

Sermon #2394 — *Miscellaneous Sermons*

Title: **“THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS”**

Text: 1 Timothy 3:16

Subject: *The Incarnation, Accomplishments,
 And Glory of Christ*

Date: Sunday Morning — February 18, 2018

Reading: *Daniel 9:3-19*

(Daniel 9:4-19) “And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; (5) We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: (6) Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. (7) O Lord, righteousness *belongeth* unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, *that*

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are near, and *that are* far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. (8) O Lord, to us *belongeth* confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. (9) To the Lord our God *belong* mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; (10) Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. (11) Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that *is* written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. (12) And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. (13) As *it is* written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn

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from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. (14) Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God *is* righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice. (15) And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly.

(16) O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people *are become* a reproach to all *that are* about us. (17) Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. (18) O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses,

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but for thy great mercies. (19) O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.”

INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 3:15 that the church (this local assembly) is “*the house of God.*” This is “*the church of the living God.*” This is not a social club, an entertainment center, an amusement park, or a theater. It is “*the house of God...the church of the living God.*”

(1 Timothy 3:15) “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”

This is the church of the living God, the very house of God.

- The place where God meets with his people.

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- The house where the Lord God makes himself known to his own.
- The place where the Lord God feeds, instructs, and comforts his family.

He tells Timothy and us plainly that **his purpose in writing this Epistle is that we might know how we ought to behave ourselves in the house of God.** A man is to be honored in his house, and God Almighty demands that we honor him in his house.

- In Preparation for Worship
- In Attire
- In Attitude
- In Hearing His Word
- In All That is Done Here
- In All That is Preached Here

Then, Paul tells us that the church, this local assembly of blood bought sinners, is by the appointment of God **“the pillar and ground of the truth.”** This is the place where God’s truth is established, maintained, and promoted in this world.

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- The pillar of the house bears inscriptions honoring the one who built it — Christ the Truth!
- The pillar is that which upholds the house and gives it stability — Christ the Truth!
- The ground is the basis, the foundation upon which the house is built and stands — Christ the Truth!
- The ground, the foundation, is that which determines the shape and structure of the house — Christ the Truth!

We are not left to guess about these things. We are not left to form our own opinions about them. In the very next verse the Holy Spirit clearly identifies that body of truth of which we are to be the pillar and ground in this world, that body of truth we are to uphold, maintain, and declare in this world.

(1 Timothy 3:16) “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”

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I want you to hold your Bibles open right here and follow me through this rich verse of Holy Scripture. May God the Holy Ghost teach us its meaning and seal it to our hearts.

IRREFUTABLE DOCTRINE

When Paul says, “*without controversy great is the mystery of godliness,*” he means for us to understand two things:

1. **The doctrine of the gospel is irrefutable.** That which it reveals is an irrefutable fact. — “*Godliness*” is the whole body of revealed truth, particularly the truth of God regarding the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul uses it in this text, “*godliness*” refers to the doctrine of Christ, to the whole revelation of God concerning his dear Son. Paul says, “the doctrine of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is indisputable, nondebatable, and irrefutable. It is so plainly revealed and evidently manifest that no reasonable controversy can be raised about it.” Yet...

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2. **The gospel of Christ is a mystery which no man can comprehend.** — It cannot be known, understood, or received by any man, except by divine regenerating grace and revelation. And even those who are blessed of God to believe it cannot comprehend it. The gospel of Christ is a mystery to mortals, a matter of obscurity to human beings. It is a mystery because we have no ability, in our present, sinful, mental state to comprehend it. We see it and rejoice in it, but we “*see through a glass darkly.*” The gospel of Christ, the revelation of his Person and work, is considerably bigger than our puny brains! Having said that, Paul goes on to declare and assert as unquestionable facts those very things which to mortal eyes are incomprehensibly mysterious.

SIX FACTS BEYOND DISPUTE

In this one sentence, breathed by God the Holy Ghost and recorded here upon this page of Holy Scripture, we are given six facts that are beyond dispute.

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1. **“God was manifest in the flesh!”** — The greatest mystery in all the world is the mystery of the incarnation. It was a miraculous, supernatural work of God. And that which is supernatural cannot be explained by the laws of nature, any more than that which is spiritual can be explained by the laws of physics. When Paul says, “*God was manifest in the flesh,*” he is declaring that — God the Son, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, who in the covenant of grace took upon himself the work of saving his people from their sins, became a man so that he might accomplish that great work.

