

Text: Rom. 2:6. God Will render to every man according to his deeds."

Scripture: Mt. 20:1-16; Rom. 2:4-11.

The story goes that in one little town where the churches were crowded on adjoining corners within easy hearing of each other's music, one Sunday morning the Methodists were singing "Will there be any stars in my crown?" and the Baptists promptly replied, "No, not one; No, Not one." Whereupon the Presbyterians shouted, "That will be glory for me!" Personally, I'm not enthusiastic about having stars in my crown, but the idea of rewards has set me to thinking, What about rewards? Should we expect them? Is it right to work for rewards? Who deserves them? What is the nature of the rewards?

Somehow it doesn't seem quite right to work in anticipation of a reward. We feel our labors should be from a higher motivation than looking for some kind of payment, especially when trying to do the good works that God's Word requires. Should we just pray the oft-quoted prayer of Ignatius Loyola?

"Teach us, good Lord, to serve Thee as Thou deservest
To give and not to count the cost;
To fight and not to heed the wounds;
To toil and not to ask for rest;
To labour and not ask for any reward
Save that of knowing that we do Thy will."

Maybe our thinking is colored by Paul's emphasis upon salvation through faith alone and not by works, overlooking ⁱⁿ other of his statements such as his satisfaction with having fought the good fight and finished the course and kept the faith so that he could look forward to receiving the crown of righteousness which, he said, "the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day."

Conversely, there are preachers whose fiery language and lurid descriptions of the punishment of the wicked have denounced the evils which merit all kinds of unattractive rewards. If evil deeds incur God's punishment, would not logic demand that good deeds deserve His rewards? Some rewards, either good or bad, come in this life but we must exercise care in attributing them to evil or righteous acts. The Bible tells of individuals or whole nations punished by God for their sin with terrible illness, but Jesus Himself warned His disciples in the case of the man born blind that this affliction was not caused either by his own sin or that of his parents. Some might argue that the frightening disease bringing terror to the US and other lands and causing so much concern that parents are even upset at the idea of their children being exposed to it in the schools, is God's scourge upon a modern society which not only indulges in immoral behavior but compounds the evil when even certain Christian circles condone it. Yet we must remember that even innocent people suffer along with the obviously deserving, and God has not yet given us the divine right to judge in such matters. How easy to attribute physical or material misfortune to our sins, and to assume that good works necessarily will be rewarded with good health, riches, and happiness! *or to question God's justice when exactly the opposite happens. In this life we will never answer such questions.*

Today let's limit our thinking to the reward we can expect in eternity with Rom. 2:6 as our text: "God will render to every man according to his deeds." This is a quotation from Ps. 62:12 which reads, "Lovingkindness is Thine, O Lord, For Thou dost recompense a man according to his work." Jesus quoted the same verse in foretelling of His second coming, "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds." (Mt. 16:27) If Jesus and Paul quoted the same verse affirming that God would render to every man according to his deeds, surely we cannot question the correlation between good deeds and some kind of reward.

I. This partially answers our first question, Are there rewards? Most assuredly there are! The Bible says so from beginning to end. God promised Abraham (Gen.

15:1) "Your reward shall be very great" and this was not only in terms of heirs and descendants, or of flocks and herds, but looking forward to the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Heb. 11:10) Jesus denounced hypocrites who wanted recognition of their charity, or admiration for their prayers or publicity for their pious fasting by saying "they have their reward in full," whereas the truly devoted and humble and charitable would be repaid by the Father who sees in secret...and then went on to tell us to lay up treasures in heaven. The parable of the talents teaches reward for the obedient and diligent. The parable of the laborers whose pay was the same no matter how long they worked teaches that the reward cannot be calculated by human standards. Even when enduring persecution for righteous behavior which at the moment seems to be anything but a reward, we are told by Jesus, "Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold your reward is great in heaven." (Lk 6:23) Paul counselled Christian slaves to obey their masters "knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance." (Col. 3:24) John's second letter tells us, "Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward." (II Jn. 8) Rev. 11:18 tells of the day of judgement of the dead and the "time to give their reward to the saints and to those who fear Thy name, the small and the great." "Are there rewards?" Yes indeed, is the resounding answer.

