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MLK on parenting, premarital sex, homosexuality, abortion

By J. Michael Sharman - Editorial Columnist

When we think of Martin Luther King, we tend to think of the powerful preacher delivering the “I Have a Dream” speech that changed a nation. But rarely do we remember him as a gentle minister, offering pastoral advice to hurting individuals.

Here are some excerpts from the 1957-58 monthly advice column Dr. King wrote for Ebony magazine:

Question: I was in a home the other day where a 3-year-old child read the riot act to his mother. The mother took it with a sheepish smile. This, I am told, is permissiveness. It seems to me that what modern children need is a large dose of parental permissiveness applied to their backsides. Do you agree?

MLK: It is quite true that many modern parents go too far in allowing their children to express themselves with hardly a modicum of discipline. ... This almost “lunatic fringe” of modern child care has been responsible for most strange and fantastic methods of child rearing in many American homes. ... The child must realize that there are rules of the game which he did not make and that he cannot break with impunity.

Question: I was raised in a Christian environment. My father placed great stress on premarital virginity. I am 29. Of late, I have begun to doubt the validity of his teaching. ... Is he right?

MLK: I think you should hold firm to the principle of premarital virginity. The problems created by premarital sex relationships are far greater than the problems created by premarital virginity. The suspicion, fears, and guilt feelings generated by premarital sex relations are contributing factors to the present breakdown of the family. Real men still respect purity and virginity within women. If a man breaks a relationship with you because you would not allow him to participate in the sexual act, you can be assured that he did not love you from the beginning.

Question: My problem is different from the ones most people have. I am a boy, but I feel about boys the way I ought to feel about girls. I don't want my parents to know about me. What can I do?

MLK: Your problem is not at all an uncommon one. However, it does require careful attention. The type of feeling that you have toward boys is probably not an innate tendency, but something that has been culturally

acquired. ... You are already on the right road toward a solution, since you honestly recognize the problem and have a desire to solve it.

Question: About two years ago, I was going with a young lady who became pregnant. I refused to marry her. As a result, I was directly responsible for a crime. It was not until a month later that I realized the awful thing I had done. I begged her to forgive me, to come back, but she has not answered my letters. The thing stays on my mind. What can I do? I have prayed for forgiveness.

MLK: You have made a mistake. ... One can never rectify a mistake until he admits that a mistake has been made. Now that you have prayed for forgiveness and acknowledged your mistake, you must turn your vision to the future. ... Now that you have repented, don't concentrate on what you failed to do in the past, but what you are determined to do in the future.

Sharman's column runs every Tuesday. He practices law in Culpeper.

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