He never ceased to be God over all, blessed forever, infinite, eternal, incomprehensible. Yet, he became a man, a real man, just exactly like us, with one great exception, he had no sin. (John 1:14, 18; 1 John 1:1-3).

(John 1:14) “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”

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(John 1:18) “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.”

(1 John 1:1-3) “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (2) (For the life was manifested, and we have seen *it*, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) (3) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

Our Redeemer had to be a man, for man had sinned and man must suffer. And he had to be God; otherwise that which he suffered had been of no value to us. **The sufferings of the God-man are vicarious sufferings of infinite value.** The death of the God-man is the payment of infinite value to God for the satisfaction of justice.

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When Paul says, “*God was manifest in the flesh,*” he means for us to understand that **God the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who in the covenant of grace had assumed the responsibility of saving his people from their sins, became a man so that he might accomplish that great work** (Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 10:5-10).

(Matthew 1:21) “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”

(Hebrews 10:5-10) “Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: (6) In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. (7) Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. (8) Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and *offering* for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure *therein*; which are offered by the law; (9) Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will,

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O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. (10) By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. ”

The Son of God assumed mortal, human flesh.

Though he laid aside his manifest glory as God for a time, **he never ceased to be God** over all, blessed forever, infinite, eternal, immutable, and incomprehensible. **All the fulness of God** dwelt in him, and still does (Colossians 2:9). Yet, he is as really and truly man as though he were not God.

(Hebrews 4:15) “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

- Because he is God, he was able to satisfy God’s offended justice for his people.
- The sufferings of the God-man unto death were vicarious sufferings of infinite, perpetual merit and efficacy.

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- Christ’s death as the God-man is of infinite merit to God for the satisfaction of his justice.
- Because God was manifest in the flesh and put to death in the flesh, God can now be just and the Justifier of all who believe.

2. “*God was manifest in the flesh, **justified in the Spirit.***” — That is a very full, meaningful statement. It means that the Spirit of God, given to him without measure, fully attested the validity of all his claims to be the Messiah, the Christ, the Redeemer, the Son of God.

All the prophets pointed to him. At his baptism the Spirit descended upon him. And the miracles he performed in conjunction with the Spirit (Luke 11:20) proved him to be the Son of God, whose mission it was to redeem and save his people. (Matthew 1:21).

I have no doubt that this also refers to the fact that he who was made to be sin for us was justified from sin when he was raised from the dead.

McCheyne was right when he suggested that the

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body of our Savior, who had been made to be sin for us, laid in an unjustified state, under the sentence of death, for three days. But on the third day, the Spirit of life came again to his body. And by his resurrection from the dead, he was “*justified in the Spirit.*”

He was spiritually justified, or justified as the Surety and Representative of his body, the Church of God’s elect. Our sins, which were made his, he has put away by the sacrifice of himself. And when he was raised from the dead, God declared that his work of atonement was effectual to our everlasting justification. — “*He was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification*” (Romans 4:25).

In the resurrection, our Savior was justified in the Spirit as the Surety and Representative of his body, the church. Our sins, which were made his and imputed to him, he has put away by the sacrifice of himself. When he was raised from the dead God the Father declared that his work of atonement had

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effectually accomplished the everlasting justification of his elect.

Augustus Toplady wrote, “When the Sun of Righteousness arose from his sad, but short, eclipse, he rose to set no more.” And there is healing for us under his wings!

God the Holy Spirit continues to justify the claims of Christ today (1 John 5:6-8).

(1 John 5:6-8) “This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. (7) For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. (8) And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.”

He bears witness to the claims of Christ in the hearts and lives of chosen sinners, raising them from death to life in Christ, delivering them from the

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dominion of Satan, making them new creatures in Christ, and transforming them into the sons of God by his almighty grace.

(John 16:7-14) “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. (8) And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: (9) Of sin, because they believe not on me; (10) Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; (11) Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. (12) I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. (13) Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. (14) He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.”

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3. Read on. — “*God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, **seen of angels.***” — The risen Savior was seen with joy, adoration, and praise by the holy angels who never fell. And he was seen with envy and dismay by those apostate spirits who kept not their first estate. Those fallen angels were forced to acknowledge him as the Christ, the Son of God.

“Seen of angels” — Think about that. — All the elect angels who were kept by Christ in their holy habitation, whom he made to be ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who shall be the heirs of eternal salvation, saw the Son of God perform the whole work of redemption as our Mediator.

