

my wife and daughter if they truly understood this before they were married and both said no. It is not simply that males find females attractive. Non-Christian males who do not deliberately fight to control their thoughts (as Christ has commanded), with no effort at all can have sexual thoughts about women around them. That includes not only mentally undressing the women around them, but even imagining themselves in sexual acts with those women. If girls and women could ever spend five minutes in a football locker-room listening to the kind of talk in which non-Christian boys and men engage, this would become crystal clear!

Certainly, controlling one's thoughts is a personal responsibility. The failure to do so is sin, but as Christians should we ever do things we know will tempt others to sin? No! How can a Christian woman or girl wear a dress that climbs up her thigh and it not contribute to the sin of others? How can a Christian

woman or girl wear a top that exposes her chest, shoulders, or back and it not contribute to the sin of others? How can a Christian woman or girl wear clothing that exposes straps or bands of her undergarments, and imagine that she is not contributing to the sin of others? When a woman or girl (or even men or boys) expose part of their undergarments they are inviting those around them to consider what is concealed. This is not the way Christians should dress anywhere in public—church, the store, school, work, or anywhere. At dances, girls and women often dress this way and even worse. Christians should not put themselves in that environment. Some might agree, but how is it different to go to a dance, and to watch one on television? How is it any different? Now, not all types of dance are sinful but when there is skimpy clothing, provocative movements and gestures Christians don't need to engage in such things through media or in person.

Conclusion

We might be inclined to say, "that's not my problem—people just need to control their own thoughts!" That's true, but what measures does Jesus teach that we should take to avoid sin? After His teaching regarding lust, Jesus said to personally avoid sin we should be willing to pluck out an eye or cut off a hand (Matt. 5:29-30). After praising the nature and humility of children, Jesus repeated His teaching on plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand to avoid causing another to sin adding that it would be better **"if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea"** than to cause someone else to sin (Matt. 18:6-9). If we really took these warnings seriously how could Christians participate in anything that could lead to sin? These principles make it clear that Christians have no business participating in or going to dances.



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Shall We Dance?

By Kyle Pope

The school year is ending, and like most years young people have had to face a question that has long plagued us—*should Christians dance?* In this study, let's consider what the Bible teaches on this important issue.

Dancing in the Bible

We should note that Scripture describes types of dance that were not sinful and types of dance that were sinful. Distinguishing between the two is important to answer the question posed in the title of this study from a scriptural standpoint.

Dancing That Was Not Sinful. Scripture describes dancing that was done as a sign of joy. Job bemoaned that the children of the wicked feel joy, **"their children dance. They sing to the tambourine and harp, and rejoice to the sound of the flute"** (Job 21:11-12) while the righteous often suffer. Job does not characterize the dance of joy in and of itself as sinful, but speaks of it merely as a demonstration of happiness. David praised God, declaring—**"You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness"** (Ps. 30:11). David is describing a type of dance set in synonymous parallel with **"gladness"** and praises God for blessing him in such a way as to move him to **"dancing."** Solomon tells us plainly that there is a **"time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance"** (Eccl. 3:4). Clearly, he is not teaching that life circumstances necessitate something sinful. Even Jesus illustrates this in quoting the children's parable which He applied to their reception of John and Himself: **"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to**

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Kyle Pope

you, and you did not lament” (Matt. 11:16-19). Jesus is not using sinful behavior to illustrate the joyous reception of His teaching—He is describing a type of joyful dance that is not sinful.

Scripture frequently describes a type of dance connected with celebration. Jephthah’s daughter danced with the tambourine after her father’s victory (Judg. 11:34). Israelite women danced with tambourines after Saul and David’s victory (1 Sam. 18:6-7). All Israel danced after the defeat of the Philistines (1 Sam. 30:16). In Jesus’s parable of the prodigal son, when the prodigal returned home there was **“music and dancing”** (Luke 15:25). Jesus does not illustrate the joy of repentance by a reference to sinful behavior. Nothing about this kind of dance was sensual, indecent, or immodest.

Finally, there are actually occasions in which dancing was an element of Old Testament worship. After the crossing of the Red Sea, Miriam and the Israelite women praised God singing **“with timbrels and with dances”** (Exod. 15:20-21). When the ark was returned to Israel, **“David danced before the LORD with all his might”** which involved **“leaping and whirling before**

the LORD” (2 Sam. 6:13-15). Two psalms actually commanded dance in worship of God, declaring—**“Let them praise His name with the dance”** (Ps. 149:2-4) and **“Praise Him with the timbrel and dance”** (Ps. 150:3-6). We should note, that this command is not repeated under the New Covenant, nor is there any example of dance as an act of worship under Christ. So, it would not be scriptural, therefore, under the Law of Christ to dance in worship to God (just as it is not scriptural to use mechanical instruments of music in worship under Christ).

