

The Word – Only Born – Firstborn

Exposition of John 1:1-3, 14; 17:5 and Colossians 1:15

Ever since men began to record their theological conclusions about the Person of Jesus Christ, a debate has persisted in respect to who He really is. This article attempts to address some of these issues by considering biblical contexts in question based on the Greek text. In this endeavor, exclusive attention is directed toward the meaning communicated by the words and grammatical relationships that make up Scripture which was composed by men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21). In keeping with this goal, initial translation of verses will not include capital letters since this designation does not appear in the original manuscripts. Although, subsequent commentary will discuss the intended meaning of these words based on evidence gathered from their common usage, grammatical relationships, and connection within the immediate context. Overall, the purpose of this exposé is to deliberate key components of the text so you will have more information to determine what these sections of the Bible teach.

The Word

John 1:1) “in the beginning the word was existing, and the word was existing with god, and god was existing as the word”

The phrase “in the beginning” (ἐν ἀρχῇ) represents *the central focus* John wants the reader to concentrate on since *it occurs at the forefront of the Greek text*. The noun, “ἀρχῇ”, in this phrase most basically means *first*. This meaning is illustrated by its use to describe Jesus’ *first* miracle (John 2:11); the corners of a sheet – the *first* accessible points of this rectangle (Acts 10:11); rulers who occupy *first* or forefront positions related to authority (Eph. 1:21); and initial or *first* exposure to the gospel (Phil. 4:15). The English word ‘archaic’ is derived from this word as well as the prefix found on terms such as “archangel” (ἀρχαγγελός) and “high priest” (ἀρχιερεὺς), which literally mean *first angel* (1 Thess. 4:16; Jude 9) and *first priest* (Acts 4:6; Heb. 4:14).

The noun “ἀρχῇ” is a *substantive* which means it *represents something with substance or essence*.¹ This is true of all Greek nouns which represent a person, place, or thing. The *preposition* “in” (ἐν), occurring with this word-of-substance, expresses the idea of being *within* or *inside* the thought this noun conveys. So, the idea portrayed by combining these two words is *within the first*. Before the significance of this phrase can be discussed, the meaning of the terms which surround it need to be identified.

The *noun* “λογος” speaks of *the totality of a message* and not just a single word or term contained in a language, as shown by the following references (John 2:22; 5:24; 6:60; 7:36; 8:31; 12:38; 19:8). The *verb of being* “was existing” (ην) is a form of “ειμι”, which simply expresses *existence* or *presence* (John 8:58). Since, this verb occurs in *the imperfect tense form* it also signifies *linear action in past time*. The action of this tense can be graphed by a line with arrows at both ends pointing in opposite directions since it does not designate when this action begins or concludes. As the meaning of these words converge with the phrase “in the beginning” they convey the thought *this message was in a continuous state of existence at the beginning*.

Now, the question arises: Can a *point of reference* be determined to both explain what the phrase “in the beginning” refers to and designate when this past continuous state of existence was happening? The answer is ‘Yes’, for verse 3 provides this reference point by use of the *verb* describing how all things “came into being” (εγενετο) at the time of creation. This verb occurs in the *aorist tense* and *indicative mode*, which together mean the same thing as our *past tense* in English. When this contextual information is applied, the initial five word phrase can be established to mean “*the word*” was existing in a *continual state prior to creation during a reality called “the beginning”*.

Again, since “in the beginning” (εν αρχη) occurs first in the Greek text, the *central focus* of this first phrase is on *the initial period of reality when* “the word” was perpetually existing even though created-time as we know it did not yet exist (Heb. 1:2; 11:3 – the noun “αιωνας” in these verses means *ages*). Although “εν αρχη” is the central focus of this phrase, the *primary subject matter* is “the word” (ο λογος) since it occurs with its *article*.²

Now, John connects this phrase to the next one by use of the *conjunction* “and” (και).³ In this second seven-term phrase, the *noun* “word” (λογος) occurs with its *article* (ο), and together they are *positioned at the forefront* which suggests they serve as both the *central focus* and the *primary subject matter*. Since the *imperfect tense verb of being* “ην” is repeated in this phrase, it indicates “the word” (ο λογος) was in a *perpetual state of existence* “with god” (προς τον θεον). The basic meaning of the *preposition* “προς” is *toward*, and it describes the relationship of *being in close proximity to* “god” (θεον).

