

ARTICLE 1

Next, grammatically the phrase “firstborn of creation” (PRWTOTOKOS PASHS KTISEWS) demands that Jesus be part of creation; a “creature.” This is because this grammatical structure is a “partitive genitive” which means that the firstborn has to be part of the group mentioned.

Website: Defend Jehovah’s Witnesses

Elijah Daniels, “Jehovah’s Witnesses: Was Jesus Created”,
<https://defendingjehovahswitnesses.blogspot.com/2013/06/jehovahs-witnesses-was-jesus-created.html> { Accessed November 20, 2019)

15.Upon Jesus Christ, then, has come the role marked out for humanity, and hence for Israel: Christ is the firstborn over all creation. The title ‘firstborn’ is given to Israel in the Old Testament (Exod. 4:22; Jer. 31:9; cf. Psalms of Solomon 18:4; 4 Ezra 6:58), and also, once, to the coming Davidic Messiah (Ps. 89:27). Burney (see above) argued strongly that it referred to the figure of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22. It therefore conveys the idea of priority in both time and rank, and we should not foreclose on either of these options (NIV, in its paraphrase, allows only the idea of rank): to opt for temporal priority does not imply that the pre-existent Son of God is merely the first created being. The continuing temporal sense of the word is clear from verse 18 (cf. Rom. 8:29), and gives a parallel idea to that expressed in the NEB translation of John 1:1, ‘When all things began, the Word already was’. It is in virtue of this eternal pre-existence that the Son of God holds supreme rank.

N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 12, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 74–75.

The second assertion about Jesus expresses his relationship to all of creation. This is found in the term “firstborn.” History reveals that this term has had various definitions. In the fourth century, Arius, a preacher from Alexandria, Egypt, taught that Christ was a created being. He was greater than the rest of the creation but lesser than God himself. Arius hoped this position would protect Christianity from the charge of polytheism. This position was condemned in the church in A.D. 325. Even so, Arius’s position has refused to die and lives on in several sectarian groups. He understood this text to teach that Jesus was the firstborn (part) of the creation (whole).⁶⁹ Even though Jesus was unique among created beings, he was still created. According to Arius, Jesus occupied the strange position of being “created creator.”

The Greek word “firstborn” comes from two words which mean to bring forth, or beget and first.⁷⁰ The word is seldom used outside of biblical materials, and its use in extra-biblical sources has limited value to biblical meaning. It occurs 130 times in the LXX, normally with the primary meaning of primogeniture. Used this way, it expressed the first birth of men or animals. The word, however, also developed a second use in the LXX. It often expressed a special relationship with God the Father, one of privilege.⁷¹ This is certainly the meaning in such passages as Ps 89:27, where David is called the “firstborn” among the kings of the earth. In the New Testament the word occurs only eight times. It is clearly used literally of primogeniture only once.⁷² The rest of the occurrences are figurative, and they are far removed from any idea

of birth. Finally, the Fathers also used the term figuratively. Polycarp, for example, referred to an enemy of the church as the “firstborn of Satan.”⁷³

The Jewish concept of the birthright also influences the meaning of the word. As Lightfoot pointed out, the term “firstborn” referred to a rite (ritual) that accorded the first son a special place in the family. The term soon lost the meaning of the first in time and developed the meaning of first in priority. Following this reasoning, Paul stated that Jesus “is His Father’s representative and heir and has the management of the divine household (all creation) committed to Him.”⁷⁴

The meaning of privilege predominates in the passage. Three lines of argument support that conclusion. First is the lexical significance of the term as it was used in the biblical materials. Second is the idea of birthright, which figured so prominently in Jewish life. Third is the problem of mixed metaphors. If Jesus were a created being, the figure of birth is hardly appropriate. Birth and creation are not to be equated here. The point of the metaphor is to distinguish Jesus from creation, not to tie him to it by placing him within it. Michaelis pointed out “that Adam, though not born but created, can be called the ‘firstborn of the world’ in Nu. r., 4 (141c).”⁷⁵ Recognizing this usage, we can see that the term must refer to the unique place of Jesus in relation to creation.

