



October 2012 - *The American Trait of Doing vs. Being*

C. S. Lewis took an hour nearly every day to personally reply in writing to his many admirers. This act of service is exemplified in the over one hundred letters he sent between 1950 -1963 to an American lady whom he had never met. One of these letters, published in the book, *Letters to an American Lady*, addresses the modern American dilemma for followers of Jesus—that of getting so caught up in doing good things that we miss what God really has for us to do. Lewis, a bachelor, writes to his pen pal friend, Mary:

A line in haste about the bits underlined in your letter (which I enclose for reference). Don't be too easily convinced that God really wants you to do all sorts of work you needn't do. Each must do his duty 'in that state of life to which God has called him'. Remember that a belief in the virtues of doing for doing's sake is characteristically feminine, characteristically American, and characteristically modern: so that *three* veils may divide you from the correct view! There can be intemperance in work just as in drink. What feels like zeal may be only fidgets or even the flattering of one's self-importance. As MacDonald says 'In holy things may be unholy greed'. And by doing what 'one's station and its duties' does not demand, one can make oneself less fit for the duties it *does* demand and so commit some injustice. Just you give Mary a little chance as well as Martha!¹

The Gospel writer Luke tells the following story:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'

'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her' (Luke 10:38-42 – NIV).

Have you given both Mary and Martha a little chance in your life this past week? Do you find yourself "doing for doing's sake," rather than enjoying time spent with the Lord and others. We are called after all, human beings, not human doings.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), pp. 50–51.