The *noun* “θεος” commonly refers to any sort of *deity* (Mark 12:24-30; John 10:34-35; Acts 14:11; 1 Cor. 8:5). However, since this phrase states “the word was existing with god” during an existence prior to creation, in this passage the *noun* “θεον” refers to *the God of the Bible* who existed before the material, time-based universe was made (Gen. 1:1). Furthermore, this God is defined as *the Father*

numerous times later in this Book (1:14, 18; 6:27; 17:3-5). Summarizing this second phrase, *two things with substance* were concurrently existing in a continuous state before creation; and these two entities are expressed by the nouns “the word” (ο λογος) and “god” (τον θεον). Lastly, because “θεον” occurs with its *article* “τον”, this phrase is established as the *primary subject matter* along with and equal to “ο λογος”.²

John concludes verse one by transitioning into a third phrase *connected with* the second by the *conjunction* “and” (και).³ Most Versions translate these words “and the word was god”, but the order in the original Greek text reads “and god was existing as the word” (και θεος ην ο λογος). Some would argue: Because “λογος” occurs with its article, it should be translated as the subject. However, in the Koine Greek of the New Testament, *word order* was regularly used to direct a reader’s thought process. So, the linguistic structure found in this phrase designates “θεος” as the *central focus* since it occupies the forefront position while “ο λογος” is labeled as the *primary subject matter* because it appears with its article. In addition, since this language lacks punctuation marks, the phrase “ο λογος” is *positioned last to designate the end of the thought*. This kind of word order is commonly used in Greek to *define relationships between words and phrases* in order to accomplish the same effect which punctuation marks have in English.

Nevertheless, in this phrase “θεος” and “ο λογος” are *subjects* of the verb because both appear in the *nominative case*. And, since this construction positions these nouns around a verb of being, they *describe one another’s essence*. When the *imperfect tense* of the verb of being “ην” is added, which denotes *continuous existence in past time*, this phrase indicates *God was existing in His perpetual essence in the same way as “the word”, and vice versa, at this pre-creation time*.

When the exact teaching of this verse is followed, a philosophical dilemma emerges: How can the statement about “θεος” and “ο λογος” *existing as the same essence/being* be reconciled with the second phrase which indicates “*the word*” *was a separate entity existing with God*? In other words, how can something exist with something else and at the same time be that thing? For, this is precisely what the text says. By combining the significance of both of these statements, it can be concluded “the word” was existing as the very essence of God (θεος) while at the same time it was existing with Him as a separate entity.

On the one hand, the phrase “god was existing as the word” literally means “*the word*” *is being personified as the very essence of God*. Since it is evident “θεος” refers to the Person of God the Father and “the word” (ο λογος) was existing as His essence, this linguistic relationship personifies or characterizes “the word” as God. Because of this, it is legitimate to translate “ο λογος” as *the Word* to represent

the *essence of Deity*, which is what many English Translations have done. On the other hand, this same Word is defined as separate from God since it was “with” Him. This statement indicates the Word is distinct from the Father, so it designates *the Word* as a *separate entity or Person*. When these two truths are merged, a reasonable theological conclusion is: *These two entities represent two Persons in a Godhead* (Col. 1:19; 2:9).

Before proceeding to verse 2, it is necessary to take a brief detour because some claim “θεος” in this last phrase does not refer to *the God* of the Bible, but it should be understood as ‘a god’ since it occurs without an article. However, by merely observing later contexts in this Book where “θεος” does not appear with an article, yet clearly refers to God the Father, it is evident *the quality of essence* (the substance) represented by this or any noun *is unchanged by whether or not it occurs with an article* (see “θεος” used in John 1:6, 12, 13, 18; 3:2, 21; 8:54; 9:33; 16:30; 19:7). In addition, some contexts where “θεος” appears without an article are intertwined with the same noun occurring with its article, which proves either grammatical structure refers to the same God.⁴

2) “this was existing in the beginning with god”

Verse 2 begins with the *demonstrative pronoun* “this” (οὗτος). A pronoun is used to take the place of a noun and almost always corresponds with that noun in gender and number. Here, “οὗτος” refers to “the word” (ο λόγος) since it occurs in the same *masculine singular* form; it is defined as having the same relationship “with god” (προς τον θεον) as “ο λόγος” does in verse 1; and “οὗτος” directly follows “ο λόγος” in the Greek text. Since “the word” (ο λόγος) has already been established to represent both a *Person* and *God*, it is also legitimate to render the pronoun “οὗτος” as *This One* or *He*, as many Versions do. Furthermore, this type of pronoun is termed *demonstrative* because it is used to *demonstrate* or *describe* something about the noun it replaces. This description is found *within the meaning of the remaining words in this verse*.

At first glance, verse 2 appears to simply repeat what was stated in verse 1. However, there is a distinct difference. In verse 2, the conjunction “και” is *not used to separate* the phrases “in the beginning” and “with god” as it was in verse 1. By use of a construction which eliminates “και”, John answers any questions which might linger relative to whether the Word’s continual past existence “in the beginning” and “with god” was *simultaneous*. In addition, composition in the Greek language repeats a similar thing in slightly different terms only when the author wants to *emphasize what he intends to communicate*. Consequently, both the wording and impact of verse 2 ensures the reader will explicitly understand:

The Word was in concurrent and perpetual existence with the Father before anything else existed (Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2; Eph. 1:4).

