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"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Romans 12:1) (KJV)

What does it mean to be in a physical education class? To some it means "fun and games," while to others it means working out in the gymnasium on a regular basis. To children of farmers it may seem to be a waste of time: after all, they already have muscles. Others think of physical education as athletics or sports. Still others suppose that "a sound mind in a sound body" presents a dichotomy, by this they mean to say that the "sound body" has no bearing on a "sound mind."

Let us first examine what the Scriptures say. What do the Scriptures teach concerning physical education? How should a Christian view physical education? What is the Christian's responsibility with regard to the physical aspect of man? Who made this body? How important is our body?

The Bible gives us a fundamental directive for physical education. This is not explicit in the Scriptures but it is certainly implied. The Holy Scripture furnishes us with some guidelines when it comes to the importance and use of the body. In creation God made everything and everything He made was good (Genesis 1:31). Man is in that creation. Psalm 100:3 says, "Know ye that the Lord He is God; it is He that hath made us and not we ourselves; we are his people; and the sheep of his pasture." Genesis 2:7 tells us, "And the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Thus Scripture plainly teaches that God is the maker of our bodies. Therefore our bodies are important and, therefore, we do have a responsibility to our Maker. Romans 12:1 which I quoted in the beginning of this paper says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." In I Corinthians 6:19
and 20, Paul teaches us that we are not our own, but belong to God: “What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit which are God’s.” The body is a priceless possession for the Christian. It is written in Deuteronomy 6:5, “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” And the very first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism teaches us; “that I, with body and soul, both in life and death am not my own but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.”

From this we can see that the Scriptures and Confessions not only establish the importance of the body as such, they also teach us that it is an integral part of the image of God. The Scriptures also teach us that God gave us commands concerning the use of our bodies. There are many people today who do not appreciate many of the functions which belong to the human life. We are not machines that are set into motion without one division of life affecting the others. The intellectual division of life does not function against the emotional aspect of life, the spiritual sphere of life does not function by itself or against the other two, and neither does the physical aspect of life function independent of the others. Not one of these areas of life function apart from each other, they all are involved in life and thus in education. The body as far as a Christian is concerned, is not a working slave, or merely a machine; it is the property of God. We, as Christians should know the importance of the body and desire to use it as a tool with which to serve the Lord.

The body is a part of the total man who is created in the image of God. Children should be taught to value their body as a God-given possession. The task in a physical education program should be designed to educate each child in the proper use of his body throughout life. The care of the physical, as well as the spiritual body, is part of man’s reasonable service to God! The physical education program must prepare each person to understand and meet his or her bodily needs. Physical education must help students make wise and intelligent decisions regarding the care and the use of the body. It should also help a student make wise decisions about how he will use his leisure time. We are living in a world of much wealth and everybody has leisure time. If we as teachers and parents do not direct our students in the right use of leisure time, they will fill that time with something of their own choosing. What a student chooses for himself may in time lead to trouble, if he is not duly instructed how to fill his spare time correctly.

The need for a physical education program in the Christian school has been questioned often. It is believed that children have plenty of opportunity to get exercise in their play. This was probably true in our earlier history. The culture of that day instilled into children the need to do physically exerting work at home and at school. But today’s culture has changed. The working man’s load has been cut down. The physical effort has been reduced. Technology has given us more leisure time. Children are not required to do demanding workloads because of our wealth. We also live in a community in which we have much broader horizons. We need to have in our physical education programs, programs that teach about fitness and the wise use of leisure time.

At this point I would like to say: Caution should be taken that the care and use of the body does not become an end in itself. We must truly glorify God with the body God has created, but we must also keep in mind 1 Timothy 4:8: “For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise
of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Also Ecclesiastes 3:20: "All go unto one place, all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." This puts our body into the right perspective quite well, and should warn us never to make an idol of our body.

Physical education, then, is not limited to the conditioning and training of bodies. We must not separate the physical education program from the spiritual, emotional and intellectual development.

