

Of Christ, the Surety of the Covenant.

by John Gill

Christ's suretyship refers to his role as a mediator between God and men, where he engages on their behalf to do and suffer whatever the law and justice of God require to make satisfaction for their sins.

Scripture: Job 33:24, Isaiah 49:5-6, Isaiah 53:6, Jeremiah 30:21, Matthew 6:12, John 10:16, Romans 15:8, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 3:2, Hebrews 7:22

Topics: "Covenant of Grace", "Christ's Suretyship"

Description

John Gill expounds on Christ's role as the Surety of the Covenant, emphasizing that He voluntarily took on the obligations of humanity's sins, satisfying divine justice through His obedience and sacrifice. Christ's suretyship is not merely an accessory to human obligation but a complete transfer of debt, where He bore the sins of the elect and fulfilled the law on their behalf. Gill clarifies that Christ's engagement as Surety ensures that believers are freed from the debt of sin, as their sins are imputed to Him, and His righteousness is credited to them. This profound act of love and grace guarantees the salvation of the elect, as Christ is committed to bringing them safely to glory. Ultimately, Gill highlights the unbreakable bond of this covenant, rooted in God's faithfulness and Christ's perfect fulfillment of His promises.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 2--Chapter 12

OF CHRIST, THE SURETY OF THE COVENANT.

The suretyship of Christ is a branch of his mediatorial office; one way in which Christ has acted the part of a Mediator between God and men, is by engaging on their behalf, to do and suffer whatever the law and justice of God required, to make satisfaction for their sins. The Greek word for "surety" *egguov*, is used but once throughout the whole New Testament, (Heb. 7:22) and there of Christ; where he is said to be made, or become, "the Surety of a better testament", or covenant.

And the word is derived either from *egguv*, "near", because a surety draws nigh to one on the behalf of another, and lays himself under obligation to him for that other; thus Christ drew nigh to his Father, and became a Surety to him for them; hence those words, "I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me; for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me, saith the Lord?" (Jer.

30:21) or rather, it is derived from *guion*, which signifies the "hand"[1]; because when one becomes a Surety, he either puts something into the hand of another for security, or rather puts his hand into the hand of another, or strikes hands with him; a rite much used in suretyship, and is often put for it, and used as synonymous; see (Prov. 6:1, 17:18, 22:26).

Snidas[2] derives it from *gh, guh*, the "earth", because that is the firmest of the elements, and remains immoveable, and may denote the firmness and security of the promise, or bond, which a surety gives to one for another. The Hebrew word for a "surety", in the Old Testament, *bre*, (Gen. 43:9) and elsewhere, has the signification of "mixing", because, as *Stockins*[3] observes, in suretyship persons are so mixed among themselves, and joined together, that the one is thereby bound to the other: and, upon the whole, Christ, as a Surety, drew nigh to his Father on the behalf of the elect, struck hands with him, and gave him firm security for them, and put himself in their place and stead, and engaged to perform everything for them that should be required of him; for the better understanding this branch of Christ's office in the covenant, it may be proper to consider, 1.

First, In what sense Christ is the Surety of the covenant. And, 1a. First, He is not the Surety for his Father, to his people, engaging that the promises made by him in covenant shall be fulfilled; which is the Socinian sense of Christ's suretyship[4]; for though the promises were made to Christ, and are Yea and Amen in him; and many of them, such as respect him, were fulfilled in him, and by him, as the minister of the circumcision, (Gal. 3:16; 2 Cor. 1:20; Rom. 15:8). Yet, such is the faithfulness of God that has promised, that there needs no surety for him; his faithfulness is sufficient, which he will not suffer to fail; he is God, that cannot lie, nor deny himself; there is no danger of his breaking his word, and not fulfilling his promise, which may be depended on, and strongly confided in: and if his word was not enough, he has joined his oath to it; so that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, the heirs of promise might have strong consolation, in believing the fulfilment of every promise made (Heb. 6:18).

Besides, though Christ is equal with his Father, is Jehovah's fellow, and has all the perfections of Deity in him, yet he is not greater than he; and, with reverence to him be it said, he cannot give a greater security, than the word and oath of God, or that will lay a firmer foundation for confidence in the promises of God; and it is with an ill grace these men advance such a notion; since they make Christ to be but a mere man; and what dependence can there be upon him, when cursed is the man that trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm? (Jer. 17:5) and what greater security is it possible that a mere man should give, than what the promise of God itself gives? or what additional strength can a creature give to that, to induce a stronger belief of it?