3) “all things came into being through him and apart from him neither one thing came into being which has come into being”

Up to this point, John has focused solely on the existence of the Father and the Word prior to the appearance of anything else. Verse 3 begins delineating the arrival of “all things” (παντα).⁵ This *noun* occurs in the *nominative case* which designates it as the *subject* of the verb “came into being” (εγενετο). In its broadest sense, “all things” represent *the totality of space and time* contained in the material universe (Gen. 1:1; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 11:3).

The verb “came into being” (εγενετο) is a different kind of *verb of being* than “ην” which occurred four times in the first two verses. As already covered, “ην” is a form of “ιμι” which indicates a noun (or any substantive)¹ *has reality, exists* and, therefore, ultimately *is*; but it does not signify how or when this existence began. In contrast, the verb of being “εγενετο” (a form of “γίνομαι”) refers to something *coming into a state of existence* or *becoming a reality*. Also, this verb occurs in the *aorist tense*, specifying action at a *point or segment of time*,⁶ and in the *indicative mode*, which denotes a *statement of fact*. Together, this tense and mode portray the same idea as our *past tense in English*. So, when the full meaning and form of this verb are considered, it indicates all things *came into initial existence at a point of history in the past*.

Although “all things” (παντα) is the subject of the verb “came into being” (εγενετο), John states how this process was commenced, which was “through him” (δι’ αυτου). The *personal pronoun* “him” (αυτου) refers back to “the word” (ο λογος) in verse 1. Because of this grammatical relationship to “λογος”, which has already been shown to indicate *Personality*, “αυτου” can legitimately be translated *Him* as seen in many English Versions.

The pronoun “αυτου” appears with the *preposition* “through” (δι’ – a contracted form of “δια”), which means *through the medium* or *agency*. Prepositions occurring with a pronoun like the phrase “through him” (δι’ αυτου) serve an *adverbial application*, so this phrase modifies the verb of being.⁷ In this relationship, the phrase “δι’ αυτου” describes *the manner or way in which* “all things came into being” stating it was *through His action*. The addition of this thought within the context means: *The manner in which all things came into existence at a period of time in the past was through the Word*. This statement earmarks Jesus as *the exclusive source* of the entire universe.

By use of the *conjunction* “and” (καί), another concept is *connected* to the fact all things had their initiation with Him.³ John proceeds to say, “apart from him neither one thing came into being”. The word “neither” (οὐδε) contains the *negative* “οὐ”, meaning *not*, connected with the *conjunction* “δε”, a *simple connector* which also indicates *a new thought is added*; and it is well translated *also*.⁸ This compound word occurs with the *singular neuter form of the numeral one* which simply translates “one thing” (ἐν). This phrase explains more specifically how “all things came into being through him”, for it states, *also not one single thing* (οὐδε ἐν) came into being “apart from him”.

The expression “apart from him” consists of the *preposition* “χωρίς”, which means *separate from* or *without*, joined to the *pronoun* “him” (αὐτοῦ). This phrase serves an *adverbial application*⁷ and describes *the procedure by which* every single thing was created. This process was *in no way separate from Him*. Quite the opposite, it was *wholly* (indicated by the word “all things”) and *singularly*, (indicated by the numeral “one thing”) *triggered by Him*.

Finally, this verse closes with the words “which has come into being” (ὃ γεγονεν). The *verb of being* “has come into being” (γεγονεν) is the *perfect tense form* of “γίνομαι” which has already appeared twice in this verse. The perfect tense combines *punctiliar action with linear action*,⁹ and it indicates *once an action is completed the result of that action continues in full effect*. The subject of this verb of being is the *singular relative pronoun* “which” (ὃ), and it refers to the numeral “one thing” (ἐν). As this pronoun and verb are linked, they state *each individual thing* which was initially created *also persists without interruption*.

It is significant to note this same thought is expressed by the First Law of Thermodynamics titled *The Conservation of Energy*. For, this principle of science states all substances such as solids, liquids, and gases as well as all unseen phenomena at the atomic level such as energy and light are neither created nor destroyed. These elements can be altered or changed in form, but no substance is lost in the process. This Law, which has survived all scientific scrutiny, fully aligns with the biblical teaching of creation. And, the concept that matter cannot be “created nor destroyed”, which is the verbiage used by many sources to define this Law, is both an *undisputed* and *universally accepted fact*.¹⁰

Numerous passages in the Bible, including John 1:1-3, present a scenario which explains *how all matter and energy remain constant*. The Book of Genesis specifies no additional matter, process, or life should be expected after the sixth day of creation because at that point the Creator had finished bringing all things into existence (Gen. 1:31 – 2:3).¹¹ Hebrews 11:3 expresses this same thought as it reads, “by faith we understand the ages to have been completed by the word of

god unto the outcome for the things being seen not to *have come into being* (γεγονεναι, perfect infinitive form of “γίνομαι” – italics mine) out of the things being manifest”. Scripture harmoniously proclaims *nothing in creation came into existence from anything visible or invisible*, but only through an *Eternally Existent Deity* (Col. 1:16-17).

