

PERSPECTIVE

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I've been thinking about the controversial role schools have in teaching our youths about sex. What should schools teach about sex? When should sex education begin? What cooperative relationships should schools have with parents of youths in teaching about sex so that there is a mutual trust between parents, youths, and schools? How can the Christian church support youths and families in the task of sex education?

One thing I am certain of is that we need today, as we have always needed, truthful and carefully taught sex education. Schools have the mandate to educate, and youths deserve accurate and understandable information about sex, just as they deserve accurate and understandable instruction in math, history, and science. They deserve skilled teachers who model respect for the human body.

Sex education courses shouldn't be a film or two shown during an add-on hour to history class. Human sexuality needs to be taught in the context of wholeness and as a natural part of human health. That means that children, from the earliest levels of their school journey, would receive age-appropriate instruction about their bodies. They would learn how well they are made, how their bodies work, how they stay healthy, how they can and should feel good about themselves, and how they can and should respect other people. From kindergarten they would learn to make their own decisions about keeping their bodies healthy. Diseases—all the kinds of diseases—would be studied as assaults against the healthy body. Children and youths would learn strategies for staying healthy, including the impor-

ance of early medical intervention in the face of the threats against health.

As youths deserve to learn early in their school experiences information that will wear well throughout their life journey, so kids in the Christian church deserve to learn early the truth of God's love and character. Our children deserve to always hear the truth in youthful vocabulary so that when they are teenagers and

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young adults they do not need to unlearn what they have learned in vacation Bible school. The wonder of God's truth is that it makes age-appropriate sense to a kindergartner and it makes mature sense to a twenty-year-old. We owe this to children when we think together with them about the meaning of life; we owe it to them in every other subject as well.

The gift of sexuality makes it possible for the human family to grow and to reproduce. The mystery of it is that sexuality is also one of the ways we express love and commitment. We can never, therefore, take lightly our sexual nature. Every feeling we have about ourselves and our self-worth is affected by the way we feel about our own sexuality and the sexuality of others.

God designed the human body for enthusiastic and romantic sexual expression between a man and woman in love and in faithful commitment to each other. The human body welcomes this total interperson-

al involvement in which a man and a woman *know* each other and *become one flesh*, as the Bible describes sexual union. Within these two expressions is not only a physical description of sexual union, but a description of the profound mystery of communication and of romance.

The human body rewards restraint in sexual relationship by allowing time for a person to grow capable of making a commitment to

another person—a commitment equal to the freedom we experience with each other. In all human giftedness you can find this balance between freedom and responsibility that makes up the equilibrium of health. When freedom is matched by responsibility, there is balance; when it is not, there is injury. The speed I drive a car needs to be matched by my ability to stop

the car when needed and by my willingness to take the consequences that go with driving the car. A skier may ski only as fast as he can control himself—severe consequences can come to the out-of-control skier and to everyone else on the hill.

The Thrill of Boundaries

Sexuality is enriched and made more exciting by restraint in the same way that rules and boundaries in sporting events enhance the excitement of the competition. The time clock strictly monitoring the length of a basketball or football game makes those final seconds of a close game so thrilling. Just so, when we reserve sexual union to be the vocabulary of commitment mixed with love and desire, we experience in that union the most thrilling and endearing romance. We have discovered in our

own generation that extensive sexual activity in teenage or adult years does not, in fact, make sexual experience more romantic and fulfilling.

Our bodies give us physical clues—sexually transmitted diseases—to tell us that lack of sexual restraint is unhealthy. The human body is not designed to thrive physically through multiple sexual relationships. Neither do our human emotions thrive when this healthy restraint is ignored. Although we need to know about diseases and about those things in the environment that put us at risk, most of all we need a goal to aim toward—a healthy, whole understanding of who we are and how much we are valued by God and by people, too.

I worry that our culture is so preoccupied about the preservation of

our freedoms that we have forgotten about the preservation of our commitments and our personal meaning. For Christians, our personal meaning has been validated to us by our discovery of God's love. Because of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we learn the full meaning of love that calls to us to have a purpose for living consistent with that love. We also learn of the one who forgives when we fail our purpose. Forgiveness makes possible new beginnings for me when I have acted wrongly toward myself, my body, and others. And *that* is a significant part of the whole truth. Schools can and should teach the truth about the healthy body, but in our families and in the fellowship of the Christian

church we must share with ourselves and our children the whole truth about the purpose that grows out of God's love for us and the forgiveness that heals.

In this lifelong task, the stakes are big—but then, they always have been.♦