Dancing That Was Sinful. In contrast to this, Scripture describes sinful dancing connected with idolatry. Israel danced around the golden calf constructed while Moses was on the mountain (Exod. 32:17-19). In the challenge of Elijah, the prophets of Baal leaped around the altar as they called upon Baal (1 Kings 18:26-29). Scripture describes a type of dancing associated with sinful behavior. The dance of Herodias’s daughter before Herod ultimately led to the death of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:6-8). This was likely a seductive and sexually explicit type of dancing that motivated Herod’s lust leading to his rash oath. Nothing about this was proper!

The New Testament also condemned these sinful types of dancing in its frequent use of two words for behaviors Christians must avoid: *kōmos* and *aselgeia*. The Greek word *kōmos*, usually translated “revelry” is defined: “Properly a village festival: a revel, carousal, merry-making. . . it ended in the party parading the streets crowned, bearing torches, singing, dancing, and playing frolics” (Liddell & Scott, *Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*). Thayer explains it refers to:

A nocturnal and riotous procession of half drunken and frolicsome fellows who after supper parade through the streets with torches and music in honour of Bacchus or some other deity, and sing and play before houses of male and female friends; hence used generally of feasts and drinking parties that are protracted till late at night and indulge in revelry” (Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

These processions, like modern Mardi Gras festivals, involved wild dancing and drinking. Christians are emphatically commanded not to participate in such behavior (Rom. 13:13-14). If they had done so in the past, they must spend no more time in such things (1 Pet. 4:3-5). Paul warns that Christians cannot participate in these things and inherit the kingdom of heaven (Gal. 5:21).

Second, the Greek word *aselgeia*, usually translated “lewdness” (NKJV) or “lasciviousness” (KJV) is defined: “unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness, wantonness, outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence” (Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). It refers to various types of behaviors that promote and arouse sinful sexual desire. Jesus lists it among behaviors that **“defile”** a person (Mark 7:21-23). Paul identifies it as a work of the flesh that can prevent one from inheriting the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21). He commanded the Corinthians to repent of their former practice of it (2 Cor. 12:21) and explained to the Ephesians that those who practice it have **“their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God”** (Eph. 4:17-20). Clearly, the types of dance that would be included in behaviors associated with “lewdness” and “lasciviousness” are sinful.

Dancing in Our World

In our world, what kinds of opportunities present themselves for dancing today? Unlike the dances of joy and celebration described in Scripture, most dance today involves drinking, immodest clothing, and movements that mimic sexual behavior. Adults dance in bars, ballrooms, exercise in the presence of others, or weddings. Young people dance at school dances, parties, or banquets. Unfortunately, the clothing often worn in all of these venues exposes parts of the body Scripture defines as **“nakedness”** (Exod. 20:26; 28:42; Isa. 47:2-3). This is not the kind of clothing Christians should wear anywhere in public (1 Tim. 2:9). Unfortunately, all of these occasions involve movements in dance (whether fast or slow) that arouse sexual desire within those who participate or those who observe them. How is this not behavior Scripture condemns under the words *kōmos* and *aselgeia*? If so, we are commanded not to participate in this behavior (Rom. 13:13). If so, we are not to spend time in this behavior (1 Pet. 4:3). If so, we cannot participate in this behavior and inherit the kingdom of heaven (Gal. 5:21).

“But What’s the Harm?”

Let’s say you are not convinced that modern types of dances are the kinds of activities that are condemned by

Scripture. Are there still reasons you should avoid them? Yes! First, you might be led into sin. In warning the young to avoid that which could lead to adultery, the wise man asked, **“Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared?”** (Prov. 6:27-28). The physical attraction between man and woman is one of the most powerful forces God has ever created. It is a powerful bond intended to draw a husband and wife close to one another, but it can be misdirected toward one to whom a person is not married. Two bodies cannot be pressed against one another and moved in rhythm to music without arousal! Two bodies cannot stand in front of one another and move to music in gestures that approximate sexual behavior without arousal! To ignore this is embracing or walking on coals and imagining that you will not be burned.

Second, you might lead others to sin. Jesus taught, **“whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart”** (Matt. 5:28). I am convinced that most young girls (and even some women) do not understand the struggle that young boys and men have with this temptation. I have asked both