I This raises a second question. On what basis are rewards granted? or, Who receives the rewards? Superficially we could say the answer is obvious ^{in the} verse in Revelation just quoted...the saints are rewarded and the sinners punished. Lazarus is carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom, while the rich man is in torment in Hades. The whole Bible holds forth this truth, and even our human sense of justice demands that the good and the bad receive their just deserts. Otherwise there would be no point in good deeds. None of us here would argue against this ^{point}.

But this is not so simple ^{performing} as appears on the surface, and here even some Christians make a big mistake. Rewards are not merely a matter of "quid pro quo" (one thing in return for another.) If that were the case rewards could be earned. We could perform all kinds of acts of devotion to God, we could spend our time and money in good works of charity, we could keep ourselves immaculately pure in thought, word, and ~~deed~~ and be sure that someday the Lord would welcome us into our eternal home with open arms and lavish rewards. We might even do more than necessary for our own rewards and lay up merit in behalf of some of our less pious brothers and sisters...as indeed has been the teaching in some parts of the Christian world. But prophets and apostles are clear on the point that rewards are in no sense earned. In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard were some worked all day and some worked only an hour and yet all received the same wage, Jesus clearly taught that something more than human labor laws are involved. The calculation of rewards is not based on the length and magnitude of the service itself like a bonus. God is the kind of householder who cares for the culture of men, rather than the production of grapes.

Have we contradicted ourselves in saying that the righteous are rewarded and the wicked punished, but that the basis of recompense is not on merit earned by good behavior? The answer lies in the great truth Paul so ^{strongly} fully emphasized, that we are saved and rewarded by God's grace through faith for good works. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves. it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:8-10). The reward for the saints does not come because of their good works. Rather good works are the natural environment of the born-again child of God...the air he breathes, the ground he walks upon.

Not our good deeds, but the grace of God, is the life-giving root, whereas good deeds are the fruit of the vine now ingrafted into the righteousness of Christ. A theologian of a by-gone day, Dr. Charles Hodge, put it this way, "God will re-

ward everyone according to, although not on account of his works." That is a hard statement. It's not our human way, but God's way and His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. We can only thank Him that His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than our thoughts. Why? Because left to ourselves we are such miserable and worthless sinners there is no way we could ever deserve any kind of reward through our own efforts. It was not the spirit of the elder brother who obediently stayed at home and worked diligently, but that of the profligate younger brother who came to himself and pleaded, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." which was rewarded with the feast and the fatted calf.

A rich young ruler asked Jesus what good thing he should do to obtain eternal life. "Keep the commandments," replied the Lord. When the young man said he had done so Jesus told him to sell all he had and give to the poor. The implication is that had he done so he would have received the desired reward. That's what Peter assumed so he asked what reward he and the other disciples would receive for having left all to follow Jesus. The Master kindly assured him that ^{they would} ~~it would~~ but added, "Many who are first will be last and the last first" and went on to tell the story of the laborers in the vineyard, again closing with the expression, "Thus the last shall be first and the first last." Thus Jesus told Peter that more than the agreed upon wage received by the first laborers, was the reward of those who threw themselves upon the mercy of the household who said, "Whatever is right, I will give you." "The hireling spirit in any man, or in any age, will get simply and only its hire; but the trustful disposition will always receive 'far more exceeding abundantly' above its expectation." (Taylor 115) ^{Only after the grace of God has made us new creatures in Christ can we perform those good deeds God desires to reward - and all in faith and love.}

Rewards are for humble trusting laborers who out of love for Christ are doers and not mere hearers of the word, as James pointed out. Now the last question: "What are the rewards?" Certainly not in terms of amounts, or quantity, or advantages, or powers, or prestige...all of which are human standards of reward, and none of which will be needed in our eternal home. Nor will the saints have any basis for comparing rewards received with one another, for that in itself would be a blemish from which those in the presence of the Father are exempt. The joy of each individual will be perfect and full, although ^{rewards} ~~differing~~ according to their deeds in the flesh...a situation our finite minds cannot now comprehend. ^{The widow's mite may deserve greater reward than the millionaire's philanthropy}

Let me point out three rewards, and I know you will think of others. They should spur us to the good works for which God created us and for which His Spirit empowers us, and by which we demonstrate that we are new creatures in Christ.