Nor, 1b. Secondly, Is Christ in such sense a Surety, as civilians call a "fidejussor", or such a surety that is jointly engaged with a debtor, for the payment of a debt; or is so bound for another, as that other remains under obligation, and the obligation of the surety is only an accession to the principal obligation, which is made stronger thereby, and the creditor has the greater security; yet still the principal debtor is left under his debt, that is not removed from him, and he is under obligation to pay it, if able; and it is first to be demanded of him, or should his surety desert his suretyship, and not make satisfaction.

But now none of these things are to be supposed in Christ's suretyship. 1b1. He is not a mere accessory to the obligation of his people for payment of their debts; he and they are not engaged in one joint bond for payment; he has taken their whole debt upon himself, as the apostle Paul did in the case of Onesimus; and he has paid it off, and entirely discharged it alone. 1b2. Nor was any such condition made in his suretyship engagements for his people, that they should pay if they were able; for God the Father, to

whom Christ became a Surety, knew, and he himself, the Surety, knew full well, when this suretyship was entered into, that they were not able to pay, and never would be; yea, that it was impossible for them, in their circumstances, ever to pay; for having failed in their obedience to God, all after acts of obedience, though ever so perfect, could not make amends, or satisfy for that disobedience, since to those God has a prior right; and their failure in obedience, brings upon them a debt of punishment, which is everlasting, and "ad infinitum"; and, if left on them, would be ever paying, and never paid (see Luke 7:41, 42; Matthew 18:24, 25, 5:26, 25:46). 1b3.

Nor is such a supposition to be made, that Christ might desert his suretyship, withdraw himself from it; this indeed has been supposed by some: but though Christ was not obliged to become a Surety, he voluntarily engaged in this work, and cheerfully took it on him; yet when he had undertaken it he could not relinquish it, without being guilty of disobedience to his Father, and of unfaithfulness to his own engagements; for from the instant he became a Surety for his people, he became a Servant to his Father, and he called and reckoned him as such; "Thou art my servant, O Israel; behold my servant whom I uphold", (Isa. 49:3, 42:1) and laid his commands upon him, both to obey his law, and lay down his life for his people, both which he undertook to do, and did perform; or otherwise he could not have had the character of God's righteous Servant, nor would have been faithful to him that appointed him, nor to himself, (Isa. 53:10; Heb. 3:2) and consequently could not be without sin, which God forbid should ever be said or supposed of the holy Jesus, who did no sin, nor was guile found in his mouth; yet this has been supposed of him by some, and the dreadful consequences of it, which have been blasphemously uttered by some schoolmen and popish writers, not fit to be mentioned. 1b4.

Nor is it to be supposed, that Christ might not fulfil his suretyship engagements, or not make satisfaction, as might be expected; since if he did not, it must be either for want of will, or want of power; not of will, since the persons he became a surety for, he bore the strongest affection to; these were the sons of men, in whom was all his delight from everlasting; and such his love to them, that nothing whatever could separate from it: nor could it be for want of power, since, as a divine Person, he is the mighty God; as Mediator, has all power in heaven and in earth; as man, was made strong by the Lord for this work, and had a power, as such, to lay down his life, and take it up again: and should he have deserted his suretyship, and not have made the promised and expected satisfaction, the purposes of God, respecting the salvation of the elect by Christ, must have been frustrated, and made null and void; the council of peace held concerning it would have been without effect; the covenant of grace abolished; the salvation of God's people not obtained, and the glory of God, of his grace, mercy, truth, and faithfulness lost; yea, Christ himself must have been deprived of his mediatorial glory; all too shocking to be admitted.

But, 1c. Thirdly, Christ is in such sense a Surety, as civilians call an expromissor, one that promises out and out, absolutely engages to pay another's debt; takes another's obligation, and transfers it to himself, and by this act dissolves the former obligation, and enters into a new one, which civilians call "novation"; so that the obligation no longer lies on the principal debtor, but he is set free, and the Surety is under the obligation, as if he was the principal debtor, or the guilty person.

