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#SS04

Firstborn of All Creation

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In **Colossians 1 :15** we are told that Jesus Christ is "**the firstborn of every creature.**" This statement reveals a truth, and it is truth we need to know. However, we need to understand just what the truth is that is revealed by this statement, since many are reading into it ideas that are not there. Thus they use a passage to deny the Deity of Christ when the passage teaches it explicitly.

By some we are told that the statement "firstborn of every creature" is a revelation of the origin of Christ, and a revelation concerning His place in the order of created things. They hold that before anything else came into existence, that He was created and then became the creator of all created things, excepting, of course, Himself.

The surprising thing is that these men set forth this idea as if they had suddenly uncovered some new information as to the origin and the nature of the Son of God. They seem to have no knowledge that this idea was first set forth by one named Arius over 1600 years ago (about 300 A.D.), and that it has appeared again and again in the history of Christendom. Arius taught that while the Son of God may be designated as God in some sense, He is not God in the same sense as the Father. This he mostly based upon his idea that the Son of God is not eternal, and there was, therefore, a time

when He did not exist. Various forms of the Arian doctrine are constantly being revived. Jesus Christ is made to be a sort of supreme angel, the first being brought forth by God, His instrument in the creation of the world. Thus a very lofty and supernatural dignity is assigned to Him, but He is made to be only an exceedingly high creature, **a created god rather than God** the Creator. This is supposed to be the truth set forth by Paul in Colossians 1 :15 when he declared Jesus Christ to be "the firstborn of every creature." But this is merely the interpretation placed upon Paul's words. It is not the truth set forth in Paul's declaration. The word "firstborn" does not tell us of His origin, neither does it infer the way that He came into existence. This becomes crystal clear when the statement is examined in the setting where God has placed it.

Consider the Context

There is a rule of interpretation which might well be written at the top of every page in our Bibles. It is this. *Consider the context.* If one has not fully considered the context or setting of a statement in Scripture, he can be deceived as to its meaning and application. Every honest Bible student knows that hundreds of passages from the Bible are used to prove the very opposite of what God intended to teach by them. An example of such wresting of the Scripture is seen in the use often made of this statement severed from Colossians 1 :15. The method never varies. An idea is inferred, hinted or declared and then a portion of a passage is brought forth to confirm it. Thus the idea becomes the context of the passage instead of Scripture in which God placed it.

What Is The Subject

A fundamental rule in dealing with any passage that is set forth *as* proof of *a* proposition is to *ask* these questions. What is the subject *of* the portion from which this text was taken? Does the portion deal with the proposition that is being set forth? If the subject is not the same *as* the idea being set forth, if the passage does not deal with the proposition being advanced, then we know that *a* fragment of Scripture has been removed from its context to give support to some idea which is not taught in the Word of God.

In Colossians 1:15-19 Paul is setting forth the transcendent glories of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, the subject of this portion is the preeminence *of* the Son. This preeminence is set forth in seven superiorities *of* which "firstborn of every creature" is one. This being the case the statement "firstborn of every creature" cannot be dealing either with the origin *or* the nature of Christ. There is no superiority or supremacy set forth in the word "firstborn" if it means nothing more than an earlier birthday. But if *firstborn* means more than this, if it sets forth some true preeminence *or* superiority then it is fitting that it be mentioned in *a* list that sets forth such things. That it does mean this will be demonstrated by Scripture, the Old Testament as well as the New.

First *of* all, let us note carefully the statement made in Colossians 1:15. He is said to be the "firstborn of every creature," or "firstborn *of* all creation" *as* it is better translated. Both translations mean the same thing. Now if Paul had said "firstborn *of* all born" *or* "first created *of* all created," then it would be plain that he was setting forth His precedence *over* things born *or* things created. If Paul had said this, then we would have to place the Son *of* God in the category *of* things born or things created. But Paul said no such thing. **He says He "is the FIRSTBORN *of* every creature."**

Therefore, it would be well if these followers *of* Arius would tell us just what the truth is concerning Christ that they find in this statement. Does it tell us as to His origin that He was BORN, or does it tell us He was CREATED? And readers will note that this has no reference to the babe born in Bethlehem. We *are* dealing with the false supposition that the One who became flesh, who existed before Bethlehem, had *a* beginning. **Did He, according to their teaching, come into existence by the process we call birth or was it by the process we call creation?** Did He belong to that order *of* beings like Adam who were created *or* to those like Abel who were born? My answer is that the Son by whom all things were created was neither born nor created. He existed eternally with God and as God.

There are no exceptions to Christ's agency in creation. Those who would make Him *a* created being seek also to make Him an exception to the things He created. They would have us believe that God created Christ, then bestowed upon Him the power to create the world. The whole Biblical revelation is dead against this, and fragments taken from their context will affect none but those who are untaught and unskilled in the Word.

