

"IF YOU GET WHERE YOU'RE GOING, WHERE WILL YOU BE?"

TEXT: "I am the way....no man cometh unto  
the Father, but by Me"

John 14: 6

INTRODUCTION You and I have been witness to a great deal of muddled thinking in recent years regarding the means and the ends of life - the goals people want to reach and the roads they travel to reach them.

We're aware that here on this road of life that we're travelling, all of us are going somewhere. With every tick of the clock, with every day on the calendar, we are moving toward some destination. However, some of our goals are not worth getting to, and some are ruined by the ways we take to reach them. Goals and roads.

Means and ends. It's at this point that our human problems become somewhat complicated - good and evil mixed in them like the tares and the wheat that Jesus spoke of. And several centuries before Jesus, a man by the name of Socrates went about the streets of Athens accusing his contemporaries of spending their lives in pursuit of goals they never bothered to examine. Said he, "The unexamined life is not worth living".

DEVELOPMENT Alice in "Alice In Wonderland" asked the cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" And the cat replied, "That depends a good deal on where you want to go". "Oh" said Alice, "I don't much care". "Then it doesn't matter much which way you go". "But" insisted Alice, "I want to get somewhere". "Ah" answered the cat, "You are sure to do that!"

And it's true. We're all going somewhere. And so here on this first Sunday of a New Year, it's well for us to pause and reflect on some fundamental questions regarding the means and the ends of our lives. For instance, where are you going? What ends do you have in view? Where do you want to get off? How do you propose to get there? We may not clear up all the confusion, but we may see more clearly where the goalposts are. ..guideposts located.

MAGNIFICENT MEANS TO ACHIEVE TRIVIAL ENDS Consider first of all this observation: the use of magnificent means to achieve trivial ends. Big means for small ends.

About a hundred years ago, Henry Thoreau sat in his little haven at Walden Pond outside of Concord, Massachusetts watching linesmen put up wires along the tracks of the old Fitchburg Railway and upon inquiry was told that it was this new thing called "the telegraph" - which would link the state of Maine with the state of Texas and enable people to talk to each other across the continent. Unimpressed, he raised this concern:

"But what if the people of Maine have nothing to say to the people of Texas, and the people of Texas have nothing to answer to the people of Maine?"

And then he came up with the comment which has more or less characterized every mechanical advancement since. Said he, "We're improving the means for reaching unimproved ends". Improved means. Unimproved ends. His observation - his appraisal relates to our time, too. There's much in our technological society

that we have glorified as progress.

We have done well in improving the means of communication - from telegraph to telephone to television. But one often wonders if there has been any commensurate improvement in what we have to say. We've witnessed some wonderful advances in the means of transportation, too.

"Inventions add new speed to life,  
We move much faster through the air;  
Our ships and cars and aeroplanes  
All hurl us faster on - but where?"

One wonders whether the quality of life

And for what? To what end? | Certainly the quality of life is not being improved in all of this. Sometimes when I watch people feverishly trying to get somewhere, I'm reminded of a story about a city lawyer who bought a saddle horse from a farmer. The farmer agreed to sell the horse, provided the lawyer could catch it. The lawyer took his two sons in the pasture and after about three hours, they managed to corral the horse and put a bridle on him. The farmer - being honest - commented:

"There are two things I have to tell you about this horse before I take your money. In the first place, he's awful hard to catch". (The man had discovered that). "The second thing" said the farmer with a wink at his wife, "He's really not worth a darn when you've ketched him".

There are a lot of things like that in our world - things that are hard to catch. If you get them, it will mean hard work - long hours, lots of self-denial. And when you get them, you won't have much. The ends of your life. If you get where you're going, where will you be?

DESIRABLE ENDS / CORRUPTED MEANS

Move on to a second phase of this matter.

Turn the problem around. Consider the good and desirable ends that so often get corrupted through the means by which we seek to reach them. It's a subtle temptation - the temptation of the shortcut. Much of the misery we pile up for ourselves comes out of it - not of choosing the wrong goals, but of choosing the wrong road to the right goals.

So often in our hurry to get where we want to go, we're inclined to be impatient with slow means, old-fashioned rules of right and wrong. So we begin to rationalize the shortcut and entertain the plausible idea that it is quite all right to cheat or cut a corner if it's a good cause and we don't get caught. Political leaders will tell you about all the wrong things that get done to get a right thing accomplished. Diplomats proceed on the assumption that cheating and lying are sometimes justified in order to protect the national interest. A representative of a church said some time ago before a gambling referendum in a nearby state, "What's so wrong about gambling if it benefits the Church?" And so we play around with the old, familiar doctrine that the ends are supposed to justify whatever means are used and never do!

How often we try to kid ourselves into thinking that if it's a good end we're after, it is permissible then to do a wrong thing to get there. Never mind how you get there. Get there - the end will justify the means. And it is a lie!

JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS

Jesus in His temptation in the wilderness saw it for what it really was - a lie of the Devil. His wilderness temptations turned on this very thing. Dostoyevsky thought that the three temptations of Jesus in the wilderness were the essence and the epitome of human history. Look carefully at them. All were temptations to take some kind of shortcut to the Kingdom of God - to do evil that good might come - to do a wrong thing for a right reason. So plausible it was that Jesus labeled it a "temptation". And He would not bow to it. He came out of the wilderness with the clear and the unclouded perception that if you want to get where God is, you have to take God's way to it. "Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God - Him only shalt thou serve".

By this time we should have learned that bit of wisdom because of all generations in history, we have witnessed the consistent illusion of the shortcut. When Jesus said, "I am the Way. No man cometh to the Father, but by me" - He was talking about means - the way to arrive. The shortcut never does. For when you get where you want to go you find the means have become the ends, and you don't have the thing you started out to reach. It is still true that "Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap".

RESOLUTIONS

Come finally now, to consider the high ends we deeply desire and often miss simply because we didn't take any means to reach them....for instance, this matter of resolutions for the New Year. Each year about this time we celebrate the anniversary of the American Resolution. New leaves get turned. Slates are wiped clean. Fresh intent and renewed purpose take hold. I believe all of this is to the good!

The making of resolutions has been the target of good natured ridicule. Who was it who said: "They just go in one year and out the other". We joke about it because it reveals so clearly the gap tween intention and action. But, I think there's something healthy in taking stock of ourselves. It's this measure of dissatisfaction with ourselves that gives birth to dreams, higher longings, resolutions. Think of it as the stirring of God's spirit in us. It's good to dream, to set high goals, but it is in the road - the means - the way we travel to get there - that we should watch carefully. Good intentions are never enough. The road we travel involves work and sacrifice. It is what a person does day by day - not what he is dreaming - that determines destination.

I normally do not quote Dear Abby in my sermons, but I would like to share with all of you one of her recent columns. I clipped it and referred to it in a New Year's meditation a year ago. Some of you may remember it. As I recall you asked for copies of it. Here it is again.

"I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year,  
'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown'. And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than a light and safer than a known way'.

So I went forth and, finding the hand of God, strode gladly into the night, and He led me toward the hills and the breaking of dawn in the East".

PRAYER

As we kneel at thy table this hour and receive the bread and wine, strengthen us, O God, to meet whatever may be ahead of us in the days of this New Year. We remember thy love is unfailing. In the name of Christ,  
Amen.

PRAYER      Confirm within us, O God, the hopes and aspirations, the dreams and resolutions of this hour. As we kneel at thy table and receive the bread and wine - strengthen us in our resolve that we may meet with courage and serenity whatever this New Year may bring into our lives. We remember thy love is unfailing, that we can never drift beyond the circle of thy care. In the name and spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen

# Dear Abby

ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

**DEAR ABBY:** Last New Year's Eve you published nine rules for living. You suggested that they would make an excellent set of New Year's resolutions, and that's exactly what I used them for.

I read them every morning, and can truthfully say that I am a much better person today than I was a year ago simply because I tried to live by those rules.

In my humble opinion that was the best advice I've ever read. This is to thank you for that column, Abby, and to ask you to please run it again for those who may have missed it. I hope it will do for others what it did for me.

I am not a teen-ager. I am a 33-year-old wife and mother, but we are never too old to learn, right?

## —STILL LEARNING

**DEAR STILL:** Right! But don't thank me. I didn't originate those rules. I paraphrased them.

It's the credo for Overeaters Anonymous.

Their credo:

1. Just for today I will try to live through this day only, and not set far-reaching goals to try to overcome all my problems at once. I know I can do something for 12 hours that would appall me if I felt I had to keep it up for a lifetime.

2. Just for today I will try to be happy. Abraham Lincoln said, "Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be." He was right. I will not dwell on thoughts that depress me. I will chase them out of my mind and replace them with happy thoughts.

3. Just for today I will adjust myself to what is. I will

try to change those things I cannot.

4. Just for today I will try to improve my mind. I will not be a mental loafer. I will force myself to read something that requires effort, thought and concentration.

5. Just for today I will exercise my soul in three ways: I will do a good deed for somebody—without letting them know it. (If they find out I did it, it won't count.) I will do at least two things that I know I should do, but have been putting off. I will not show anyone that my feelings are hurt; they may be hurt, but today I will not show it.

6. Just for today I will be agreeable. I will look as well as I can, dress becomingly, talk softly, act courteously, and speak ill of no one. Just for today I'll not try to improve anybody except myself.

7. Just for today I will have a program. I may not follow it exactly, but I will have it, thereby saving myself from two pests: hurry and indecision.

8. Just for today I will have a quiet half hour to relax alone. During this time I will reflect on my behavior and will try to get a better perspective of my life.

9. Just for today I will be unafraid. I will gather the courage to do what is right and take the responsibility for my own actions. I will expect nothing from the world, but I will realize that as I give to the world, the world will give to me.

It makes sense, doesn't it? And so does their program. It's free. For information about this wonderful organization, write to Box 34854, Los Angeles, Calif. 90034.

P. S. Have a happy, healthy New Year. —LOVE ABBY



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