

## B. διακονέω in the NT.

Jesus' view of service grows out of the OT command of love for one's neighbour, which He takes and links with the command of love for God to constitute the substance of the divinely willed ethical conduct of His followers. In so doing, He purifies the concept of service from the distortions which it had suffered in Judaism. Jesus' attitude to service is completely new as compared with the Greek understanding. The decisive point is that He sees in it the thing which makes a man His disciple.

1. In the NT διακονέω is first used in the original sense of "to wait at table": Lk. 17:8: ἔτοιμασον τί δειπνήσω, καὶ περιζωσάμενος διακονεῖ μοι ἕως φάγω καὶ πίω; Jn. 12:2: ἐποίησαν οὖν αὐτῷ δεῖπνον ἐκεῖ, καὶ ἡ Μάρθα διηκόνει, ὁ δὲ Λάζαρος εἰς ἣν ἔκ τῶν ἀνακειμένων σὺν αὐτῷ. At table there is a palpable distinction between the worthy man reclining on the couch and the girded servant or the attentive woman. It is thus a high honour for the vigilant servants when their returning lord rewards them by girding himself, setting them at table and coming to serve them (Lk. 12:37). The astonishing act of Jesus in the appraisal of service is to reverse in ethical estimation the relation between serving and being served (Lk. 22:26 f.). Among the disciples ὁ ἡγούμενος must be ὡς ὁ διακονῶν. τίς γὰρ μείζων, ὁ ἀνακείμενος ἢ ὁ διακονῶν; οὐχὶ ὁ ἀνακείμενος; ἐγὼ δὲ ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν εἰμι ὡς ὁ διακονῶν.

The natural man — and especially the Greek — would see no difficulty in answering the question who is greater, the one who serves or the one who is served. It is obviously the latter. Jesus in His emphatic statement (ἐγὼ δὲ ...) does not oppose to this view the general thought that serving is greater than being served. Instead, He points to the actuality: I am among you as a servant. This is said by the uncontested leader of the disciples, by the Son of Man who knows that He is Lord of the kingdom of God (Lk. 22:29) and who summons the disciples to exercise final judgment on Israel with Him (v. 30). It is thus clear that Jesus is not merely bringing about a radical change in the academic estimation of human existence and action; He is instituting in fact a new pattern of human relationships. He makes this no less clear in terms of the specific process of waiting at table than by His own action in washing the feet of His disciples.

There is a variant reading of Lk. 22:27 f. in Codex D. This would give the following sense: "Better the leader be servant than the one who sits at table. For I have come among you, not as one who sits at table, but as one who serves. And you have grown through my service." Blass and J. Weiss<sup>5</sup> regard this as the original version. It blunts, however, the sharpness of the antithesis between the current view and that of Jesus, and reduces to mere pedagogy the impressive reference to the manner and conduct of Jesus. It is surely a later softening.

In a rather wider sense διακονεῖν means "to supervise the meal" in Ac. 6:2: διακονεῖν τραπέζαις. The reference is not merely to the provision of food but to the daily preparation and organisation. H. J. Holtzmann describes the men to whom this task was committed as organisers, dispensers and overseers of meals, τραπεζοποιοί.<sup>6</sup> The διακονεῖν τραπέζαις is brought into emphatic contrast with the διακονία τοῦ λόγου, and embraces practical love rather than the proclamation of the Word.

<sup>5</sup> *Schriften d. NT*<sup>3</sup> (1917), *ad loc.*

<sup>6</sup> H. J. Holtzmann, *Apostelgeschichte*<sup>3</sup> (1901), 51.