1. There will be the reward of satisfaction that in this life we have pleased the Master by the quality and obedience of our lives. We've all heard the story of the budding young violinist who counted as his reward for ~~for~~ a magnificent concert hall rendition not the applause of the crowd, but the beaming approval of his teacher in the gallery..."It is enough to have pleased the Master." There will be the satisfaction that we have pleased the Master in serving others. Remember His words about the separation of the sheep and the goats, "Truly I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it unto Me." Emerson remarked, "The reward of a thing well done, is to have done it." The deed done in kindness, the loving thought, the hand stretched out in sympathy and comfort, healing or guidance, and most of all the word spoken to bring to hungry hearts the love of a Savior with ^{the} ~~promise~~ of eternal life... all not only bring their own reward in the doing, but in eternal satisfaction that we have pleased our Lord. "Well done, good and faithful servant."

2. There will be the crown of righteousness that Paul talked about. In this life we are conscious of our faults, failures, shortcomings, inadequacies, the incompleteness of our devotion and service to the Master. "There is none righteous, no not one." With Paul each can say he is the chief of sinners. "The good I wish,

I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish." (Rom. 7:19) But then ^{there} will be the reward of the crown of righteousness, when God perfects us in Christ Jesus. Even now he has clothed us with the righteousness of Christ so that we are acceptable in those garments rather than the filthy rags of our sinful nature. But someday we ourselves will be crowned with righteousness, perfect, sinless, qualified to stand in the presence of God as the sons of light. All the things which are incomplete in this life will be complete, all the questions we cannot answer here will be answered, all the things we would like to be and do here will be fulfilled there, all the fellowship with God we have failed to enjoy here will be enjoyed to there in fullness. The crown of righteousness!

3. There will be the reward of the "joy of the Lord." ^{coming} Face to face with Christ my Savior" will infinitely surpass the joy of any human family reunion. The joys of this life are always flawed, something is always to be regretted, there is pain or suffering or unhappiness somewhere in the background. But the great reward saints may anticipate is unspeakable joy, perfect and undiluted, centered in the Lord Himself. Feasting and the rejoicing of a marriage feast are the figures of speech the Bible uses to describe this great joy. The Hallelujahs and anthems of praise reflect the joy of the saints in glory recorded in Revelation center in the Lamb of God surrounded by those whose names are written in His book of life. There is a story, possibly legendary, about Thomas Aquinas. "Worshipping one day in the chapel in which he was accustomed to perform his devotions, it is said that the Saviour thus addressed him: 'Thomas, thou hast written much and well concerning me. What reward shall I give thee for thy work?' Whereupon he answered 'Nihil nisi te, Domine,'... 'Nothing but thyself, O lord!' And in very deed he is himself the best of all his gifts. He is himself the 'exceeding great reward' of all his people." (Taylor 119)

Conclusion. There is both a promise of reward and an exhortation to good deeds in the words of Rev. 14:12-13 with which we conclude: "Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labor, for their deeds follow with them.'" "God will render to every man according to his deeds."

along with the bridegroom

#134

"His judgments are true and righteous altogether"

They also serve who only stand and wait"

God's Pattern for Good

Scripture: Rom. 8:26-32

Text: "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Rom. 8:28

Looking left just after crossing the wide bridge from Tuk-jin westward into the Pal-boke Dong industrial complex is a curious sight. A large brick church is nearing completion but the walls under the first slab are not bricked in. You can see within the ~~old~~ white walls of an older church from which the roof has been removed and that slab poured overhead, leaving a place for worship while the new church is built over and around it. When we came to Chonju, that was all farm land with a small country village church name Sin-sang in the middle of what is now the six-lane boulevard toward the expressway. About 30 years ago as I drove across the old bridge somewhat to the right of the present one I saw people tearing the roof off the Sinsang church. Upon inquiry I learned that as a result of one of the unfortunate church splits, this congregation was dividing...but amicably. They had agreed to divide materials from the old building, sell the land, ^{and} divide the proceeds, and each build a new church at least 100 meters from the old. Within a year each congregation was as large as the original, and 3 decades later each has a very large sanctuary. What they did not know, of course, was that 15 years later that great wide street would pass right over the site of the old Sinsang Church, dividing the now heavily populated area like a great river. I am sure the Lord is not happy about church divisions, but He knew what was not even on the city planning boards, that someday two churches would be needed in that area, one to the right and one to the left of the highway. God knew the future and had plans to override a distressing human quarrel for a greater good in His own time.