Furthermore, since John 1:1-3 and multiple passages in the Bible claim only “god” (θεος) and “the word” (ο λογος) *existed before anything else came into being*, it is evident this teaching directly contradicts the theory of evolution which *requires the original existence of some substance*. Today, the most common explanation of this theory is: Prior to a ‘big bang’, *a dense atomic particle existed*. It should go without saying, but *this belief has no factual basis in science*, for it cannot explain where this alleged initial substance came from. However, the Bible does provide a plausible answer for what we actually know about the universe. For, it affirms *the power to create always existed within an Eternal God, but time and substance did not exist until this Divine Designer made them* (Rom. 1:19-20).

The Only Born

After recording truth about the eternal existence of Christ and His central role in creation, the apostle John continues to share additional revelation with reference to His appearance on earth.¹²

14) “. . . and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only born beside the father full of grace and truth”

This verse begins with the phrase, “and the word became flesh”. The *noun* “flesh” (σαρξ) is commonly used to represent the concept of *having a physical body*, which is the intended meaning here (Eph. 6:5, 12; Col. 1:22; Heb. 2:14-18). Customarily, the theological term *incarnation* is used to describe this event, which is derived from a *Latin root meaning in the flesh*.

The *verb of being* “became” (εγενετο) is the same verb used three times in verse 3, and it means *to come into existence*. This is exactly what happened when “the word”, who existed in the same essence of and with the Father before creation in Spirit form (John 4:24), *became a man* by taking on a human body. Since this verb occurs in the *aorist tense* and *indicative mode*, it targets how this event happened at *a period of time in the past*. This timeframe is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew which twice states how the Holy Spirit impregnated Mary when she was still a virgin (Matt. 1:18-25). In this account Joseph, while engaged to Mary, was instructed in a dream to name the coming child “Jesus (Ιησους – meaning Savior), for he will save his people from their sins”. His subsequent birth fulfilled

the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 which foretold the advent of “Emmanuel”. This English name is transliterated from the Greek word “Ἐμμανουήλ”, which in turn is derived from Hebrew and means “god with us” (μεθ’ ἡμῶν ὁ θεός).¹³

Not only did the Word become flesh, He also “dwelt among us”. The verb “dwelt” (εσκηνωσεν) is more literally translated *tented* or *to pitch a tent* (Rev. 7:15; 12:12; 13:6; 21:3). Appearing in its *aorist indicative form*, this verb references *the past time period* which encompassed approximately thirty-three years while Jesus occupied His human body on earth. During this fleeting segment of history “the word” (ὁ λόγος) – God’s *message* to mankind – became a man and resided “among us” (ἐν ἡμῖν) or *in our midst*. Note *the reoccurrence* of “the word” (ὁ λόγος) in this verse which had already appeared three times in verse 1. This repeated use of “ὁ λόγος” designates it as the *overall theme of verses 1 through 14*, that is, *the Father extended the message “λόγος” of Himself to mankind by sending the pre-existent God to earth as Man and Savior*.¹⁴

“And”, (καί),³ *in connection with* Jesus’ presence, “we beheld his glory”. The word “glory” (δοξάν) fundamentally means *that which is thought about* something, and it is one of the principal nouns used to describe *the perception of* what God is like (John 2:11; 7:18; 11:4; 12:41-43; 17:5, 22-24). Verses 1 and 2 of this chapter established “the word” as a distinct Personality, yet equal to the essence of God, so also “his glory” (τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ) perfectly represented *the glory of the Father* (John 17:5). Now, John ties how this reality affected mankind as he records “we beheld” (εθεασαμεθα) or *observed* this “glory”. Just like our term ‘theater’, which comes from the same Greek root, this verb portrays *man as a spectator watching* the nuances of Jesus’ words and actions as He performed His role on earth. In this way, the Word, “ὁ λόγος” – God’s *Message* – “dwelt among us” providing a way for *mankind to perceive who God is*.

This “glory” is further described in the following manner, “glory as of the only born beside the father”. The noun “of the only born” (μονογενοῦς) comes from the adjective “μόνος”, meaning *alone*, joined with the noun “γενος”, which refers to *substance resulting from coming into existence*; and it is well translated *a born one*. This thought combined with the phrase “beside the father” (παρὰ πατρός), meaning *side by side with God the Father*, expresses the idea Jesus Christ was *the only one born with a human body from this divine essence*.