Everyone needs recreation throughout all of life. Recreation can bear many forms, such as music, crafts and arts, reading and many others. Most recreation is of free choice. Recreation is one area in the life of man in which he is not always bound to do the same thing or at the same time, but as he feels the need or has the time. The choice is ours, and if we are like most people, we will enjoy those activities in which we have at least, some knowledge and competence. One of the values of our physical education should be that we provide the opportunity to attain skills and knowledge in healthful activities that can be used for recreation during our student's school years and for years to come. Knowledge is necessary for successful participation in games and sports.

Another important value in physical education is the psychological aspect. The student is subject to tension and emotional stress that result from hard labor in the class room. The physical education class should provide exercise that can release some of the frustrations and fears of other classroom activity. Aggressiveness often disappears when a person vigorously attacks the soccer ball, or football or any activity in which one might be engaged. A good hard game often relaxes a person so that he can once again participate in intellectual tasks of studies.

Another important value of physical education is the development of good conduct. Children must be taught good sportsmanship. This ethical conduct depends upon our and their religious commitment. We must teach fairness, honesty, and so forth. Games and sports demand outward signs of conduct that are observed by everyone who is playing or watching.

From these values and from our religious commitment to serve the Lord to the best of our abilities, we must and should see the need of physical education in our school. The goals of our physical education program should center around the importance of teaching creative ways to maintain health fitness and to develop the physical skills of the body. We should provide an intellectual opportunity to our students, so that they will know and understand the need of physical fitness, and healthful living habits.

Therefore, health also should be high on our list. We should direct our students how to make wise decisions for the use of leisure time. With this I would like to give a list of aims and objectives:

1) Provide a classroom in physical education which leads to maximum health and the normal growth of a student's body.
2) We should throughout the program give students reasons why we as Christians have to care for our God-given body.
3) We should strive to develop the highest physical potential in our students. (adequate strength, endurance, agility and speed)
4) Develop general coordination and motor skills needed for daily life. (e.g., walking, standing, lifting, pushing, dodging, running, climbing)
5) Improving the power of perception.
6) Develop the ability to perform in a variety of sports and games, at the same time developing appreciation for these in later life; use of leisure time.
7) Teach our children how to develop skills for the worthy use of time now.
8) Provide a means of social interaction where individuals can learn to know
and to understand the needs of other people.

9) Provide opportunities for students to lead, to follow, to share in responsibilities.

10) We should try to provide participation in activities which call for courage and determination, for this will build self-confidence.

11) We must set forth the reasons why and benefits of good proper fitness.

12) We must direct the moral aspect of a person in the right direction. (fairness, unselfishness, patience, good sportsmanship, etc.)

13) We also must be realistic in that, it must be fun, relax the student, and give the student the satisfaction of accomplishment. The student should be able to reach some achievement, though never separate from their spiritual growth.

14) We should stress the importance of proper healthful living habits, such as eating, sleeping, and so forth.

15) We should conduct conditioning exercises in our classes.

These are some of the aims and objectives that should be in our physical education program. In order for these to be met, a program has to have the proper facilities.

In conclusion, permit me to make a few general remarks. One of the newest threats to our spiritual life is the increase in leisure time. Next to the abundance of the material things we now have, leisure time is high on the list. What must we do with it? How ought a Christian use his leisure time? We as Christian teachers and parents must give direction to our children in the use of their leisure time. We must start that in our physical education classes. This is part of our God-given responsibility when we baptize them. We read the Baptism form the third question, “Whether you promise and intend to see these children, when come to the years of discretion, instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power?” And we answer, “Yes”!

We as Christian parents having made this choice must provide this education to the best of our ability. We must give them the knowledge to make wise and careful decisions regarding the use of leisure time. Physical education is a must in the Protestant Reformed Christian schools. It is the Christian’s moral responsibility to be concerned about physical education.

“It is the duty, then, of the interpreter and teacher of Holy Scripture, the defender of the true faith and the opponent of error, both to teach what is right and to refute what is wrong, and in the performance of this task to conciliate the hostile, to rouse the careless, and to tell the ignorant both what is occurring at present and what is probable in the future. If, however, the hearers require to be roused rather than instructed, in order that they may be diligent to do what they already know, and to bring their feelings into harmony with the truths they admit, greater vigour of speech is needed. Here entreaties and reproaches, exhortations, and upbraidings, and all the other means of rousing the emotions, are necessary.”

Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, Book IV.

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