I do not know when the angels were created, but they appear to be God’s very first creatures. **As soon as they were created by him,** they saw him, loved him, and adored him. To this day they **attend the gatherings of God’s church** to learn from redeemed sinners the wonders of redemption (Ephesians 3:10; 1 Peter 1:12). Yet, those holy creatures saw the Lord

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Jesus Christ as he performed the great work of redemption.

- **The angels of God saw Christ in his preincarnate glory**, not only as God, but also as the Mediator, as the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world (Isaiah 6:1-7; Revelation 4:8-11; 5:8-10).

They were informed of the covenant of grace, made aware of our Savior’s intentions of grace for his elect, and of the purpose of God in the creation of the universe (Hebrews 1:14).

- **When the blessed Son of God actually entered into this world he was “seen of angels.”**

The angels beheld his miraculous conception. An angel was the first and the second messenger of the incarnation (Matthew 1:18-21; Luke 1:26-35). An angelic host announced the birth of our Savior (Luke 2:8-14).

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What a place Bethlehem’s stable was for one brief night! The presence of the incarnate God turned a cow stable into a temple of glory! A feeding trough was made a throne of grace in which the King of glory was laid!

- **The angels of God ministered to the God-man in his times of trouble.**

In the wilderness of temptation, after he had foiled Satan, the angels ministered to him. In **Gethsemane**, when his body was covered with the bloody sweat, the angels of God ministered to him. **In his death**, our Savior was alone. But the angels of God watched over his dead body in the tomb, rolled away the stone on the resurrection morning, and announced his resurrection to his disciples.

- **At last, the angels of God welcomed the triumphant Savior back to glory** (Revelation 12:10-12).

They watched him as he entered in once into the holy place, with his own blood, having obtained eternal

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redemption for us, and sat down on the throne of God!

(Revelation 12:10-12) “And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. (11) And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. (12) Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.”

4. Then the Apostle adds, he was “***preached unto the Gentiles***.” He who is God, who came into the world as a man, who died under the penalty of sin as our Substitute, who was raised from the dead, whom angels beheld, is the theme and subject of

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all true preaching. He was “*preached unto the Gentiles.*”

There is a great mystery in the fact that Christ was preached unto the Gentiles. Before he came nothing was preached to the Gentiles. The Jews looked upon Gentiles as dogs. Yet, God chose to send saved Jews to be the first preachers of the gospel to the Gentiles. And now the children of the desolate are more than the children of the married wife. The Lord multiplied Abraham’s spiritual seed in the Gentile world, though his physical seed (the nation of Israel) was cut off. The Gentiles were the barbarian, immoral, idolatrous races of the world. The history of the Gentiles, until the gospel of Christ was preached among us, was a history of cruelty, superstition, witchcraft, and decadence. Yet, God sent the gospel to us (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

There is also a great mystery in the method God has ordained for communicating the gospel — preaching! Mark that, my friend, God has ordained that the gospel be made known to men by preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21-25). **The mightiest weapon of**

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God’s church for offense and defense is the pulpit from which the gospel is preached. It is by the foolishness of preaching, the foolishness of the message we preach (Christ crucified), that God is pleased to save them that believe.

Our churches need no attraction and no weapon of warfare but Christ crucified set forth clearly and constantly in the pulpit. Oh, how we need preachers to set him forth! The most prominent feature of the early church and the most prominent feature of every true church is the preaching of the gospel. **This is the trumpet of heaven and the battering ram before which the gates of hell must fall!** God’s means of creating life and faith in the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners is the preaching of the gospel (James 1:18; 1 Peter. 1:23-25; Romans 10:17).

Another great part of the mystery of godliness is seen in the men God uses to preach the gospel. The first were poor, unlearned fishermen. Yet, by these men the gospel was soon carried into every nation of the world! So it is to this day. A few bright lights in

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God’s church have been men of great learning, but most are **just ordinary men, saved by grace, gifted and empowered by God** the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel.

The Lord Jesus Christ is God “*manifest in the flesh.*” God the Son came into the world as a man. He died under the penalty of sin as the Substitute for God’s elect. He was raised from the dead, thereby being “*justified in the Spirit.*” In all this he was seen, watched, and reverently observed by the holy angels. This Christ is the subject of all true preaching.

In the book of Acts, which records the preaching ministry of the church during the apostolic era, the words “*preach,*” “*preached,*” and “*preaching*” are used thirty-seven times. Every time the theme of preaching is the Lord Jesus Christ. He was and is, by divine appointment, preached unto the Gentiles...