Doesn't this illustrate one of our most familiar texts: "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." What ordinary men call good or bad luck or fortune, we know is the plan of God. There are no errors in that plan; nothing is left to chance. As the architect constructs a building, placing each brick and pounding each nail with care so that each component, no matter how obscure or insignificant, contributes to the ultimate beauty and stability and utility of the structure, so God has a plan for each of us and for His world. That plan sometimes demands cutting trees and excavating earth, it utilizes scaffolding and forms for concrete work which later are torn away and discarded...matters which may hurt or seem unreasonable at the time, but ultimately work out for the total good of the finished building. The greatest peace of mind and serenity of spirit comes to the Christian who grasps the fact of God's master-plan, accepts it in faith, and can say with Paul, "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

1. We know. This sweeping assertion is based on the confidence of Paul who had crossed seas, endured all kinds of hardships, known disappointment and disaster as well as success and triumph, and had tested the reliability of God's plan and found that it works. This was all apart of his firm, "we know." His personal experience testified that God could be counted upon, and he knew that this fact was universally applicable. "In everything, God works for good."

A Scottish preacher tells this story: "When I was a ^{WE KNOW} lad in Scotland, we had in our classroom a large globe on which was printed in bright colors a map of the world. Now and then I would slowly spin the globe round with the tips of my fingers. On it I could see the names of places then strange to me...Tokyo and Toronto, Iceland and New Zealand. I wondered at times whether the map-maker could be relied upon for accuracy with all those names. Black dots and painted areas represented cities and countries which for all I knew to the contrary might exist only in his imagination. How could I know they were not mere figments of his fancy?"

"I'll tell you what I did with that map maker. I checked upon on him within the region where I could put him to the proof. I looked on the globe for a place called Edinburgh, and I found it. I looked for Glasgow and Aberdeen, and there they were! Thus to my own satisfaction I established the fact that the map-maker was correct insofar as I was then able to verify his work. Afterward I made this deduction from the evidence: 'If the map maker is right in all matters which I know to be correct within the range of my present experience, surely I may justly presume that he is right also with reference to spheres beyond my present experience. Meantime, I shall take his word for it, trust him where I cannot trace him, and someday I shall find that he was absolutely true in regard to all the places on his map.'" (Art of Ill p. 16)

"Trust him where I cannot trace him." That describes the mature faith of a person like Paul. The older we grow, the longer our experience with God, the fuller our grasp of how He has worked in history, the deeper our knowledge of His Word recounting how He has worked through the ages...the more glimpses we see of His over-riding pattern for good beyond what we now perceive, and ^{we} can say with Paul, "we know." Not just John's Gospel, but the whole Bible...and indeed the annals of the saints and our experiences...are written "that ye may know." Our world always needs people who can say with conviction, "We know!" God is reliable.

2. God works, ^{in everything} Events are not haphazard or meaningless. Whether we can see it or not, God is at work. He made the world and He controls it. Frustration and insecurity in our society come from failure to recognize this. Some of you have heard about the young man working on his Model T Ford trying to make it run without success. A well-dressed man stepped up, went over to the young man, and sensing his difficulty told him to make a certain minor adjustment in the timing of the motor. Reluctantly the young man did so. "Now," said the man, "your car will run." The surprised young man asked, "How ^{is} it that you know just what to do to make my car run?" Who are you?" Quietly the other man replied, "I'm Henry Ford. I made the car. I know its workings."

God the Creator also says, "I made the world, I know its workings. Not only so but I know the end from the beginning and have already determined the course of events. It is my will to work for good to those who love me, who are called according to my purposes." A century of tumultuous events in China...wars, revolutions, imposition of communist philosophy...have perplexed the world and baffled Christians. Could any good come out of it all? Yet now we begin to see that God has been at work all along creating a strong and more self-reliant church.

