

Who First Trusted In Christ?

"That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ."

(Ephesians 1:12)

After faithfully preaching the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ for nearly 50 years, on the last day of his life in this world (April 6, 1827) Robert Hawker quoted Ephesians 1:3-12 to some friends and briefly explained their meaning. When he got to verse 12, "*That we should be to the praise of His glory Who first trusted in Christ,*" the old pastor paused and asked, "Who first trusted in Christ?" He then made this answer: "It was God the Father Who first trusted in Christ."

Who?

Actually, the word translated "*Who*" is in the plural. That fact has led many good commentators to object to Hawker's interpretation of the words, suggesting instead that Paul must have had in mind Old Testament believers, the early Jewish believers, or the apostles themselves. But Hawker's interpretation is, in my opinion, the only interpretation that fits Paul's language, though it is true that the masculine article translated by the English pronoun "*Who*" (του) must refer to more than one person. It is written in the plural because it refers to the entire Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

All three Persons in the Holy Trinity trusted the Lord Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Surety, with all the purpose and glory of the triune God, as it is set forth in this passage. Throughout this paragraph, God the Father is spoken of as the Covenant Spokesman for the Holy Trinity. We are saved to the praise of the glory of the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, not just to the praise of the glory of the Father. And Christ, as our Surety, is spoken of as the Covenant Spokesman for his elect.

This interpretation is even more obvious when we realize that the word translated "*trusted*" (προηλπικотав) is a perfect, active participle, implying an action completed in the past, once and for all, never to be repeated. It is a word that is used nowhere else in the Bible. When the Scriptures speak of our faith in Christ another word is used. The words here, "*trusted in,*" would be more accurately translated "fore-hoped in," or "hoped in beforehand," or "hoped in advance." So when the question is asked, "Who first trusted in Christ?" the answer Paul gives in this text is, "The triune God, for whose glory and by whose grace we are saved in Christ."

Nothing else will fit the context in which our text is found. Paul is talking about the inheritance we have obtained in Christ already from eternity, according to God's sovereign, blessed, eternal purpose of grace in Christ our Surety. He is explaining to us the mystery of God's will, revealed in Christ (Eph. 1:7-12).

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ."

The Apostle Paul tells us three times in these verses that the purpose of the Triune God in our salvation is that we should be "*to the praise of his glory.*" One reason given why we should desire his glory is given in these words: — "*That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*"

The Covenant

Our heavenly Father entered into a covenant with his Son on our behalf before the world began for the saving of our souls. In Hebrews 13:20 it is called "*the everlasting covenant.*" Frequently it is called the

“new covenant.” This covenant was made in eternity between the triune God (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) and Christ our Mediator and Surety; but it was made for us. In so far as the benefits and blessings of it to us are concerned, it is an unconditional covenant. The Lord God said, *“I will love them freely? I will be their God; and they shall be my people.”*

This everlasting covenant of grace is a sure covenant, a covenant which infallibly secured and guaranteed to God’s elect all the blessings of salvation and eternal life in Christ (Jer 31:3, 31-34; 32:38-40; 2 Sam. 23:5). The only condition to the covenant and the blessings of grace and salvation promised in it was the obedience of the Son of God as our Surety unto death (Heb. 13:20). And there never was a danger of that condition not being met by the Son of God. There was never the slightest possibility of failure on his part. He was willing to obey. He was able to obey. And he did obey his Father’s will, even unto death, even unto the shedding of his blood, *“the blood of the everlasting covenant”* (Heb. 13:20-21).

The Father’s Trust

Having found a ransom for our souls in the Person of his own Son, our heavenly Father gave his chosen into the hands of his Son, as sheep into the hands of a shepherd, and trusted him with the salvation of our souls and the glory of his own great name. In the covenant of grace, before the world began, when the Son of God volunteered to become our Surety, God the Father trusted his elect and all his purposes of grace toward his elect, into the hands of his dear Son. God the Father trusted Christ as our Surety, Shepherd, and Savior long before we did (John 6:37-39).