Two points of grammar connect this “glory” (δοξάν) with Jesus. First, the *adverb* “as” (ὡς) means *like* or *in the manner of*. Second, the noun “of the only born” (μονογενοῦς) is in the *genitive case* which expresses *association*. Collectively, these points of grammar describe the “glory” *like that which is associated with* or *comparable to* one “beside” the Father. The Word (ὁ λόγος), formerly described

as *the same essence as God* in verses 1 and 2, is now identified as *born into human flesh* (v. 14). In this flesh and blood body, Jesus *radiated divine “glory”* (δοξαν) *identical with* that of His invisible Father in order that the world might see a *perfect representation* of God.

The next phrase, “full of grace and truth”, expounds what this “glory” consists of. The *noun* “grace” (χαριτος) depicts the idea of an *unmerited gift* or *favor*. The *noun* “truth” (αληθειας) links the Greek letter *alpha* “α”, which *negates* what it is joined with, to a root related to the verb “λανθανω”, meaning to *escape notice*. Therefore, “truth” represents *a reality which cannot escape one’s notice*; it is a *conspicuous* and *impactful actuality*. This means, through the arrival of the only born Son of God, the Father exhibited His “glory” *in a medium which could not be ignored* even though the human race did not *merit this opportunity* to connect with Him. Thus began man’s encounter with “the word” (ο λογος), *the message* illuminating the essence of who God is. For, through His Son, God exposed the *perceptive glory* of who He is to the world as they observed Jesus Christ in the flesh “full” (πληρης) of or *satiated with* “grace and truth” (John 1:18).

Firstborn of all Creation

Colossians 1:15) “. . . who is the image of the invisible god, the firstborn of all creation”

Those who believe the Son did not exist as God in eternity past tend to also teach the term “firstborn” in Colossians 1:15 supports the idea Jesus was a created being. In this verse, the *noun* “firstborn” (πρωτοτοκος) is formed by connecting two words, “πρωτος” and “τοκος”. The *noun* “πρωτος” means *first in order* and often refers to *that which is first in relation to time*. The front half of the words ‘protozoa’, meaning *initial life*, and ‘prototype’, representing *an initial pattern*, originate from this Greek root. The *noun* “τοκος” conveys the idea of *that which is brought forth* or *produced* and commonly refers to *birth*. So, the English rendering “firstborn” is a very accurate translation. Consistent with this meaning, three New Testament occurrences of “πρωτοτοκος” speak of *one born first in a family* (Luke 2:7; Heb. 1:6; 11:28). Four of the remaining five times it refers to Jesus Christ. And, the final usage is in reference to believers.

Before considering other passages where “πρωτοτοκος” appears, let us take a closer look at how it is used in Colossians 1:15 in light of its grammar and context. This verse begins with the *relative pronoun* “who” (ος) which references “the son” (του υιου) found in verse 13. Paul says two things about the Lord Jesus, He is the “image of the invisible god” and “the firstborn of all creation”. In the first phrase, the *noun* “image” (εικων), from which we derive the word ‘icon’, is used to

represent the image of Caesar (Mark 12:16), human idols (Rom. 1:23), and the Beast in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 13:14-15; 15:2; 19:20). In passages where it is used in relation to Jesus, it describes *His present heavenly state* (1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4; Col. 3:10).

Evidence the word “image” (εἰκὼν) in Colossians 1:15 also refers to the *current glorified state* of our Lord is based on its link with the *present tense form* of the *verb of being* “is” (ἐστίν). Note, this verse does not state Jesus Christ *has always been the “image of the invisible god”*, but it allows for the brief period of time He bore our sins in His body on the cross and was temporarily forsaken by the Father. During that period He did not represent the “image” of God like He did before His entrance into the world and during His sinless life on earth (Matt. 27:46; 2 Cor. 5:21). Then, after His resurrection from the dead, He regained *His current position* of representing the “image” of God. As a result of His *second physical birth* (the resurrection), He “is” (ἐστίν – present tense) also *currently* called the “firstborn”.

Additional support the term “firstborn” (πρωτοτοκος) represents our Lord’s resurrected state is found a few verses later in the phrase, “firstborn out of the dead” (πρωτοτοκος εκ των νεκρων – Col. 1:18). This means, of all those who had died, Jesus is *the first one to experience a physical rebirth*. Since His resurrection, He now exists *in a glorified bodily state* and is titled “the firstborn” *in the spiritual family of God* (v. 15; Rom 8:29; Rev. 1:5).