Genesis tells of Joseph, mistreated by jealous brothers, serving as a slave, imprisoned unjustly in Egypt. His faith never wavered during those dark years until he was able to reveal himself to his trembling brothers who came to him as prime minister of all Egypt...and reassure them with these words, "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good." People who can say "we know" do so not only because they trust God on the basis of experience, but on the basis of faith in His power and loving control...a faith which He alone gives.

3. For good? Here is the hard part of the text, often questioned, argued, or denied. It's easy to quote this verse when a happy result turns up quite obviously after a seemingly adverse set of events. But what do we say in the midst of senseless tragedy, prolonged suffering, even apparent loss to the Kingdom of God itself? What about plane crashes, earthquakes, famines, millions suffering tyranny? Look at the experience of our little community on this hill. A beloved physician died suddenly on the road outside our home. Across the street a neurosurgeon was taken in a day or so by a brain tumor. The youngest child of a missionary couple never had a chance from birth and died in a few years. Cancer struck the knee of the eldest son of another couple. Three sets of missionary grandparents in as many years have had grandchildren with birth defects and one died shortly after birth. Can we say, "All things work together for good?"

The text does not say that all things are good. I'm not sure there is any warrant to say "praise the Lord" for everything that happens, because clearly some things are bad, or sad, or tragic. There are questions we can never answer, there are solutions we will never see, but God has ways of using all these things and fitting them into larger patterns of good. If we believe God is almighty, we know He has the power to over-rule even our wickedness for His purposes. If he is holy, all that transpires will fit into a perfect plan. If He is loving, He has some purpose as a Father for His children.

Some weeks
~~Three Sundays~~ ago as we came ⁱⁿ here to worship, Laveryn Talmage was singing what I assumed would be her solo, "His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me" ...a fine testimony from her. Surprisingly though, of all people, she sang,
Climb every mountain, search high and low,
Follow every by-way, every path you know.
Climb every mountain, ford every stream
Follow every rainbow till you find your dream!
A dream that will need all the love you can give,
Every day of your life, for as long as you live
Climb every mountain, ford every stream
Follow every rainbow till you find your dream! *pilgrimage*

As a figure of speech to describe our spiritual aspirations, it was an appropriate solo, but coming from one crippled 30 years ago in both legs by polio it was astonishing. How she would love to ~~have~~ ^{she was} climbed those majestic mountains around her home in Denver, or clamber up and down the hills around Chonju with paints and brushes, but because of her handicap ^{she was} unable even to reach the cable car to soar to the heights of Sorak San. "Ford every stream"...when dragging her left foot over the doorsill took superhuman effort? Yet everywhere she brought cheer and laughter so that our cook remarked in awe, "Ki-boon-ai Cho-ta" and countless people in the market and stores were inspired by her courage. How this condition has brought out in David an ever attentive devotion, and patience and love! A tragedy, yes...and nothing good about it in itself, but tremendous good in demonstrating how God gave courage and faith and acceptance...making her a witness to His goodness and power. That's how He wants us to treat life's events ...that's how he causes all things to work together for good. "Climb every mountain, ford every stream!"

Two other remarks in the context help us understand this difficult assertion of Paul. In verse 26 Paul assures us that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. The other is this, "If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things in Him?" We are not alone in our suffering. God participated on the cross in the person of His Son; he participates constantly in the person of His Spirit. We too suffer and sighs - but in this
We work for good.

4. To those who love Him, who are called according to his purpose. "If a man loves God and trusts God and accepts God, if a man feels and knows and is convinced that God is the all wise and all-loving Father, then he can humbly accept all that God sends to him. (Barclay 118). All our lives here in Chonju, we have been blessed to have the medical attention of doctors we knew and respected and in whose skills we had absolute confidence. Not only that ~~we~~ ^{not only} knew they were our best friends ~~and had~~ ^{but also} our own best interests at heart. If they prescribed medicine that was bitter to the taste, or surgery that was painful, or treatments that were unpleasant...we could always trust their wisdom and skill. And so it is when we love God who also loves us. *It is natural that a father should take perfect care of his own beloved and loving children. Mary + Joseph's psychology of birth of Jesus*

