

"In A Roundabout Way"

by Tom Wacaster

Dodging responsibility and skating around life's difficulties are sometimes excused on the basis that eventually we get things done, only in a "roundabout way." James Thurber has a little story entitled, "The Dog Who Bit People." It seems that his family had a dog to whom Thurber's mother had taken a liking. The problem was that the dog was quite well known for its streak of meanness. Rather than deal with the situation in a strait forward manner, the family would take care of otherwise normal situations in a "roundabout way." The postman, for example, had to deliver the mail to another house down the street, and one of the children would be dispatched to fetch the mail, all because the dog did not like the postman. There were others whom the dog did not like, and when such company came to visit, the dog would have to be chased down, and tied up. It would seem that a better solution would be to simply constrain the dog behind a fence. Instead, the family adjusted their life to the ways of the dog.

Admittedly there are occasions when the Christian brother or sister should simply "give in," and respect an opinion of another. "Destroy not with thy meat him for whom Christ died" (Romans 14:15b). Sometimes we can accomplish the Lord's work in a "roundabout" way while respecting the opinions and liberty of a fellow Christian. Personal "rights" must give way to the harmony and unity of the body. But when it comes to matters of doctrine, moral uprightness, integrity, honesty, etc., and when truth is at stake, there is no "roundabout way" to fulfill our responsibility. There is much truth in the proverb, "Sometimes you have to take the bull by the horns." The tragedy of our age is the unwillingness of men and women to do just that, and to face life's problems head on. Instead we attempt to deal with truth in a sort of "roundabout way," when in reality we don't deal with the problem at all. Instead of locking the dog up, we simply adjust our life to the way of the dog. Read on.

Raising children is most difficult. Always has been; always will be. Sometimes it is much easier to simply give in to the child so as to pacify them in their immaturity rather than exercise discipline and teach the child self control. It is easier to take the child into the nursery and let them play on the floor, rather than discipline that child and teach him to behave in worship services. We may deceive ourselves into thinking that we are training the child in a "roundabout way," while in fact we are reinforcing misbehavior by giving the child what he really wanted in the first place - freedom to do what he wants.

The same is true in the church. Misbehavior by a selfish, immature brother or sister calls for corporate discipline on the part of the congregation as a whole. We may think that toleration of open sin will eventually win the friendship of the brother and lead him back into the fold, thereby accomplishing our desired end in a "roundabout way," but we deceive ourselves when we think this way.

In the realm of evangelism we fear any confrontation with those lost in sin, and so we seek to win that soul over in some "roundabout way." Cottage classes, gospel meetings, personal one-on-one studies are all shunned in exchange for some magical method that will lead the soul to the baptistery without ever dealing with sin, the Lordship of Christ, the essentiality of faithful godly living, etc.

It is this same attitude that has led many a congregation to soften the claims of God's word in order to fill their buildings and increase their membership. The

commandments of our Lord are too strait, the exactions too demanding. Folks are "turned off" by the straight forward preaching of the Gospel, so we adjust to the ways of the world and seek to get them into the church in some "roundabout way." But the Gospel is God's power to save, and there is no "roundabout way" to produce faith in the heart of an unbeliever. Faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17). And we cannot, we dare not, seek to produce some sort of a faith and maturity in the souls of men apart from the preaching of God's word - the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

There is no "roundabout way" to get God's work done. "And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).