Thus it is that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of all his sheep as being his sheep, which he must bring into the fold, long before many of his sheep were born. He spoke of the all as his present possession, though he declared plainly that they were not yet in his fold (John 10:16).

In the everlasting covenant of grace God the Father trusted his Son, our all glorious Christ, with the salvation of his elect, and thus with the glory of his name from everlasting. When our Savior had finished his great work of redemption, whereby he secured the salvation of all the chosen, he asked and the Father gave to him, as the just reward of his obedience, the glory he had with him before the world began (John 17:1-5; Heb. 1:1-3; 10:1-14). But the glory that was openly and manifestly given to him when he had finished his work is the glory he had with the Father as our trusted Surety before the world began. He said, *“I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”*

Our Trust

“In whom ye also trusted” (Eph. 1:13). — At the appointed time of mercy, grace, and love, every chosen, redeemed sinner is born again and called by the irresistible power and grace of God the Holy Spirit to life and faith in Christ. This God given faith is not the trust of some imaginary Jesus who tries to save, but cannot do so without the consent of man. Oh, no! That Jesus is nothing but an idolatrous figment of man’s depraved imagination. This God given faith is faith in the same Christ the Father trusted from eternity — our almighty covenant Surety who cannot fail.

Trustworthy

Upon the basis of this covenant, our heavenly Father accepted us and blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ from eternity (Eph. 1:3-6; Rom. 8:28-30). If God the Father has trusted his glory to his dear Son as our Substitute and Savior and trusted the salvation of our souls to his hands, how we ought to trust him with our immortal souls and with all that concerns us. If the Father trusted him, he is a trustworthy Savior.

Our Surety

Let me tell you about our great Surety, the Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Father trusted from eternity, and whom we trust today (Heb. 7:22). I want to show you what a surety is and how the Lord Jesus Christ performs the work of a surety on our behalf. They say that one picture is worth a thousand words. So, first, look at the picture of a surety given in Genesis 43:8-9. — *“Judah said unto Israel his father, Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones. 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.”*

When Judah volunteered to be a surety for Benjamin, assuming all responsibility for his brother, Jacob accepted him and trusted Benjamin into his hands. If you will read Genesis 42:35-38, you will see that Rueben had made the same offer earlier, but Jacob refused to trust Rueben as a surety for his beloved Benjamin. Why? The answer, it seems to me, is obvious. — Our Surety is not the lion of the tribe of Rueben, but *“the Lion of the tribe of Judah”* (Rev. 5:5). As Benjamin’s surety, Judah was typical of Christ our Surety. As Judah became Surety for Benjamin, the Lord Jesus Christ became Surety for God’s elect in the covenant of grace.

What is a surety?

A surety is one who approaches one person on the behalf of another person. He is a representative man, one who lays himself under obligation to another person for the one he represents. In this sense Christ is our Surety. He drew near to his Father on our behalf, and laid himself under obligation to God for us. — *“Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart”* (Ps. 40:7-8). A surety is one who strikes hands with another in solemn agreement. Suretyship is, to a man of honor, a voluntary bondage. — *“My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth”* (Pro. 6:1-2).

That is what the Lord Jesus Christ did as our Surety in the Covenant of Grace before the world began. When he became our Surety, he voluntarily placed himself in bondage to his Father until his service was performed (Isa. 50:5-7; John 10:16-18). He drew near to God on the behalf of his elect. He promised to faithfully perform all that God required for the salvation of his people. He struck hands with the Father in solemn agreement. And God the Father entrusted his elect people into the hands of his Son as our Surety, and the matter of our salvation was then and there settled forever, *“that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.”* And *“the works were finished from the foundation of the world”* (Heb. 4:3; Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:3-6; 2 Tim. 1:9-10).

How did Christ become our Surety?

In modern times we commonly think of a surety as a mere guarantor, a co-signer, one who is jointly responsible with the principle debtor for the payment of a debt. That is not the kind of Surety Christ is. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not merely agree to meet our obligations to God’s law and justice if we, by some circumstance or condition, became incapable of meeting our own obligations. Our blessed Savior, as our Surety, took the whole of our obligation before the law of God upon himself.

