



Reflections

August 2015 – Mistaking the Means for the End

In his fictional book, *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis tells the story of a man who, through a dream, took a journey to heaven and hell. One of the man's experiences was an encounter with the Scotsman George MacDonald, now a citizen of heaven, whom he calls "My Teacher."

MacDonald recounts to the man the seemingly strange story of Sir Archibald,¹ who in his earthly life had been interested in nothing but Survival. He'd written books, conducted experiments and given lectures on the subject, and it eventually became his only occupation. He was so obsessed with the subject that, at the end of his life, he had no interest in heaven. Everyone there had already survived, so his occupation was gone. MacDonald observes that if Sir Archibald "would only have admitted that he'd mistaken the means for the end and had a good laugh at himself he could have begun all over again like a little child and entered into joy," but he cared nothing about joy and in the end went away.



When the man listening to the story exclaims, "How fantastic!," the conversation continues:

"Do ye think so?" said the Teacher with a piercing glance. "It is nearer to such as you than ye think. There have been men before now who got so interested in proving the existence of God that they came to care nothing for God Himself ... as if the good Lord had nothing to do but *exist!* There have been some who were so occupied in spreading Christianity that they never gave a thought to Christ. Man! Ye see it in smaller matters. Did ye never know a lover of books that with all his first editions and signed copies had lost the power to read them? Or an organiser of charities that had lost all love for the poor? It is the subtlest of all the snares."

Lewis understood that it is all too easy for people to become so occupied with something they are doing that they mistake the means for the end, and, as a result, miss out on what's really important. Are there areas in your life where that might be happening?

"And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith"

HEBREWS 12: 1-2 (NIV)

¹C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, Touchstone: New York, 1996, p. 70-71.