The definition of “firstborn” provides understanding for the statement translated “over all creation.” As previously noted, some have wanted to take the statement in a partitive sense, as the “firstborn part of the whole creation.” This is impossible with the sense demanded of the word “firstborn.” The NIV translation correctly states that Jesus is “over all creation.” The term “firstborn” distances Jesus from creation rather than subsumes him under it. Therefore, the point is that Jesus is the firstborn (preeminent) with reference to the creation, just as later Paul argued that Jesus was preeminent “out of the dead.”⁷⁶

Thus two assertions are made regarding Jesus. In his work toward us as revealer of God, he manifests God to us. In his work toward creation, he is prominent over it.

Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 215–217.

“Firstborn” could refer to the position of authority and preeminence given to the firstborn son in the Old Testament (Gen 49:3–4). (A related word for “firstborn” could translate the Hebrew word for “chief” in 1 Chron 5:12 LXX. Jewish texts most commonly applied the term to Israel. Ancient Near Eastern texts applied equivalent terms to other deities, e.g., Amon-Re in Egypt, and kings were sometimes acclaimed as sons of gods at their enthronements.) This term could also refer to the redemptive role of the firstborn (cf. Col 1:14) or be another title for God’s “Son” (1:18; see Ps 89:27, although David was the youngest of eight sons). Both Greek and Jewish religion describe God or supreme deities as “First.”

Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Col 1:15.

(1) The whole point of the passage (and the book) is to show Christ's superiority over all things. (2) Other statements about Christ in this passage (such as Creator of all [1:16], upholder of Creation [v. 17], etc.) clearly indicate His priority and superiority over Creation. (3) The "Firstborn" cannot be part of Creation if He created "all things." One cannot create himself. (Jehovah's Witnesses wrongly add the word "other" six times in this passage in their New World Translation. Thus they suggest that Christ created all other things after He was created! But the word "other" is not in the Gr.) (4) The "Firstborn" received worship of all the angels (Heb. 1:6), but creatures should not be worshiped (Ex. 20:4–5). (5) The Greek word for "Firstborn" is *prōtotokos*. If Christ were the "first-created," the Greek word would have been *prōtoktisis*.

"Firstborn" denotes two things of Christ: He preceded the whole Creation, and He is Sovereign over all Creation. In the Old Testament a firstborn child had not only priority of birth but also the dignity and superiority that went with it (cf. Ex. 13:2–15; Deut. 21:17). When Jesus declared Himself "the First" (*ho prōtos*; Rev. 1:17), He used a word that means "absolutely first." "Firstborn" also implies sovereignty. The description "firstborn" was not a fairly common Old Testament designation of the Messiah-God. "I will also appoint Him My Firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth" (Ps. 89:27). While this regal psalm refers to David, it also designates the Messiah, as seen in Revelation 1:5, where Christ is called "the Firstborn from the dead (cf. Col. 1:18) and the Ruler of the kings of the earth." So "Firstborn" implies both Christ's priority to all Creation (in time) and His sovereignty over all Creation (in rank).

Norman L. Geisler, "Colossians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 672–673.

The first-born Son, superior to all created things represents a three-word phrase in Greek. "first-born of all creation." Translated literally (as RSV), it implies that Christ is included in the created universe, which is inconsistent with the context of the whole passage. The prefix *prōtos* "first" may be taken in a temporal sense: "he was born before all creation" or in a hierarchical sense, "the begotten One is superior to all creation." As Lightfoot and Moule suggest, possibly both are intended. (It should be made clear that "born" or "begotten" refers not to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, but to the relation of Jesus to God, as the eternal Son and heir of the heavenly Father. The use of the word "born" or "begotten" emphasis the unique relationship between God and Jesus which is best expressed in terms of father and son; unlike all other human beings Jesus' relation to God is not expressed in terms of creature and creator.) GeCL stresses the first element "He is the Father's first-born Son; he already existed before all creation." Lightfoot paraphrases: "He is the Firstborn, and as the Firstborn, the absolute Heir and sovereign Lord, of all creation." TNT "He takes precedence over all the created universe"; NEB

“his is the primacy over all created things.” First-born in this context does not imply there were others who were likewise “born” afterward; it is a term which stresses the position of Jesus as the heir of his heavenly Father.

