

The Christian Hierarchy

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’”

Matthew 18:1(ESV)

What an amazing question. Most of us have never verbalized such a question, but most of us are pretty sure we fall pretty low in the Christian hierarchy.

We are certain others can do more than we can, so they have a greater rank than we do. We are sure that some are elders, deacons, or preachers, so they are more important than we are. We are positive that others have lived more faithfully than we have, so God must love them more.

What kind of response do we expect from Jesus at this point? “Whoever has given up the most in order to serve Me is the greatest among you.” Or, “Whoever has traveled the farthest to teach my gospel is the greatest among you.” Maybe you expected, “Whoever is the richest and gives the most to the church is the greatest among you.” Or perhaps, “Whoever is an elder or a preacher is the greatest among you.”

But that is not what Jesus said. Instead, “And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, ‘Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven’” (**Matthew 18:2-4**, ESV).

Wait! What? A little child? Little children can’t do anything! They can listen. They can obey. They can submit wholly to another, just as this little child did when Jesus called him to come.

Thus, the greatest in the kingdom is the one who submits wholly to Jesus like this little child. But wait. Jesus said that only those who submit like little children can even enter the kingdom of heaven.

What a phenomenal thought. Everyone who enters the kingdom as a submissive little child is greatest in the kingdom. We are all on the same footing. There is no hierarchy among Christians.

Certainly there are gifts and roles. Clearly we do not all do the same things, but none of us is more important than the other. In fact, we are all needed to make this body work. **I Corinthians 12** drives this point home.

Really, about the only rank in God’s kingdom is that Jesus Christ is our head (**Ephesians 1:22-23**). The highest rank that any of the rest of us will ever achieve is the rank of Christian. Of course, that is not even really a rank. Rank implies something earned. Being a Christian is not a rank. It is a gift.

Let’s not worry so much about rank and just surrender humbling like little children.

--Edwin L. Crozier