More than that He has called us for His purpose. In His plan no life is useless or wasted, and according to that plan no event or condition in any given life is without its purpose. That purpose may not be detected for years after an event; or it may never be known to us at all. Yet like the infinitesimal fraction of

an love does not earn anything - it is what God has done for us - called us for His purpose.
the blessed effect of

a billionth of a billionth, everything has a place within the jig-saw of divine intent. We may not see how, but essentially every part of that plan is in some way to make Jesus Christ known, to glorify Him... so that as Paul put it, all things are "for the praise of His glory." How well Phillips paraphrases this passage: "Moreover we know that to those who love God who are called according to His plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good. God in his foreknowledge, chose them to bear the family likeness of His Son, that he might be the eldest of a family of many brothers. He chose them long ago; when the time came he called them, he made them righteous in his sight, and then lifted them to the splendor of life as his own sons."

May God give each of us the assurance of Paul when he wrote those words! It will carry us through each day and down every path, up every mountain and across every stream. It will enable us to "trust him where we cannot trace him," for we know that in everything God works for good to those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." "For nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

#108

6/7/87 ~~Workout~~
 " ~~Boiler~~
 9/6/87 ~~Summit Creek~~
 10/25/87 ~~Mills River~~ 1
 5/1/88 ~~Hot Springs~~
 5/15/88 ~~Volunt~~
 5/29/88 ~~Rustington~~
 11/13/88 ~~Murphy~~
 1/35a 7/15/89 ~~Murphy~~
 4/22/90 ~~Marshall~~
 9/16/90 ~~Carlton~~
 12/20/91 ~~Malvern Hills~~
 1/20/91 ~~Greentree Nursing Home~~
 1/20/91 ~~Crossed~~
 1/20/91 ~~Conair (United Church)~~

Text: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Rom. 8:35a

Does this mean that having completed His mission on earth, dying for our sins, rising from the dead, and ascending into heaven our Lord now rests, enjoying for eternity the praises of the heavenly hosts, basking in ^{the} exaltation and honor conferred on Him by His Father? ^{Don't} Will He merely ^{relax} sit back and glory in the authority and power of His the Almighty's universal empire until the day when He returns "to judge the quick and the dead?" No indeed! "Sitting at the right hand of God" refers ^{but our Lord's} to His exalted status, but not to a static condition of inactivity! ^{where} Our Lord ^{is} busy every moment on our behalf, making His presence and power and love felt throughout our world. Paul's rhetorical question in Rom. 8:35, ~~near the end of this great chapter~~, reminds us that nothing in heaven or on earth, no condition or creature, no limits of time or space, can separate us in any way from the on-going constant love of Christ...a love which is always in action. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Let us consider four ways in which Christ is actively expressing that love, right now, today, while He sits at the right hand of God in glory.

I. HE IS INTERCEDING FOR US. Christ's work as mediator, bringing reconciliation between us and God, did not end with His death on the cross for our sin. He continues to be our representative, speaking on our behalf to His Father. Verse 34 tells us: "Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us." We Americans like the direct approach, but in much of the world, ~~such as Korea where we have spent most of our lives,~~ it is customary to ask a third person to intercede. If a high school graduate wants a job, he asks a ^{close relative or} friend who knows the head of a business firm or the principal of a school to put in a good word for him with that person at the top, ~~or even to propose marriage for him.~~ Now Jesus is always doing this for us before God...the big difference is that he does this not at our behest, but because God has decreed that His Son represent us before His throne. Could there be any more beautiful expression of the Saviour's undying

and active love on our behalf?

I John 2:1 tells us: "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." This means that when I sin, Jesus says to His Father: "Father, Joe Hopper has sinned again. He yielded to temptation, lost his temper, said something mean. He does not deserve forgiveness, but, Father, forgive him for my sake...I, who am righteous, died on the cross for him!" And the Father graciously grants that petition ^{for me and} as He does for countless others of His children, as it says in 8:33 "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" It means that when we face one of life's decisions or problems (big or small), Jesus is at work asking His Father to show His will, remove the blockades, demonstrate His power, and bring growth to His kingdom through His servants. It means that when a young person wonders what course to chart through his life, the Saviour is at work asking God to make known what direction to take, and what the next step should be.