Now, how are we to understand the phrase “firstborn of all creation”? The words “all creation” (πασης κτισεως) occur in *the genitive case* which is key to the relationship this phrase has with the noun “πρωτοτοκος”. The genitive case signifies *association or affiliation*, so the thought conveyed is Jesus Christ exists as “the firstborn” *in association with* “all creation”. This *relational association* between Christ and creation is clarified by Paul in the surrounding context.

In the next verse, the *conjunction* “because” (οτι) is used *to introduce causal background information* which explains how Jesus can be “firstborn” *in relation to* “all creation”, for He is described as its *Creator and Sustainer* (Col. 1:16-17). Also, verse 19 begins with the same conjunction “οτι” to cite *further causal information* about Jesus’ *relationship with fallen creation* by declaring the purpose for shedding His “blood” was to *reconcile all things in the heavens and upon the earth* to the Father (v. 20). So, even though believers *presently occupy the position of being reconciled to God through the redemptive work of Christ* (vv. 14, 21-22), so far, neither we nor any other part of creation has physically reached the promised state of glory (Rom. 8:18-25; Col. 3:3-4). Therefore, *the commentary found within this passage* describes Jesus’ “firstborn” *association* with His “creation”: *He is the first and only one who has been resurrected* and, as such, solely possesses the

title “firstborn out of the dead” (v. 18, cf. Rev. 1:5, “the firstborn of the dead” [ὁ πρωτοτοκος των νεκρων]).

In summary, it is apparent no part of “creation” has yet experienced the same rebirth as our Savior, but “all” of it awaits future restoration to its original state of perfection (Gen. 1:31; Col. 1:15). In contrast with the universe, Jesus Christ has already been resurrected, occupies His final destination of glory, and is thus called the “firstborn” *in His association with* “all creation”.

Romans 8:29 is another place “πρωτοτοκος” refers to our Lord which reads, “. . . because whom he foreknew he also predestined as conformed ones in association with the image of his son unto the outcome for him to be the firstborn among many brothers”. God’s ultimate purpose for His foreknowledge and predestination of the elect is to become “conformed ones” (συμμορφους) with or *those of the same form* as the glorified “image” (εικονος) of His Son (Rom. 8:30, 33; Col. 1:15; 3:12). Although members of the Body of Christ have the future guarantee of transformation into the perfect state of our “firstborn” Lord, at present we are still in the process of being conformed to His “image” with a day-to-day potential to put on qualities consistent with His character (Rom. 8:38-39; Phil. 3:10-11, 20-21; Col. 3:10-11). When He returns and completes our glorification into His holy and eternal “image”, only then we will be “brothers” *in the spiritual family* with our “firstborn” Savior (Col. 3:3-4; Heb. 2:10-13).

Hebrews 12:22-23 is another passage which confirms what “πρωτοτοκος” means. It states, “But you have come . . . to the church of the firstborn having been recorded in the heavens”. These verses indicate those redeemed by the blood of Christ have already become members of the “church” (εκκλησια or *assembly*) which is *in association or identified with* (genitive case) “the first born”. This reference is the only time “firstborn” (πρωτοτοκων) appears *plural in number* and refers to *believers*. The idea these saints are called “firstborn” *in regard to their spiritual position* is indicated by the *perfect tense form* of the participle “having been recorded” (απογεγραμμενων). This tense means their *present condition* is the result of *an already accomplished heavenly enrollment*.⁹ So here, the label “first born” (πρωτοτοκων) refers to those who have effectually experienced the *guarantee of future glory* but not the actual resurrection of their bodies. This reality is confirmed by how these Christians still reside in sinful flesh (Heb. 12:1-13; 13:20-21).

Concluding this segment about the meaning of “πρωτοτοκος”, our Lord’s “firstborn” *association with creation* refers to *His spiritual relationship* with the fallen world. For, He “became flesh”, “dwelt among us”, took our sins in His body on the cross, was resurrected from the dead, and now occupies a position at the right hand of

the Father as “the firstborn out of the dead” (Col. 1:18; John 1:14; Rom. 4:25; 8:34; 1 Pet. 2:24). In God’s time, all creation which does not suffer eternal judgment will be reconciled to its former created state of perfection and share this eternal glory with our “firstborn” Savior (John 5:28-29; Rom. 8:29-30; Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 3:3-4; 2 Thess. 2:10-14).

Jesus’ Prayer to the Father

John 17:5) “and now, father, you glorify me beside yourself with the glory which I was having beside you before the world existed”

This is another pertinent passage which contains information about the Person of Jesus Christ. In this verse, Jesus implores the Father to glorify Him with “the glory which I was having . . . before the world existed”. The verb “I was having” (εἶχον) means *to possess* and in its *imperfect tense form* expresses this possession of “glory” was a *continuous action in the past*. The historical reference to the time of this *ownership of glory* is specified by the phrase “before the world existed”.

