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# The High Calling of Deacon

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George C. Fuller

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Just north of Hyde Park and overlooking the Hudson valley stands the palatial Vanderbilt mansion. During the winter months two people lived here, served by over twenty maids, butlers, chauffeurs, groundskeepers, cooks and servants. Vanderbilt money was plentiful and powerful. Measured against the standards of past and present societies, the Vanderbilts "had it made." Wealthy, powerful, they sat where others have longed to be.

Jesus told his disciples, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them."

The world has always measured greatness by the standard of service, not service a person gives, but that which he receives. In business a man or woman is often judged successful if many people "report to him." Happiness and success is then to be found at the top of the pyramid. At the bottom is misery and drudgery.

Plato said, "How can a man be happy when he has to serve someone?" For the Greeks, menial "service" was not dignified, surely not to be sought as a way of life.

But Jesus changed all that, radically reversing the world's standards. He did not make subtle changes or adjustments in a well-entrenched system. He turned the whole thing upside down, making, as it were, the first last and the last first.

That kind of change does not allow for compromise. Choice is necessary, and only

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How does someone reverse a standard whose acceptance has been so nearly universal among all people and throughout all centuries, perhaps especially in our present world? First, know that we are not talking about "someone"; we're talking about Jesus. More than Jesus the man, he is Jesus the Creator, Jesus the Son, Jesus the Lord. This world owes its beginning and its continuance to him and his power. The One who seeks to overturn the standards of a world that exalts men of power is himself King of kings and Lord of lords. With God the Father and God the Holy Spirit he is alone at the top of the pyramid; in fact, he is above the entire pyramid. So the precise question is: How does the Lord of Glory set forth in a world of sin standards that utterly contradict its life-style, begun in Adam and continued to this day?

He does it by demonstration. He "deacons." Place high value on that word; it rises from the heart of the gospel. The Greek word meant to "serve at tables," and by extension, "to render humble, menial service for the benefit of others."

Jesus said, "The Son of man came not to be served, but to serve." That's the word: "I came not to be 'deaconed', but to 'deacon'." For Jesus, "deaconing" meant giving sight to blind eyes, hearing to deaf ears, comfort to afflicted hearts, strength to weak legs, deliverance to tormented souls. He washed the disciples' feet. No wonder they were confused; their and the world's value system was being challenged. He endured capital punishment, emotional and spiritual agony beyond our comprehension, and not for any crime he had committed. He did it for others; he "deaconed."

If Jesus had not taken upon himself the "form of a servant," if the Lord of glory had not also "humbled himself and become obedient unto death, even death on a cross," the world's standard would be unchallenged. Not only would we be without his supreme example, as the one who though Lord of all became servant of all, we would also be deprived of his essential power. Having endured, suffered, died, Jesus was then raised, powerful, victorious, triumphant, now to live in and through his people. He is the "deacon," our ultimate example, and in his fulfilling of that charge from God is power for his people, his body on earth, to do his ministry.

The relationship between what Jesus did for us and what he does through us lies in the depths of his love. "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Jesus' love for us is love for sinners. A righteous, pure, holy God loves that which is unclean, impure, unholy. He loves us in spite of what we are. To say of such love that it is unusual is an understatement; it is absolutely unique. He loves the unlovely, the unlovable, who have rejected him and his mercy. He loves them anyway and brings them to himself.

"If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." The same kind of love with which the Christian was loved becomes his, namely, love for the unlovely, the unlovable, the dirty, the unclean. The love that Jesus demonstrated on the cross accomplishes our salvation, but it also gives us power for ministry. As no other