Christ interceding for us does not ~~discount~~ ^{our own} the need ~~for us~~ to pray ~~ourselves~~. It does mean that when we offer our prayers in His name, even though poorly worded, inadequately expressed, sometimes selfishly or wrongly motivated, Jesus is at work to take them and amplify our whispers, and to plead more eloquently and persuasively than we ever can. There are times when we do not pray at all when we should, or even refuse to pray...but our Representative before God prays for us anyway. And for those whom God is calling to be His own, but who as yet refuse to obey and accept His Son as Saviour, Christ is continually interceding to soften hearts and cause them to yield. Is Christ busy? Yes indeed! "Who can separate us from the love of Christ?"

II. HE IS SENDING HIS HOLY SPIRIT. Jesus not only represents us at the right hand of God, He is also working in us through His Holy Spirit. As He neared the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus understood perfectly how His disciples would miss His physical presence among them. They had relied upon Him to teach them daily. Whatever powers they had were derived from Him. What would happen when He left? Jesus took care of this in a clear promise to His disciples in John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." Not long after Jesus ascended into heaven, that promise was fulfilled for the early church on the day of Pentecost, and Jesus has kept that promise ever since by sending the Holy Spirit upon His own.

We could never count all the functions of the Holy Spirit and sometimes there is misunderstanding about some of them. But in John 14 and 15 Jesus made it crystal clear what the chief work of the Holy Spirit is: "He will bear witness of Me," said Jesus. "He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have

said to you." That is the chief work of the Spirit, to be our Teacher in the place of Jesus who had been the Teacher for His disciples. We may find helpful teachers in the Sunday School classroom, in Bible conferences, in good books, but none compares to the real Teacher...the Holy Spirit. In fact all other teachers must be taught by Him! He teaches us the things of Christ, He "brings to remembrance all that Christ has said," He shows how all Scripture exalts Christ.

*He allots good fruit
comfort and*
The Holy Spirit provides companionship. He gives power for the Christian life. He bestows gifts. He pours out innumerable auxiliary blessings. But all of this is to bear witness to Christ. He is the greatest of all teachers. The best example of this is in Bible reading. How many of you understand everything Scripture says? I'm sure I don't, even though I went to Christian schools and seminary and have been a minister for many years. Yet whenever I read the Bible prayerfully and thoughtfully the Spirit brings to my mind some new truth, some fresh understanding of an old truth, some up-to-date application to today's needs. How? Well, ~~we know that~~ the Spirit of God who inspired those words in the first place now teaches them to us in 1988. This means we can never finish our Bible reading and study. How great the continuing love of Christ! At the end of 3 years He did not hand His disciples their diplomas saying,
→ "Now, go out and convert the world." He said, "The Holy Spirit will continue to teach you and to give you power...He will even give you the words to say." "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses even to the remotest part of the earth." "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

III. HE IS RULING HIS CHURCH. "Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Saviour of the body." (Eph. 5:23) The ruler of the church is not the pastor, or some moderator or bishop. All are under the lordship of Christ Jesus, the sole head of the church. If a local pastor can be busy with sermon preparation, leading in worship, visiting his congregation, participating in community affairs, etc., how busy must Christ be as He governs not only this congregation, but thousands of churches and millions of Christians of every nation, tribe, and tongue? He is never resting, never asleep, never on vacation.

The Head of the church calls out those who are His own, He gathers these believers into the fellowships we call churches, He trains and matures their faith, He selects those with special callings as Sunday School teachers, choir members, deacons, elders, ministers, committee chairmen, missionaries. All the organizations of the church are under His control. The great evangelistic campaigns are at His instigation. World-wide movements of reform of the church, renewal of its spiritual life, efforts to win the world for Himself through missionary activity...He directs them all. Men

may create organizations, plan programs, write creeds and constitutions, and do all the mechanical work of church administration, but the unseen Head of the church is very much in command! He is Lord! It is His church! It is His body!

