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MAKING YOUR LIFE MATTER IN AN URGENT DAY

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"Smart" Sex

According to the most comprehensive national survey of sexual behaviors released by the federal government, slightly more than half of all American teenagers (ages 15-19) have engaged in oral sex, with males and females reporting similar levels of experience.

Claire Brindis, professor of pediatrics at the University of California-San Francisco, observes that "At 50 percent, we're talking about a major social norm. It's a part of kids' lives." The report, released last month by the National Center for Health Statistics in Hyattsville, Maryland, shows that the figure increases to about 70 percent of 18-19-year-olds.

Brindis suggests that part of the rise can be attributed to teens becoming increasingly "smart" about sex, postponing intercourse with its risk for pregnancy and disease. Yet she adds that it is to be questioned how "smart" it really is, pointing out that oral sex has been associated in clinical studies with several infections, including gonorrhea, syphilis, herpes and the human papillomavirus, which has been linked to cervical cancer.

The deeper cultural shift is not how many teens engage in oral sex, but how foundational attitudes toward sex itself have changed. For example, the majority of teens do not even consider oral sex to *be* sex. Lost even further is the biblical perspective on sex as found in the words of the Apostle Paul: "*There is more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact...the two become one*" (1 Corinthians 6:16, *The Message*).

Yes, chastity is a Christian practice that is out of synch with our secular culture. As Lauren Winner writes, "It challenges the movies we watch, the magazines we read, the songs we listen to. It runs counter to the way many of our non-Christian friends organize their lives." Yet the Christian perspective on sexual intimacy also offers something that the world doesn't already have, and its treatment of sex can never deliver – namely, intimacy. The Christian view of sexual fulfillment offers intimacy with another person, and with God, of such gravitas that it could not imagine any

relationship less than marriage for it to be realized. As such, the Christian view of sex is larger, and more significant, than the world's trivializations.

And when exposed to the depth and richness of Christian sexuality, the world seems to pay attention.

Consider a three-part documentary series on BBC2 airing in the UK, currently generating much conversation, titled, "No sex please, we're teenagers..." It follows 12 teenagers as they take a vow of celibacy for five months to explore the physical, emotional and sometimes spiritual possibilities for a healthier lifestyle.

The project, called Romance Academy, is run by two Christian youth-workers, Dan Burke and Rachel Gardner, who believe that a period of sexual abstinence creates space for teenagers – from peer pressure, from drugs and alcohol, and from the insecurities of youth – to begin thinking more clearly and positively about themselves, their bodies and their relationships. The teenagers were so impressed by Dan and Rachel as role models, and how they seemed to be living life to the full that they asked to find out more about the faith that drives them.

It is doubtful that many who seek to engage culture see the Bible's teaching on sex as the best bridge across which to walk, but as G.K. Chesterton once wrote, everyone who walks into a brothel is looking for God.

James Emery White

Sources

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