

DEACON, A GLORIOUS OFFICE

By Adauto Rezende

- ✓ *“Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.” Revelation 7: 15*

Have you ever noticed when visiting a church, the presence of some people, welcoming you with a smile and a handshake? Occasionally, some are unknown to many, but lonely they are repairing the church’s roof, or cleaning and watering the garden of their congregations. In some ministries, they are taking care of the food bank, or serving meals to the homeless in the city's neighborhoods lanes and hedges. Sometimes, following their leader's instructions, they are visiting people with diverse and distinct needs. I know many people who have remained in the church captivated by the actions of these individuals. They are called “Deacons”.

This office arose at the very beginning of the church. The apostles encountered disagreements among the new Christians regarding food distribution for the widows. In view of the crisis, they ordered the selection of candidates to take on and deal with such problems. Seven men were chosen, ordained, and sent to the exercise of this ministry: to serve tables (***diakonein trapezais***) Acts 6:2.

Years later, in his letter to Timothy, Paul gave instructions on the qualifications of deacons and added the blessings to those who would carry out this office with zeal. By the way, it is worth remembering that the apostle Paul had the terrible experience of consenting to the murder of Stephen, the first martyr, and one of the first seven deacons appointed by the church. Paul, therefore, knew the honor of this office in the church. Another example was Philip, also one of the seven (Acts 6:5, 21:8), promoted as the first evangelist by an office, who had carried a mighty ministry, accompanied by signs and wonders.

There was also a deaconess in the church of Joppa, although not officially recognized, however, she proved to carry this ministry with passion. About her, it is written, *“she was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room... All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.”* (Acts 9:36-39) She was so loved by the church that when she died they sent a team to bring Peter in to resurrect her. Probably some preachers had died as well in her time, but it seems they were not missed as much as this deaconess. Paul also

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mentions another deaconess, in his letter to the Romans “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who serves in the church which is at Cenchreae,” 16:1

The Scriptures say about this office:

- ✓ *“For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (NKJV) I Timothy 3: 13*
- ✓ *“Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.” (NIV) I Timothy 3: 13*

This text reveals characteristics and rewards for deacons:

1. Some important elements to consider:

- ✓ They are called to serve.
- ✓ They may serve inadequately, modestly, or with excellence.

2. Rewards for good deacons:

- a) Not only they are in a position of promotion, but also held in high esteem before the Lord.
- b) They would get a visible spiritual growth in the faith rested in Christ. (Great boldness, *where it is especially applied to boldness in preaching the gospel of Christ.*)
- c) They will advance in their leadership due to contact with the leader and members.

The word "deacon" essentially means servant. (from the Greek diakonos, "helper"). They are judged by many as a member of the lowest level of Christian ministry.

It is interesting to remember that this office was part of the lives of dozens in the Old Testament Scriptures. I would like to mention a few:

- ✓ **Joshua served Moses**
- ✓ **Elisha served Elijah**
- ✓ **Ruth served Naomi**

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Joshua

a) A deacon is in the service of his mentor:

Moses took the young Joshua with him, who apparently stayed with him for 40 days on the Mount of God.

- ✓ “The Lord said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction.” Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. He said to the elders, “Wait here for **us** until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them.” Exodus 24: 12-14
- ✓ “Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, “There is the sound of war in the camp.” Moses replied: “It is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear.” Exodus 32:15-18

b) A deacon walking in the presence of the Lord:

Joshua showed love and dedication to the Lord and to the Tabernacle of God:

- ✓ *“As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses. 10 Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent. The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.” Exodus 33: 9-11*

c) A deacon who serves well is known for his faith:

Joshua proved to have courage, despite the fears of most. (Numbers 13-14)

From Joshua, we learned that those who want to be God's leaders must stand up for what is right even when everyone else wants to do what is wrong. They must not be intimidated or allow fear to control them.

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d) A deacon who serves well will get promotion:

- ✓ *“So the Lord said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the Lord. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in.” Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the Lord instructed through Moses.” Numbers 27: 18-23*

Elisha

The diaconal role of the prophet Elisha could be perceived by:

a) He took care of his mentor's physical needs:

- ✓ *“But Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there no prophet of the Lord here, through whom we may inquire of the Lord?” An officer of the king of Israel answered, “Elisha son of Shaphat is here. He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah.” II Kings 3: 11*

b) He took care of his mentor's emotional needs:

He put it in his heart not to allow Elijah to walk alone:

- ✓ *“Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; the Lord has sent me to Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel.” II Kings 2: 2*
- ✓ *“Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here, Elisha; the Lord has sent me to Jericho.” And he replied, “As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went to Jericho.” II Kings 2: 4*
- ✓ *“Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.” And he replied, “As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them walked on.” II Kings 2: 6*

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c) His observation and godly ambition regarding his mentor's anointing:

- ✓ *“When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?” “Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,” Elisha replied. “You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah said, “yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not.” II Kings 2: 9-10*

d) By exercising his services as a deacon well, he received what he had asked for:

- ✓ *“The company of the prophets from Jericho, who were watching, said, “The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha.” And they went to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.” II King 2: 15*

Ruth

Her diaconal character was observed by:

a) Her resolution to honor her leader:

- ✓ *“Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.” But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” 18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.” Ruth 1: 16-18*

b) Her resolution to feed her leader:

- ✓ *“And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.” Naomi said to her, “Go ahead, my daughter.” So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. Ruth 2: 2-3a*

c) Her resolution to perpetuate the lineage of her leader:

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- ✓ *“He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.” Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.” Ruth 4: 15-17*

The diaconate in the person of Christ

- ✓ *“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.” John 13: 14*

Jesus made it very clear on many occasions that servitude is an essential virtue in the lives of his disciples, regardless of the title or function that they would exercise. He said of himself:

- ✓ *“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to **serve**, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20: 28 (**Greek = diakonēsai – to serve**)*
- ✓ *“For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who **serves**? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who **serves**.” Luke 22: 27 (**Greek = diakonōn – serve**)*

In the context of these passages, he stated:

“Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” Mathew 20: 26-27 (**Greek = διάκονος - diakonos – servant**)

What is the difference between diakonos and Doulos?

- ✓ *“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.” Romans 1: 1 (**Greek – doulos – servant**)*

Diakonos is a call to a life of serving others besides yourself, and doulos is a call to become a slave to the master, Jesus.

The diaconate in the person of David

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Jesse had eight sons. God sent the prophet Samuel to anoint a king from his children, and when he arrived in the house, deluded by the appearance of the oldest, he moved toward Eliab, thinking that he was the chosen one. After inspecting the others six, he asked the father if there was any other son. There was one more, the youngest one. He was the deacon of the family. While the seven were at home, he was taking care of his father's flock. No one gave attention to David, not even his father, but God saw him in the wilderness, serving his family. Watching his heart of a servant, the deacon of the house of Jesse was anointed king of Israel by the Lord.

The diaconate in the person of Paul

- ✓ *“When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, “This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live.” But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects.” Acts 28: 4-5*

Paul, one of the greatest of the apostles, on one occasion, when sailing to Rome, their ship was wrecked on the island of Malta. On a cold and rainy day, the 276 exhausted survivors, including Paul, watched the wreckage of the vessel, propelled by the waves, reaching the beach. Seeing the discouragement of the crew, due to tensions and losses, the disciple demonstrated his diaconal character. He went out in search of sticks to feed the flames, in order to warm the body and the spirits of that crowd. It is interesting to note that he went through different experiences and difficulties in his ministry; however, it was while exercising the diaconate that a serpent wounded him. Satan has a tremendous aversion when he sees a believer serving, for in this action he recognizes the presence of Christ, and he knows what opportunities will arise for the extension of the Kingdom. Through the miraculous healing of the poisonous sting in his body, the people of the island, overwhelmed by the miracle, witnessed and received divine healing for their sicknesses through Paul's hands.

“The highest life is A LIFE OF PERPETUAL SERVICE. The reward which God confers upon His faithful ones is ability and permission to serve, and when He calls them from the lower to the higher places, the higher honor is that they are enabled and privileged to serve more. In God's view rank is determined by the measure of service. It is strange how the world has reversed this principle in its conceptions of rank and dignity. We speak of service with a sort of disdain, and of

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servants as inferior persons. You would find thousands of people ashamed to be seen with soiled hands, where you would find one ashamed of living an utterly profitless life. And we often pay the greatest respect to men and women who are of so little good to the world that almost the best service they could render would be to remove themselves out of it as speedily as possible. What a curious spectacle this must present to those who look down upon the earthly life from above. In days to come, when Christ shall truly rule in the hearts of men, they will find it hard to believe that there was ever a time when hats were doffed and knees were bowed to selfish and unserviceable lives. And even now if we look with Christ's eyes, we shall think the most ignorant ploughman who earns his daily bread a far nobler being, and of more exalted rank than the cultured voluptuary who neither uses hands nor brain to serve his fellows and make the world a little better than he found it. We shall honor the meanest workman more than the noblest of society's indolent darlings. We shall be as much ashamed of living unserviceable lives as of being detected in some glaring felony. The homes on earth which most resemble heaven are those in which from the father down to the youngest child, every loved and loving one is serving and being served by each and all; where love is always giving, yet receiving more than it gives; where all are servants, and because servants, masters; where all are happy because all are ministering to the joy of others.: J.G. Greenhough

In conclusion, I would like to ask you a few questions:

Can your church leadership see a servant's quality in you?

Do you walk alongside your mentor, honor your mentor, and serve your mentor?

Does Christ see in you an ordinary or an outstanding deacon?

In your present office, are you still able to get firewood to warm the lives of those the Lord has placed in your church, and ministry?

Remember that as a deacon, even if no one values your servitude, however, God will never ignore your labor. Also, you can be sure that your spiritual life will never be the same. Your spiritual advance will be noticeable, and your promotion may take some time, but it will not fail.

To him be the glory!