The *infinitive* “existed” (εἶναι) is derived from the same root as the verb of being “εἶμι”, which has already appeared four times in John 1:1-2 and means *to occupy a state of existence*. Just like the first section of this Gospel account teaches the Word was eternally existing with God, this verse indicates Jesus *was possessing the same glory as the Father possessed “before” (πρὸ) or prior to the time the world existed*. In addition, the verb “I was having” (εἶχον) occurs in the *first person singular form* which provides more evidence Jesus *existed as a Personality* in His pre-creation state of shared “glory” with the Father.

As a final point, it is important to *recognize the timeframe* in which Jesus prayed “you glorify me” (δοξάσον με), *telling* (imperative mode) the Father to *complete* (aorist tense) this process. For, He entered into this world with a distinct mission. He could not be glorified until after He bore the sins of mankind and was temporarily forsaken by the Father (Matt. 27:46; 1 Pet. 2:24). Soon after this prayer, our Lord was resurrected and granted His request to reclaim the same exact “glory” He had previously possessed “beside” (παρὰ) God in eternity past.

Closing

In this article, passages have been considered declaring Jesus Christ as eternally co-existent with the Father prior to the existence of anything else. And, during that pre-creation period, some verses teach He fully represented the essence of God and embodied the *message* (ὁ λόγος) about who God is. Also, sections have been covered which set our Lord forth as the Creator of all things. In addition,

verses have been discussed which present how God purposed to reveal His “glory” – the perception of who He is – to mankind, beginning with Christ’s appearance on earth. The conclusion of His life established the cross as a way for sinful man to participate in divine “grace and truth”, which are outgrowths of the “glory” Jesus possessed before creation and currently occupies while having the title of “firstborn” (Col. 1:15; 2:9-10).

Numerous theological conclusions from these and other Scriptures have been the subject of serious controversy since the onset of Christianity. One dispute centers on the Trinitarian concept which the Bible confirms by how it depicts the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as *separate Personalities* who have always existed; yet each one is defined with the term *God* and displays *divine attributes*. Another disagreement persists in regard to how Jesus is presented as the Creator of everything. This difference is based on the assumption the Son is also a created being, but this notion has absolutely no biblical basis. A third issue continues in reference to the biblical explanation of how our universe originated since many detractors tenaciously hold to some form of evolution. Although these three doctrines are firmly established by a literal assessment of Scripture, many Christians aggressively label some or all of them as ridiculous.

Fortunately, there is an explanation for this reaction in the Bible. God presents the Devil as the true propagator of opposition to His Word, and God’s children are warned he will use any devious method to confuse us (1 Pet. 5:8-9). So, no one should be surprised the meaning of Scripture has been steadily and vigorously attacked. For, Satan makes it his mission to develop tactics designed to oppress proclamation of the gospel message (2 Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 6:10-20).

Our adversary uses two primary methods to achieve this goal. First, he promotes so-called scholarship which *falsely translates or interprets sections of Scripture*. Second, he incites doubt concerning some biblical truths by insinuating *they are not rational* (Eph. 4:14). Before swallowing this propaganda, men should take a step back and remember, as part of Adam’s fallen race, we are not completely objective since our entire being is permeated with sin. In this state, we find ourselves in dire need of being reprogrammed as we seek to recover the flawless condition our minds and hearts had at creation (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 2:1-3; 3:20-21).

To accomplish this spiritual restoration, God has provided revelation which explains truth and reality. He asks us to *believe* what is written, not relegate it to conform to our sin-tainted intellect. In order to grasp truths such as the idea creation came from nothing, we must simply *believe* the Scriptures (Heb. 11:3). Likewise, *faith* is the only route which can lead to an understanding of how the Word was a distinct Personality from the Father in eternity past while, in essence, He was existing as God (John 1:1-2). At the end of the day, with our human

inadequacies, we can comprehend these things only by *trusting* His Word. The fact God chose to require *belief* in concepts which challenge human reasoning appears to be a significant way He exposes the humble condition of man while, at the same time, glorifying Himself (Rom. 3:3-7; 1 Cor. 1:18-31).

Although God desires to be seen as uniquely holy, the good news is He also graciously assists His children's transformation. Becoming conformed to the image of His Son begins as the Holy Spirit empowers us with saving faith. Then, our journey of growth begins. When the exhortation to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" is followed, the Spirit helps us to believe and accept what is written. Then, over time, this truth becomes increasingly logical as our minds and hearts adapt to the intelligence of our eternal God (1 Cor. 2:12-16; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 1:7-10; 3:14-21; Col. 3:16). Our maturation process is simple, it begins with *belief in Scripture, which is the most basic component* needed to know and please Him.

