



May I Have This Dance?

In no time, the tables and chairs are cleared away. The lights are suddenly turned down. Red, blue and green strobe lights appear and start flashing across the room just as the music starts. A romantic song is cranked louder than most can talk. One couple glides onto the floor alone to initiate the night of dancing. Soon, many couples follow.

Sound familiar? Where are we - a bar down-town? A community centre's annual dance-a-thon? Have we poked our noses into a tent late one evening at the country fair? Or walked into a high-school prom? We might find just such a scene in any of those places but more and more we are finding it at wedding receptions among our own church members.

What's Right With It?

Many will ask, "So, what's wrong with it?" A better question to ask is: "What is right with it?" If we profess to be Christians who live every moment of every day for the glory of God, then we should be able to say about any activity we undertake: I am doing this because it honours my Maker and here is how. If we can't do that then we have a problem. The onus is on us to demonstrate first to the Lord but then also to our fellow Christians that this or any activity serves to bring respect to the Name of God.

Out of the Closet

As the history of dancing shows, there are many kinds of dancing from many different cultures. We can't possibly analyze each of them nor do we need to. There is also the godly dancing of upright Israelites as Dr. Van Dam explains (see his article in this issue). Our concern in this editorial is with how our young people want to dance at weddings (and elsewhere) here in *our* culture. The truth is, wedding dances are nothing more than scaled-down versions of what can be found in bars and night-clubs.

It is not much of a secret that Reformed young people have, for decades already, found their way on weekends into these establishments. The brave ones get up and dance. Drinking

improves the 'bravery.' And now, tired of hiding it, the pressure is growing among our young adults to bring this out of the closet into the open. Parents are sometimes simply and abruptly told: *Mom, Dad, we're going to have a dance at our wedding!*

It's good that clandestine activities come out into the open for then they can be seen for what they are. So long as dancing is a hidden activity, few are giving it much thought. "Outing it" also gives the 40-plus crowd an opportunity to re-visit the not-so-glory days of their youth and have an open conversation with their young adult children about their experiences with dance. But before we simply accept those old, previously underground practices (no questions asked!), and go along with the desires of today's youth, we need to analyze them. Questions *do* need to be asked and as Christians we start with a basic one: what does God's Word say about such dancing? Does it serve to honour the Name of our Saviour?

Couple Dancing

The basic kind of dancing that we're talking about is couple dancing, man-woman. Sure, there is the traditional father-daughter dance at weddings in our culture, but that isn't the main event. And I know that groups of girls will get up and dance together but, let's be honest, that's just because the boys haven't worked up the nerve to ask them yet, isn't it? What everyone really wants is to dance with a member of the opposite sex. Indeed, this is the very nature of the dancing done in bars (including country-western bars – witness the movie *Footloose*), night-clubs and inherited from a long tradition of ball-room dancing through the waltz, the twist, the jitterbug, lambada, right up to the groove-any-which-way you like 'free' dance of today's club scene. Both history and honest observation make it clear that the dancing we're keen on is boy-girl.

Consider the slow dance: a young man takes a young woman in his arms to sway in unison. Their bodies are close together, even pressing each other. For the faster songs, they step apart a foot or two but continue to face each other. Even if they turn away for a moment, they are dancing *with each other*, for each other. Their eyes meet often. Hips and buttocks sway, bosoms bounce to the pulsating beat – can anyone deny that these dances are laden with sexual messages? It is as plain as day that these dances openly display sensuality and evoke sexual desire, even lust.

The World's Perspective

Is this an over-reaction? Maybe I've been cooped up in the study too long and have a bad case of 'preacher's over-kill.' Well, don't just take my word for it - what does the world say of such dances? They were invented by and perfected by the unbelieving world, so what do they think of them?

Writing of the considerably tamer (by today's standards) waltz, one source says, "The waltz not only made it possible for individuals to come together on an egalitarian basis, it also made possible a kind of 'escape' from reality through the thrilling dizziness of whirling one's way in a private world of sensuality."ⁱ Another writer comments, "The wag who said that dancing was the 'vertical expression of a horizontal thought' told part of the truth about social dancing. Its existence is an expression of sexual relations..."ⁱⁱ Still another dance historian sums it up this way: "By its very nature the act of dancing is exhibitionistic. The dancer seeks to become the object of attention..."ⁱⁱⁱ

What kind of attention? Pete McMartin, a long-time columnist for the Vancouver Sun, makes it abundantly clear in a recent article. After taking his wife out for an evening of ball-room type dancing, he decided to write about the experience. He frankly describes his perception of the dancing he observed: "It was sex of a kind, barely disguised yet courtly, with the men wanting control and the women – in this rare instance – happy to let them have it. It was the dance within the dance, the subtle wrestling between the genders, and it was vastly more sexy to watch than the hump and grind of hip hop."^{iv} Couple dancing is inherently sexual in nature.