Yet far more important than His role of administrator of His vast domain is the fact that the Lord of the Church is also its very life. If the church is His body and He is her head, then the very life of the church derives from Him, for no body can survive if severed from the head. Because Christ died for His church and now lives forevermore, the church lives too...especially when we remember that the church is not a building but people. For decades we thought the church of China had disappeared under her communist government, but recently we have discovered that she is very much alive and one of the fastest growing churches in the world. In my lifetime I have visited many little weak struggling new churches and despairingly wondered if they could survive. One such visit was in a deep mountain valley in Korea when the congregation numbered only three old grandmothers, and even they were split into two factions! Could that church survive? Yes indeed! Today it is a thriving congregation with a neat little building and its own evangelist. Several years ago a smartly dressed young man approached me in a bank and introduced himself. "Many years ago, you examined me for church membership in that little church." Now he is a Ph.D., a university professor, and a deacon in a city church. Not only has that church lived, but continued to send out useful Christians into the world. Another visible proof that the real church is very much alive...and alive because Christ is alive.

The Apostle John had a vision of the risen Christ standing and walking in the middle of the seven golden lampstands (symbolic of the church)...and holding in His right Hand the seven stars (again symbolic of the church)...proof that He cares for and protects and nurtures His church. John was writing to a church under persecution...and the only other place where Christ is mentioned as standing in heaven is when Stephen, dying under a hail of stones "saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." Could it be that when Christ's church or His saints are especially on trial ^{or} in trouble, the Head of the church no longer sits but stands, rising to meet the persecutions and repressions, and times of travail? For this is the church He loves. Just as the bridegroom loves his bride, so Christ loves His church, the church for which He shed His blood. "Lo, I am with you always." "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ."

impress
in the Holy Spirit
in the church

IV. HE PREPARES A PLACE FOR US. Christ represents us in heaven, He works within us through His Spirit, He governs and sustains His Church. And He prepares our future home. All history moves towards the climax God has foreordained and for which Christ prepares. He will certainly come to judge the quick and the dead, and even now He

prepares a place for us. To His disciples and to us He promised, "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself, that where I am there you may be also." (John 14:3)

What did Jesus mean? He certainly meant a place...where, we do not know. Is He constructing a great hotel or housing complex? We cannot say, but we know it will far exceed our wildest dreams. The One who shed His blood to redeem us will surely not prepare a shabby hut for us! For whom? He said, "for you.!" Who is the you? Those who accept Him in faith as Saviour. He spoke to His disciples but His words were for all believers. Let any who hear these words and have not accepted Him as Savior in faith know...these words are not for unbelievers, or for those whose ancestors were faithful believers but have made no personal commitment themselves. Let any unbeliever then consider: you too may claim this promise, and be sure to join those loved ones who have already gone ahead of us to that Heavenly home. We know too that the greatest blessing of that home will not be magnificent dwellings or fine clothing or sumptuous feasts, but the knowledge that we will be with Him..."where I am there you may be also."

We may go on a journey to some great unknown city and wonder as the plane touches down...where will I sleep tonight? I have no friends here. I am afraid of what the future holds for me here. But when we reach our final home, there will be no such fears. Our home is prepared. A feast is on the table. Best of all the Friend above all friends is waiting to welcome us and to be our Companion forever. Some years ago the mother of our nearest neighbor came to live with her daughter, the wife of the head of a great mission hospital. She had been a Christian all her life, widowed twice when her husbands (both ministers) died, and extremely active in Presbyterian church affairs. During her last days she was in the hospital until one morning her son-in-law, Dr. Seel, called us to her bedside knowing the end was near. We found her mentally alert, able to speak and apparently in good spirits...but she knew the end had come. I asked, "Mrs. Garber, you know the Bible better than we...where would you like me to read?" "John 14, of course!" But before I could open my Bible, this great lady who had spent a life-time of loving service to her Lord began to quote in a loud clear voice without a mistake the first six verses...down to the words "I am the way and the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."...a testimony to her sure knowledge that nothing could separate her from the love of Christ whose promise she claimed as she quietly slipped away a few hours later.

"Who can separate us from the love of Christ?" He loved us long ago in giving Himself for our sins on the cross. He loves us today in representing us before the Father and sending us His Holy Spirit and governing His church. He loves us

throughout all future eternity in our heavenly home. When we repeat that familiar phrase in the Apostles Creed "He sits at the right hand of God Almighty" let us remember what great things He is doing for us today. "Who can separate us from the love of Christ?"

213 Hymns:

Crown Him with many crowns

139 Blessed Assurance or ³⁶³ *all the way my Saviour leads me*

220 I've Found a Friend, Oh such a Friend

wrong tune