Chuck Schiedler

info@edifiedliving.net

Written 2018

Old Testament quotes are from the KJV.

New Testament quotes are original translations by the author from the Greek text.

To be published in Journal of Grace Theology – Fall 2018

¹ A *Substantive* is any word in the Greek language which has substance such as nouns, pronouns, articles, participles and infinitives when they appear with an article.

² The Greek *Article* is a part of speech which marks the primary subject matter of a context. The Article directs a reader's attention in a similar way to how *italics*, *underlining* or *highlighting* point toward an author's *emphasis* in English composition.

³ The conjunction "καί" simply indicates a connection exists between two words or phrases.

⁴ Just like "τον θεον" refers to the same entity as "θεος" in John 1:1; "θεου" refers to "ο θεος" in 3:2; "θεου" is equated with "του θεου" in 9:33, 35; and "του θεου" and "θεου" are used for the Father in 16:27, 30. This same principle holds true for any noun in the Greek language, but for the sake of additional support note the following example. The name "Jesus" (Ιησους) in John chapter 1 occurs without an article in verses 17, 45, 47, 48, and 50, and it occurs with an article in verses 29, 36, 37, 38, 42 and 43. There is no reason to think any appearance of "Ιησους" in this context refers to anyone other than the Savior.

⁵ Forms of the word "πας" such as "παντα" can be used as a noun or adjective in the Greek language.

⁶ Verb tenses in the Greek language are characterized by *Linear Action*, which refers to *continual action* like the *Present Tense*, or *Punctiliar (point or segment of time) Action* as indicated by the *Aorist Tense*. The meaning of some Greek tenses are designated by combining both of these actions. The Aorist Tense is often likened to our Past Tense in English, however, it only takes on this meaning when it is combined with the *indicative mode*. For, aorist verbs occurring in other *Modes* as well as *Aorist Participles* and *Infinitives* do not necessarily refer to past time. In these forms, the *point or segment of time* signified by the *Aorist Tense* is determined by their contextual relation to other action words.

⁷ *Prepositional phrases* consist of a preposition connected with one or more substantives.¹ These constructions serve as *adverbial phrases which accomplish a more extensive description of words expressing action or being* than any individual adverb is capable of.

⁸ The conjunction “δε” specifies a connection exists between two words or phrases just like “και”. Unlike “και”, it also adds the idea to expect further information which defines this connection.

⁹ The Perfect Tense is characterized by combining Punctiliar (point or segment of time) Action and Linear Action. It indicates *the results of a completed action continue in full effect*.

¹⁰ Wikipedia states, “In physics, the **law of conservation of energy** states that the total *energy* of an *isolated system* remains constant — it is said to be *conserved* over time. In other words, this law means that energy can neither be created nor destroyed; rather, it can only be transformed from one form to another”.

¹¹ The word ‘Genesis’ is derived from the Greek word “γενεσις” which contains the same root as the verb “γίνομαι” found in John 1:3. The Book of Genesis is often called *The Book of Beginnings*, for it explains how the universe *came into existence*. It also clarifies how Judgment, Human Government, The Nation of Israel, and many other things *were initiated* by God.

¹² In the context between verses 3 and 14, John describes how *life* and *light* existed in *the Word* but darkness hindered the world from understanding or knowing Him. Nonetheless, John the Baptist was sent to witness about His presence to mankind so especially the Jews would receive Him. As a whole they did not, but some did believe as a result of the will of God and these became His children. Following this interlude of information about the Word, the author continues to characterize Him.

¹³ This and other passages do use the Greek article “ο” with the noun “θεος” to designate Jesus as *God* (Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 3:4; Rev. 21:3). However, as previously shown, the article does not need not appear for “θεος” to carry this significance. This is important because John 1:1-2 is the only passage in the Greek New Testament which teaches *Jesus (the Word) was existing as God prior to creation*. Although other passages such as Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2; and Ephesians 1:4 indicate the pre-creation existence of Jesus Christ, none of these contexts describe Him with the title of *God*.

¹⁴ In addition to the occurrence of “ο λογος” in John chapter one, this phrase is often used to represent *the entire message* surrounding the Person of Jesus Christ in the Gospel accounts, Acts, Paul’s Letters, and the General Epistles (Mark 4:15; Luke 4:32; John 8:37; 12:48; 14:24; 17:17; Acts 6:7; 13:26, 49; 17:13; 19:20; 1 Cor. 14:36; 2 Cor. 1:18-20; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 1:8; 2 Thess. 3:1; 2 Tim 2:9, 11; Titus 2:5; Heb. 4:12-13; 1 John 1:10; 2:7, 14). Then, “ο λογος” occurs one final time in Revelation 19:13 where, just like “in the beginning” of John 1:1, in the end Jesus is again called “the word of god”.