

Hugo Bouter

# Who is the greatest among you?

*"But there was also rivalry among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest."*

Luke 22:24

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## The first

During the discussions at the Passover meal, the disciples disagreed as to which of them should be regarded as the first or the greatest in the kingdom of Christ. The kingdom of heaven, however, cannot be compared to earthly kingdoms. Different laws apply here. The Lord Himself behaved in their midst as a Servant, and the disciples were to emulate Him. He had laid aside His glory and taken on the form of a slave (Phil. 2:7). He had even washed the feet of His followers. Although He was their Lord and Master, He gave them this example of humility, that they might imitate Him in this (John 13:1-17).

It is evident that the Lord is the First in the midst of His own. He is the Firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29). In all things He must have the preeminence, or be the First (Col. 1:18). And if the First has become the Servant of all, what is our place? Then it no longer matters whether we occupy the second, third or fourth place among the Lord's followers. It is enough for us to be useful to others, and in this way to serve Christ.

## The second

That is why we never read about a brother Primus (= the first) in the Christian company, but we do read about a brother Secundus (= second). We come across his name in Acts 20:4. He was one of the two believers from Thessalonica, who accompanied Paul on the third missionary journey together with others to Jerusalem. He is also mentioned as the second of the two. The other brother was called Aristarchus (= chief ruler). He was apparently more prominent, and he also accompanied Paul on his journey to Rome (Acts 27:2).

Are we content to take the second place, even in the work of the Lord? Are we okay with the Lord assigning others a place that is more conspicuous and seemingly more important? The Lord knows what is good for us. We are all members of one body. When one member suffers, all members suffer with him. If one member receives honor, all members share in the common joy (1 Cor. 12:26).

## The third

There was also a brother who was called Tertius (= third). This one we would easily overlook, but he really fulfilled a very important task. For he served as Paul's secretary at Corinth (Rom. 16:22-23). Here Tertius wrote down the letter to the Romans; and it is partly to him, therefore, that we owe the knowledge of the great foundations of our salvation in Christ, as set forth in this letter.

Perhaps we may analyze this event: the Lord was the First in this, for He inspired Paul by the Spirit to write the letter. Paul was the second as the instrument used by the Holy Spirit to dictate it. What he spoke were spiritual words, wisdom that was from the Spirit of God (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6-16). Tertius was the third who was involved in the work, because he was led to record these words, Scripture words that have laid the foundation of the Church of God through the ages. What a great task this has been!

## The fourth

Finally, there was also a brother in Corinth who bore the name Quartus (= fourth). Of him we read nothing especial at first sight. He does not seem to be as important as Erastus, the treasurer of the city, who is mentioned in the same verse (Rom. 16:23). Yet that is only an appearance. Quartus, in fact, bore the honorable title of *brother*. "(...) greets you, and Quartus, a brother."

Who is the greatest among you?

He belonged to the family of God's children, all of whom have fellowship – like the apostles – with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3)! There is no greater privilege on earth than to be part of this new community of people, who together are the "brethren" of the risen Lord (John 20:17). Let us also be content with the title of "brother" or "sister," even if we end up in the fourth or an even lower place. To the Lord it makes no difference.

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