With men a surety may be legally forced into suretyship. A father is legally responsible for the debts and legal liabilities of his minor children. But Christ voluntarily, cheerfully placed himself in servitude to God’s law and will as the Surety of his own elect. From the instant he became Surety for his people, he became servant to his Father (Isa. 42:1; 49:3; John 10:17-18).

Be sure you understand this: — The Lord Jesus Christ is an absolute Surety by voluntary consent. When he became our Surety, Christ took the whole of our debt upon himself. He became responsible for our obligations. As soon as he was accepted as our Surety, we were released from all of our debts and obligations to God’s holy law. As soon as the triune God accepted Christ our Mediator as our Surety, he set us free. He ceased looking to us for satisfaction. He freed us from all bondage, all curse, all penalty, and all obligation, and looked to our Mediator alone for satisfaction of our debts (Job 33:24).

Just as Paul became surety for Onesimus (Phile. 1:18), our blessed Savior became Surety for us in eternity. And when Christ became Surety for us, our sins were imputed to him. He alone became totally responsible for our debt to God's holy law, and that before the debt was incurred. The language of Scripture in this regard is crystal clear. This imputation is spoken of in the Book of God as something done in the past tense, long before Christ came into this world in time (Ps. 40:12; 69:5; Isa. 53:6). By divine imputation our sins were placed to his account; he became responsible for them. Christ was made to be sin for us when he hung upon the cursed tree (2 Cor. 5:21). But he became responsible and accountable for sin when he became our Surety.

When Christ became our Surety, we were then and there redeemed, justified, pardoned, made righteous, sanctified, and accepted in the sight of God (Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:3-6). God's forbearance, patience, and long-suffering with this world are due to the suretyship engagements of Christ. God's eye has always been on the blood. It is the blood of Christ our Surety that held back the hand of God's judgment when Adam sinned. The Old Testament saints were pardoned, justified, and forgiven upon the basis of Christ's obedience as our Surety, though he had not yet actually rendered that obedience (Isa. 43:25; 45:24-25; Heb. 11:13-16). And those saints of old had knowledge of and faith in Christ as their Surety (Job 19:25-27; Ps. 32:1-4; 119:122; Isa. 38:14).

The Lord Jesus Christ became our Surety by his own voluntary will. And he was accepted as our Surety in the Covenant of Grace, before the world began. God, as it were, trusted him to be the Surety of his people (Eph. 1:12-14; John 6).

What did the Lord Jesus Christ agree to as our Surety?

When Christ became our Surety, he made certain promises in the name of his covenant people that he is honor bound to perform. These promises were voluntarily made, without any constraint or force, except the constraint of his own love and the force of his own grace. But now, having made those promises, he is bound to perform them, bound by his own honor. What are those promises? What did our great Surety agree to do?

The Word of God makes it clear that our eternal Surety agreed to do three things: (1.) He agreed to meet and perfectly fulfill all our responsibilities to God. (2.) He agreed to satisfy the penalty of the law as our Substitute. He agreed to bring in everlasting righteousness for us by his life of obedience to the law, and to put away all our sins by his death upon the cursed tree, making satisfaction to divine justice for us. And (3.) our great Surety, agreed to bring all his elect safely home to God in glory, *"to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ."*

Standing as our Surety, in an absolute sense, Christ did not simply assume part of our responsibility in a given area. He became absolutely responsible for his people in all things. He agreed to render that perfect obedience to the law, establishing righteousness for us, which we were obliged to do. He worked out a legal righteousness for God's elect, and said, *"I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do"* (John 17:4).

Our blessed Surety also agreed to satisfy the penalty of the law as our Substitute. And when he had done so, pouring out his life's blood for us, we read in John 19:30 that he cried triumphantly, *"It is finished!"* By his perfect obedience, in life and in death, our great Surety magnified the law and made it honorable, fulfilling all the will of the triune God as our Surety (Heb. 10:5-14).

