**Jesus, the Firstborn**
Scripture: Colossians 1
Code: BQ71211

**And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.**(Colossians 1:15)

The heretics viewed Jesus as one among a series of lesser spirits descending in sequential inferiority from God. Paul refutes that with two powerful descriptions of who Jesus really is. First, Paul describes Him as**the image of the invisible God.***Eikon*(**image**) means “image” or “likeness.” From it we get our English word*icon*, referring to a statue. It is used in Matthew 22:20 of Caesar’s portrait on a coin, and in Revelation 13:14 of the statue of Antichrist.

Paul further describes Jesus as**the first-born of all creation.**From the Arians of the early church to the Jehovah’s Witnesses of our own day, those who would deny our Lord’s deity have sought support from this phrase. They argue that it speaks of Christ as a created being, and hence He could not be the eternal God. Such an interpretation completely misunderstands the sense of*prototokos*(**first-born** ) and ignores the context.

Although*prototokos*can mean first-born chronologically (Luke 2:7), it refers primarily to position, or rank. In both Greek and Jewish culture, the first-born was the son who had the right of inheritance. He was not necessarily the first one born. Although Esau was born first chronologically, it was Jacob who was the “first-born” and received the inheritance. Jesus is the One with the right to the inheritance of all creation (cf. Heb. 1:2; Rev. 5:1–7, 13).

Israel was called God’s first-born in Exodus 4:22 and Jeremiah 31:9. Though not the first people born, they held first place in God’s sight among all the nations. In Psalm 89:27, God says of the Messiah, “I also shall make him My first-born,” then defines what He means—“the highest of the kings of the earth.” In Revelation 1:5, Jesus is called “the first-born of the dead,” even though He was not the first person to be resurrected chronologically. Of all ever raised, He is the preeminent One. Romans 8:29 refers to Him as the first-born in relation to the church. In all the above cases, first-born clearly means highest in rank, not first created.

There are many other reasons for rejecting the idea that the use of**first-born**makes Jesus a created being. Such an interpretation cannot be harmonized with the description of Jesus as*monogenes* (“only begotten,” or “unique”) in John 1:18. We might well ask with the early church Father Theodoret how, if Christ was only begotten, could He be first-begotten? And how, if He were first-begotten, could He be only begotten? How could He be the first of many in His class, and at the same time the only

member of His class? Yet such confusion is inevitable if we assign the meaning “first created” to “first-born.” Further, when the*prototokos*is one of the class referred to, the class is plural (cf. Col. 1:18; Rom. 8:29). Yet, creation is singular. Finally, if Paul meant to convey that Christ was the first created being, why did he not use the Greek word*protoktistos*, which means “first created?”

Such an interpretation of*prototokos*is also foreign to the context—both the general context of the epistle and the specific context of the passage. If Paul were here teaching that Christ is a created being, he would be agreeing with the central point of the Colossian errorists. They taught that Christ was a created being, the most prominent of the emanations from God. That would run counter to his purpose in writing Colossians, which was to refute the false teachers at Colossae.

Interpreting*prototokos*to mean that Christ is a created being is also out of harmony with the immediate context. Paul has just finished describing Christ as the perfect and complete image of God. In the next verse, he refers to Christ as the creator of everything that exists. How then could Christ Himself be a created being? Further, verse 17 states, “He is before all things.” Christ existed before anything else was created (cf. Micah 5:2). And only God existed before the creation.

Far from being one of a series of emanations descending from God, Jesus is the perfect image of God. He is the preeminent inheritor over all creation (The genitive*ktiseos*is better translated “over” than “of”). He both existed before the creation and is exalted in rank above it. Those truths define who Jesus is in relation to God. They also devastate the false teachers’ position. But Paul is not finished—his next point undermines another false teaching of the Colossian errorists.

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