Now this sort of suretyship being most similar, and coming nearest to Christ's suretyship, is made use of to express and explain it; though they do not in everything tally; for the civil law neither describes nor admits such a Surety among men as Christ is; who so substituted himself in the room and stead of sinners, as to suffer punishment in soul and body for them; but in some things there is an agreement. 1c1. Christ, by his suretyship, has took the whole debt of his people upon himself, and made himself solely responsible for it; he has dissolved thereby their obligation to payment or punishment, having taken it on himself; so that

they were by it entirely set free from the very instant he became their Surety; it is a rule that will hold good, as Maccovius[5] observes, that as soon as anyone becomes a surety for another, the other is immediately freed, if the surety be accepted: which is the case here; for from henceforward, God the Father looked for his debt, and expected satisfaction of Christ, and let the sinners go free, for whom he engaged; he was gracious, and said, "deliver" them "from going down to the pit; I have found a Ransom", (Job 33:24) just as when the apostle Paul became a surety for Onesimus; supposing him accepted as such by Philemon, Onesimus was set free; the apostle taking the whole debt and wrong upon himself, and promising to repay and make satisfaction, and which he wrote and signed with his own hand. 1c2.

When Christ became a Surety for his people, their sins were no longer imputed to them, but were imputed to Christ, were placed to his account, and he became responsible for them; it was not, at the time of his sufferings and death, that God laid on him first the iniquities of his people, and they were imputed and reckoned to him, and he accounted them as his own, (2 Cor. 5:19; Isa. 53:6; Ps. 40:12, 69:5) by which it appears, that obligation to payment of debts, or punishment, did not lie upon the principal debtor, or guilty person, but upon Christ, who became their Surety; for, 1c3.

The Old Testament saints were really freed from guilt, condemnation, and death, before the actual payment was made by Christ their Surety; some had as full an application of the pardon of their sins, and as clear a view of their interest in Christ's righteousness, as their justifying righteousness before God, as any of the New Testament saints ever had; the one were saved by the grace of Christ as the other; yea, they were received into heaven, and actually glorified, before the suretyship engagements of Christ were fulfilled (Isa. 43:25, 45:24, 25; Acts 15:11; Heb. 11:13-16).

So that it is a plain case, that the obligation to payment and punishment lay not on those for whom Christ became a Surety, but was transferred from them to him; unless this absurdity can be admitted, that such an obligation lay on glorified saints, till the actual payment was made by Christ; or that there was a "limbus patrum", as the papists say, where the saints, before Christ's coming, were detained; but were set free by him when he came. 1c4. It is certain that the Old Testament saints had knowledge of the suretyship engagements of Christ, and prayed and pleaded for the application of the benefits of them to them, (Job 19:25; Ps. 119:122; Isa. 38:14) and which they enjoyed: and such was the dignity of Christ's person, and his known faithfulness to his engagements, and the eternity of them, which with God has no succession, they were always present with him, and in full view, as if actually performed; before and after made no difference in the sight of God, with whom a thousand years are as one day, and eternity itself as but a moment.

And now, from this suretyship of Christ arise both the imputation of sin to Christ, and the imputation of his righteousness to his people; this is the ground and foundation of both, and on which the priestly office of Christ stands, and in virtue of which it is exercised (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:20-22). I proceed, 2. Secondly, To consider what Christ as a Surety, engaged to do. And, 2a. First, He engaged to pay the debts of his people, and satisfy for the wrong and injury done by them; this may be illustrated by the instance of the apostle Paul engaging for Onesimus; which is thus expressed, "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on my account; I Paul, have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it", (Philem. 1:18, 19).

Sin is a wrong and injury done to divine justice, and to the holy law of God, broken by it; which Christ undertook to satisfy for; and sins are debts; see (Matthew 6:12) compared with (Luke 11:4) not proper ones, for then they might be committed with impunity, since it is right and commendable to pay debts: but

in an improper sense, as debts oblige to payment, so sins to punishment; even to endure the curse of the law, and death eternal, the sanction of it: these debts, or sins, are infinite objectively, as they are contracted and committed against an infinite being, and require punishment of a creature ad infinitum; and therefore not to be paid off, or answered, by a finite creature; but Christ being an infinite Person, as God, was able to pay off those debts, and answer for those sins, and engaged to do it, and has done it.