- **Preached in his twofold character** as God and man, the only Mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

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- **Preached as the only and all-sufficient Sacrifice for sin** (Hebrews. 10:1-14), the only one by whom sin could be put away and the one who has effectually put away the sins of his people by the sacrifice of himself (Hebrews. 1:3; 9:26; Romans 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21). As our sins were made his, so his righteousness has been made ours! As he was made to be sin for us, so we are made the righteousness of God in him.
- **Preached by all who faithfully preach the gospel** (1 Corinthians. 2:2). All true preachers in every age have preached Christ crucified. In the Old Testament all the prophets spoke of him. In the New Testament all the apostles spoke of him. Today all true preachers preach him constantly. **He who preaches the Book of God preaches the Son of God.** — “And,” Augustus Toplady wrote, “he will still be preached to the end of time, as long as there is one elect sinner uncalled, and until all the vessels of mercy are brought to the saving knowledge and love of himself.”

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5. This blessed Christ who was preached unto the Gentiles, was, and is, and shall be until the end of time, **“believed on in the world.”** The Spirit of God makes the preaching of Christ crucified the means by which sinners are converted. Christ alone is the Object of faith, and the preaching of Christ crucified is the means by which faith is granted to sinners (John 3:14-15; 12:32; Romans 10:17). Through the preaching of the gospel God the Holy Ghost gives faith to the chosen.

- The preaching of the gospel is the means of faith. (Romans 10:17).
- The crucified Christ is the Object of faith.

Illustration: The Brazen Serpent (John 3:14-15; 12:32). Some saw clearly. Some saw faintly. But all who looked were saved. And some believers have a clear, assured, confident faith; while others have a clouded, faltering, confused faith. But all who trust Christ are born of God!

6. Now, read the last line of our text and rejoice! — **“Received up into glory.”** — Our Savior, the

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incarnate God, was “*received up into glory*” because his work on earth was finished (John 17:4; 19:30). He sat down in heaven and “*received gifts for men; yea for the rebellious also*” (Psalm 68:18). As the Representative, Surety, and Forerunner of God’s elect, he received all the fulness of salvation and glory that he might give the gifts of grace to us (Hebrews 6:20). All the gifts of grace and glory come to us freely; but he earned and purchased them for us by his obedience unto death.

William Hendrickson wrote, “While the echo of men’s voices, ‘Crucify, crucify,’ had scarcely died, heaven opened wide its portals, and upon receiving back its victorious King, resounded with echoes of jubilant anthem, sung by ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, ‘Worthy is the Lamb!’”

“*God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*” — He was raised from the dead and his body was glorified, as

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ours shall be in the resurrection. He ascended into heaven in a glorious manner, in a cloud, and with chariots of angels. There he was received by his Father, sat down at his right hand and was crowned with glory and honor, and glorified with the glory he had with him before the world was.

(John 17:1-5) “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: (2) As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. (3) And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (4) I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. (5) And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”

- He was “*received up into glory*” to intercede for his elect!

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- He was “*received up into glory*” to rule the world for his redeemed!
- He was “*received up into glory*” to execute the salvation of his ransomed, blood-bought people!

Now, let me tell you something about this great God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior. — **“He shall not fail”** (Isaiah 42:4).

- All whom he came to redeem, he has redeemed (Galatians 3:13).
- All for whom he makes intercession are forgiven (Romans 8:33-34; 1 John 2:1-2).

(Romans 8:33-34) “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? *It is* God that justifieth. (34) *Who is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

(1 John 2:1-2) “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: (2) And he is the

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propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of the whole world.*”

- All whom he seeks to save shall be saved (Matthew 1:21).
- All who believe on him have everlasting life (John 3:16).

(John 3:14-16) “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: (15) That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (16) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

“Great is the mystery of godliness! God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” — How astonished the angels of God must be when they, who have looked into the wonders of redemption for more than 6,000 years, see us, who are redeemed by the blood of

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Christ, so cold toward him, so unaffected by his death, so disinterested in him and his great work of love! God help us to repent!

“Sons of peace redeem’d by blood,
Raise your songs to Zion’s God;
Made from condemnation free,
Grace triumphant sing with me.

Calvary’s wonders let us trace,
Justice magnified in grace;
Mark the purple streams, and say,
Thus my sins were wash’d away.

Wrath divine no more we dread,
Vengeance smote our Surety’s head;
Legal claims are fully met,
Jesus paid the dreadful debt.

Sin is lost beneath the flood,
Drowned in the Redeemer’s blood,
Zion, oh! how blest art thou,
Justified from all things now.”

John Kent

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Amen.