And Christ, our Surety, agreed to bring all his elect safe to glory (John 6:39-40; 10:16). Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ became responsible to bring God's Benjamins safely home, saying of us as Judah did of Benjamin, "If I bring them not unto thee, and set them before thee, then let me bear the blame forever." It is because of his Suretyship engagements for his elect that our Lord says, *"Them also I must bring."* What our Surety has sworn to do, he must do (Heb. 2:13). He reconciled us to God in his sin-atonement death. He entered into Heaven as our Covenant-Head and claimed our eternal inheritance in our name as our Surety. And he will, in the last day, present all of his elect faultless before the Father's glory with

exceeding great joy. In that day he will appear without sin. We will appear without sin. And his Father (our Father) will say again, "Well done!" — "*By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.*" — "*He shall not fail!*" Christ alone is the Object of the Father's trust, and Christ alone is the Object of our trust.

Christ exalted is our song,
Hymned by all the blood bought throng;
To His throne our shouts shall rise,
God with us by sacred ties.

Shout, believer, to thy God,
He hath once the wine press trod;
Peace procured by blood Divine,
Canceled all thy sins and mine.

Here thy bleeding wounds are healed,
Sin condemned and pardon sealed;
Grace her empire still maintains;
Love, without a rival, reigns.

In thy Surety thou art free,
His dear hands were pierced for thee:
With His spotless garments on,
Holy as the Holy One.

Oh the heights and depths of grace!
Shining with a glorious blaze;
Here the sacred records show
Sinners black, but comely too.

Saints dejected, cease to mourn,
Faith shall soon to vision turn;
Ye the kingdom shall obtain,
And with Christ exalted reign."

In His Grip

Do not fail to grasp the teaching of Holy Scripture regarding the matter of our acceptance before God. Our acceptance is in Christ our Surety. Our acceptance is from everlasting to everlasting. Our acceptance is absolute and unconditional. Our acceptance means that God the Father, our heavenly Father, looks upon us in Christ as perfect in him, and has done so from eternity. He declares, "*It must be perfect to be accepted.*" Being "*accepted in the Beloved,*" our heavenly Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ from eternity, and has promised to bless us forever for Christ's sake (Eph. 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:9). The Lord God commanded Aaron, his high priest, to bless his people symbolically (Num. 6:23), because he had sworn from eternity, for Christ's sake, saying, "*I will bless them*" (Num. 6:27). Bless us he has; and bless us he shall, because our Surety is a faithful Surety, a Surety worthy of the everlasting trust of the Triune God (Eph. 1:11-14). We are in the grip of God's grace; and we have been from eternity. Therefore, he would not let us go until he had saved us, and will not let us go until he brings us to Glory.

Some years ago on a hot summer day in south Florida, a little boy decided to go for a swim in the bayou behind his house. In a hurry to dive into the cool water, he ran out the back door, leaving behind shoes, socks, and shirt as he went. He flew into the water, not realizing that an alligator was swimming toward the shore. His mother was in the house looking out the window. You can imagine her horror! In utter panic she ran toward the water, yelling to her son as loudly as she could. Hearing her voice, the little boy became alarmed and turned to swim to his mother. It was too late. Just as he reached her, the alligator reached him. From the dock, the mother grabbed her little boy by the arms just as the alligator

snatched his legs. That began an incredible tug-of-war between the two. The alligator was much stronger than the mother; but the mother was much too passionate to let go. A farmer happened to drive by, heard her screams, raced from his truck, took aim and shot the alligator.

Remarkably, the little boy survived. His legs were extremely scarred by the vicious attack of the animal, and on his arms were deep scratches where his mother's fingernails dug into his flesh, trying to hang on to the son she loved. A newspaper reporter, who interviewed the boy after the trauma, asked if he would show him his scars. The boy lifted his pant legs. Then, with obvious pride, he said to the reporter, "But look at my arms, I have great scars on my arms, too. I have them because my Mom wouldn't let go."

Every believer can identify with that little boy. We have scars, too. No, not from an alligator, or anything quite so dramatic, but the scars of a painful past. Some of those scars are unsightly and have caused us deep regret. Others are tokens of our Savior's infinite mercy, love, and grace. We have them because he refused to let go. In the midst of our struggles, he has been there holding on to us. We are in the grip of his grace. He did not and will not let us go.