbyterians, by Baptists, by Congregationalists and dissenters generally. It bears testimony to the united stand of the people of God throughout the ages on the issue of dancing. We need no quotes from the writings of a John Owen or a John Calvin or a Samuel Rutherford for the statement in the Larger Catechism is as catholic a statement of the universal church's view on dancing as could be set down.

One consideration in closing.

"How come that such a topic has arisen amongst the people of God?" This worldliness has not emerged overnight. Rather, it has been casting an increasing shadow over the people of God for a number of years. I would suggest that it was born and cradled in the musical innovations that had their beginnings amongst us in the 1970s. The country and western style of music, which now is the signature tune of the line dancer, began to infiltrate the house of God and, despite warnings of the danger it posed, found increasing acceptance. From there we moved on to the "show business" presentation of the gospel concert with its aping of the worldly pop music concerts. Christians soon accepted this as well. Women attired and painted and bejewelled for the stage, singing alongside men who were likewise garishly attired for the occasion, became so accepted that to object was to bring the derision of many upon your head. The whole trend was but a duplicating of the world, but to the accompaniment of words and phrases more associated with the gospel. This was fol-



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lowed by the increasing popularity of the “Christian” social with its worldly music and its tagged-on epilogue to gain for it a semblance of respectability. But the appetite for the world was not to be satisfied with this. It wanted more. The occasional dance of the social must now become the centre of the latest development in the return of the professing Christian to the ways of the world. The Christian dance must now be accepted as have all the other innovations and departures.

This is the path that churches have gone down before. May God give us the heart of Phinehas to resist the disastrous, the destructive innovations being presently foisted upon young people. There is yet time to stand up against this evil and to denounce it for what it is. There is a need for those already caught up in it to recognise where their folly will take them and the baleful influence their activities will exercise upon the work of God. It is time to heed that call directed at the first century church at Ephesus:

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent, Rev 2:5.