There is a twofold debt paid by Christ, as the Surety of his people; the one is a debt of obedience to the law of God; this he engaged to do, when he said, "Lo, I come to do thy will"; thy law is within my heart: and accordingly he was made under the law, and yielded perfect obedience to it, by which his people are made righteous; and the other is a debt of punishment, incurred through failure of obedience in them; the curse of the law he has endured, the penalty of it, death; and by paying both these debts, the whole righteousness of the law is fulfilled in his people, considered in him their Head and Surety.

Now let it be observed, that these debts are not pecuniary ones, though there is an allusion to such, and the language is borrowed from them; but criminal ones, a wrong and injury done, as supposed in the case of Onesimus; and are of such a nature as deserve and require punishment in body and soul, being transgressions of the righteous law of God; and God is to be considered, not merely as a creditor, but as the Judge of the whole earth, who will do right, and who will by no means clear the guilty, without a satisfaction to his justice; and yet there is a mixture of grace, mercy, and goodness in God, with his justice in this affair, by admitting a Surety to obey, suffer, and die, in the room and stead of his people, which he was not obliged unto; nor does the law give the least hint of an allowance of it; nor do the civil laws of men admit of any such thing, that an innocent person should suffer death in the room of one that is guilty, even though he consents to it, and desires it; because no man has a power over his own life, to dispose of it at pleasure; but God, who can dispense with his own law, if he pleases, has thought fit to explain it, and put a construction on it in favour of his people, where it is not express; and allow of a commutation of persons, that his Son should stand in their legal place and stead, obey, suffer, and die for them, that they might be made the righteousness of God in him.

This is owing to his sovereign grace and mercy; nor is at all inconsistent with his justice, since Christ fully consented to all this, who is the Provi.ince of life, and had power over his own life, as man, to lay it down, and take it up again; and since justice is fully satisfied, by the obedience and death of Christ, and the law magnified and made honourable, and more so than it could have been by all the obedience and sufferings of angels and men put together. 2b. Secondly, Another thing which Christ as a Surety engaged to do, was to bring all the elect safe to glory; this may he illustrated by Judah's suretyship for Benjamin; thus expressed to his father, "I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him; if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever" (Gen. 43:9).

And thus Christ became a Surety to his divine Father, for his beloved Benjamin, the chosen of God, and precious; as he asked them of his Father, and they were given into his hands, to be preserved by him, that none of them might be lost; he agreed that they should be required of his hand, everyone of them, and pass under the hand of him that telleth them, and their whole number appear complete, and none missing; as will be the case, when he shall say, "Lo, I, and the children which God hath given me" (Heb. 2:13).

Christ engaged to "bring" his people to his Father; this was the work proposed to him, and which he agreed to do; "to bring Jacob again to him, and to restore the preserved of Israel", (Isa. 49:5, 6) to recover the lost sheep, to ransom them out of the hands of him that was stronger than they; to redeem them from all iniquity, and from the law, its curse and condemnation, and save them with an everlasting salvation,

and bring them safe to his Father in heaven; and because he laid himself under obligation to do all this; hence he says, "them also I must bring", into his fold here, and into heaven and glory hereafter, (John 10:16) and "set" them "before" his Father; as he did at his death, when all the elect were gathered together in one Head, even in him, to present them in the body of his flesh, through death, holy, unblameable, and unproveable in the sight of God; and as he now does in heaven, where he appears in the presence of God for them, and they are set down in heavenly places in him, as their Head and Surety; and as he will at the last day, when he will deliver up the kingdom to the Father, the mediatorial kingdom, the kingdom of priests, complete and perfect, as he received them; and having first presented them to himself, as a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle, he will present them faultless before the presence of his Father's glory, with exceeding joy; and will be so far from bearing any blame, having so fully discharged his suretyship engagements, that he will appear without sin unto salvation; even without sin imputed, without the wrong done by his people put on his account; all being fully answered for according to agreement.

ENDNOTES:

[1] So Hesychius and others.

[2] In voce ennuh.

[3] Clavis Ling. Sanct. p. 810.

[4] Crellius et Schlichtingius in Heb.. vii. 22.

[5] Theolog. Quaest. loc. 31. qu. 6.

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