In the first chapter *of* Colossians we find the word *firstborn* twice. This gives us *a* most positive clue to its meaning. But it is *a* fact that is given scant heed by those who use the word *firstborn* to prove that He had *an* origin no different than Gabriel *or* Michael. In this same portion *of* Scripture He is also called "**firstborn from the dead.**" (Co!.1:18.) In another of Paul's epistles we read of certain things that God did for a certain company of believers in order that He (the Son) might be "**the firstborn among many brethren.**" Thus we have in Paul's epistles three different companies over which Christ is firstborn. This fact alone is sufficient to prove that ***Firstborn* is a title descriptive of a high office. It has in it the ideas of ownership, responsibility, rule, and disposal.**

He is "**the firstborn of every creature.**" If we ask why He is the firstborn of every creature, those who follow Arius tell us that it is because He was born in advance of every other creature. But this is not **he** Scriptural answer. The Son of God is the firstborn of all creation because "**by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for**

Him." Colossians 1 :16. This is why He is FIRSTBORN of all creation. He is the owner of all; He is the Lord of all; the disposal of all is in His hands.

Firstborn from the Dead

He is also declared to be "**firstborn from the dead.**" Of that great company which shall come from among the dead, He is the Firstborn. Note that it does not say, "first raised from the dead." Since men are *raised* from the dead and not *born* from the dead, we know from this passage that the word firstborn is a title of great honor. He is not the "firstborn from the dead" because He was first to be raised from the dead. This high position is His because He is the resurrection and the life. Thus He has the same preeminent place in the new creation as He had in the old. From this passage alone it is evident that "firstborn of every creature" does not tell us that Christ was the first created of all created beings. If we interpret it this way, then we will have to interpret the parallel title "firstborn from the dead" in the same way. This would lead us to impossible conclusions. The word *firstborn* no more speaks of His coming into existence in Colossians 1 :15 than the same word in Colossians 1:18 tell of His coming forth from the dead.

Firstborn Among Many Brethren

The statement "**that He might be firstborn among many brethren**" in Romans 8 :29 is a positive proof of the meaning of *firstborn*. The One who already was firstborn of all creation and firstborn from the dead is also firstborn among a certain group of saints.

That the word translated "firstborn" does mean in certain passages to have been born first in relation to others born of the same parents is readily admitted. The word is found in Luke 2:7 and Hebrews 11 :28. However, even here the one born first became the Firstborn, a position of high privilege and responsibility in that time.

Of the nation of Israel God said, "**Israel is My son, even my firstborn.**" Exodus 4 :22. Israel is called this, not because she was the first nation to come into existence, but because of the exalted position God had given her among other nations. To make the word *firstborn* here teach that Israel was the first people to become a nation would be to deny divine history. The word speaks of position, not of origin.

In Deuteronomy 21 we find an illuminating passage that sheds much light upon the subject. **If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be her's that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that**

which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn; but he shall acknowledge the Son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his. Deuteronomy 21:15-17.

Here we have indisputable proof that the word *firstborn* has a twofold meaning. This commandment forbade any man taking his second son and making him his firstborn, a ridiculous prohibition if *firstborn* means only the order in which a man's sons were born. No power on earth could reverse this order once it was established. However, if the word *firstborn* denotes a certain position, then a father could take a second son and make him his firstborn. Since this is forbidden here we have positive proof that firstborn means more than the order of generation. It denotes position.

The Only Begotten

In connection with the misuse of the word *firstborn* to make it teach that there was a time when the Son of God had no existence, the word "begotten" is brought forth as supporting proof. As Arius argued, "If the Father begat the Son, He who was begotten had a beginning of existence. So there was a time when the Son did not exist." This idea is based upon the wholly false assumption that the Scriptures set forth Jesus Christ as "begotten of the Father."

The Bible never says this, either of His eternal Sonship or of His human birth. The Greek word *monogenes* does not mean "only begotten." This is demonstrated by its use in Hebrews 11 :17 where Isaac is called the "only begotten son of Abraham." Since Isaac was not the only son of Abraham, since he was not even the first son born to Abraham, he could not be the "only begotten" in the sense we give to this term today. In English we lack both words and a comparable idea by which to set forth the thought contained in this Greek word. It is a term of endearment, something like the word *darling* in Psalm 22 :20, and it signifies one who is greatly beloved. A like truth is seen in "his dear Son" in Colossians 1 :13. This word (*monogenes*) when applied to Christ tells us what the Son is to the Father. It does not speak of his generation.

I rejoice in being able to set forth this witness concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and feel that I have been amply rewarded for my effort in the opportunity of confessing Him once again. Without reserve, without compromise, without qualifications, Jesus Christ is God. There is no honor which I give to the Father that I do not give to the Son. This includes the honor of eternal existence.

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