Sex and Dance

What this sort of dancing does is to put on public display what God has ordained for the privacy of the bedroom – the bedroom of the *married*. Sensuality, seduction, sexual desire and lust are given free rein in couple dancing, and most aren't married. How can single Christians dance in this manner with members of the opposite sex and be right in the Lord's eyes? And when a group of young ladies starts jiving on the dance floor, what sort of attention are they calling to themselves and what thoughts are going through the minds of the male observers? When girls groove, boys watch and desires build – does that fit with the command to avoid whatever may entice us to unchastity (Lord's Day 41)? Is that taking up our cross and following Jesus?

Would it be appropriate, then, for a married couple to go out dancing like this for an evening? Certainly, a husband and wife are free to be intimate with each other, to be sensual and evoke sexual desire within each other, but that is not for public consumption. The Lord has ordained that as the pleasure and honour of the marriage bed, not the dance floor! We need to consider the context of our actions as well as the actions themselves. We need to think of who is watching and how our actions may affect them. Let husbands and wives waltz together in their bedroom but don't profane God's gift by letting others ogle your sexual intimacy in the club!

Not Even A Hint

Sexuality is a beautiful gift but also a powerful weapon of Satan's in the spiritual warfare. It's not for nothing that the Bible warns often against its abuse. The Bible never addresses couple dancing *per se* but it most certainly addresses the dishonouring of sexuality. Let's not forget that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit which leads Paul to call Christians to complete purity of sexual conduct (1 Cor 6:19 and context). He says it again in 1 Thess 4:3-5, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God." Christians are to be so careful with our sexuality that among us, "there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity" (Eph 5:3) for this doesn't fit with being God's holy people. *Not even a hint* is strong language and speaks directly against swaying hips, bouncing breasts and "come-hither" looks on a dance floor.

Whom are We Pleasing?

Space does not permit to speak about the nature of the music to which we dance a couple dance – ask the same questions of it that we asked of dancing above and see what you find. As the pressure mounts for couple dancing to become accepted at our weddings and among our youths on the weekend, we need to ask ourselves some further hard questions: what message are we sending to the world? If we take the dance of the bars, clubs and streets into our church halls and reception rooms, what will the world think? "Oh good, they've become like us?" Likely they will be surprised that we've become like them because they at least are honest about what they do: dancing is sexual, dancing is part of a night out which, if a person gets 'lucky,' ends up with him or her going "all the way." Then our witness to the world has imploded and we are not shining a light pointing to salvation from sin in Jesus Christ but we are sharing with the world in the sins of the flesh.

Still more important to ask is: what does the Lord God think about our dancing? Is He pleased? Are we aiming to please God or to pleasure ourselves? By now we know the answer. There is true joy for a Christian only when his or her thoughts, words and deeds are in accord with God's will. A dance which flaunts sensuality and sexuality in public simply cannot please the Lord.

But in all honesty, we knew this in our hearts already, didn't we? Isn't that why we kept it out of sight all those decades? And did it not strike you as odd and contradictory when the formal wedding reception was "closed" with thanksgiving prayer at 9:30 PM and then at 9:35 PM the beat was struck, the room went dark, and bodies started swaying to pop music? It should, because in truth the two have nothing to do with each other. Let's back away from a bad trend before it takes root and let's promote a truly Christian celebration of our marriages in the Lord.

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ⁱ Carol Wallace and Don McDonagh, Jean L. Druesdow, Laurence Libin and Constance Old, *Dance: A Very Social History* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1986).

ⁱⁱ McDonagh in *ibid.*, p.78.

ⁱⁱⁱ John Lawrence Reynolds, *Ballroom Dancing: The Romance, Rhythm and Style* (Key Porter Books, Toronto, 1998) p.93.

^{iv} Pete McMartin, “*May I Have the Pleasure of This Dance?*” in the *Vanouver Sun*, January 17, 2012.