The use of the second element tokos (“beget” or “bear”) excludes Christ from the process of creation; he was not created first, but was born first. A possible translation is: “God’s first Son (or heir) who existed before all creation and is superior to it.” There are some problems involved in rendering literally the first-born Son, since any term such as “birth” or “to be born” would suggest Christ’s birth on earth at Bethlehem. A literal translation might also give the impression of some kind of miraculous birth by which God the Father actually gave birth to his Son named Christ. Another complication involved in the use of a word such as “born” might suggest some kind of sexual relations between God the Father and “mother earth.” Therefore, it seems far better to use some such expression as “God’s first Son” and to explain the concept of being “first” in the terms of having “existed before anything else was created.” The superiority of Christ to all creation can sometimes be expressed as “he is more important than all that was created” or “he ranks higher than all created things.”

Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 22–23.

He existed before Creation (v. 15). The term firstborn does not refer to time, but to place or status. Jesus Christ was not the first being created, since He Himself is the Creator of all things. Firstborn simply means “of first importance, of first rank.” Solomon was certainly not born first of all of David’s sons, yet he was named the firstborn (Ps. 89:27). Firstborn of all Creation means “prior to all Creation.” Jesus Christ is not a created being; He is eternal God.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 115–116.

first-born of every creature—(Heb 1:6), “the first-begotten”: “begotten of His Father before all worlds” [Nicene Creed]. Priority and superlative dignity is implied (Ps 89:27). English Version might seem to favor Arianism, as if Christ were a creature. Translate, “Begotten (literally, ‘born’) before every creature,” as the context shows, which gives the reason why He is so designated. “For,” (Col 1:16, 17) [TRENCH]. This expression is understood by ORIGEN (so far as the Greek from favoring Socinian or Arian views) as declaring the Godhead of Christ, and is used by Him as a phrase to mark that Godhead, in contrast with His manhood [Book 2, sec.

Against Celsus]. The Greek does not strictly admit ALFORD'S translation, "the first-born of all creation."

Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 372.

The first-born before every creature, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως.—[So Ellicott. Braune's exegesis is better set forth by: the first begotten before every creature.—R.] This second predicate defines His relation to the created world. Πρωτότοκος distinguishes Him as the Son from the creation (κτίσις); it is =πρωτόγονος, "first begotten" (PHILO), but not =πρωτόκτιστος, πρωτόπλαστος (among the Alexandrians, ORIGEN). It is joined with the first predicate, closely uniting with God and distinguishing from the creation. (THEODORET: "not as having creation for a sister, but as begotten before all creation." CHRYSOSTOM: "not significant of glory and honor, but only of time.") It is synonymous with ἀρχή (ver. 18; Rev. 3:4). The genitive κτίσεως depends on πρώτος as πρώτός μου, Jno. 1:15, 30 (WINER'S Gram. p. 229). [SO MEYER. It must be here remarked that WINER does not expressly sanction this view of this passage. It would not perhaps be strictly correct to say that the genitive is governed by πρώτος in composition, although the Greek syntax favors such government in composition. BENGEL even governs this genitive by the πρό found in πρώτος. ELLICOTT'S view is a safe one: "genitive of the point of view, rendered more intelligible by the latent comparative force involved in πρώτος," though even this is but a circumlocutory statement of its dependence on πρώτος, As the word is Alexandrian, the syntax has been supported by Hebrew usage, though the broad use of the Greek genitive scarcely requires this.—R.]

Since πάσης denotes every kind of creature, angels and men, Christ existed before all. He does not begin the series of a category, as "first begotten of the dead" (Rev. 1:15), "among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29), but He is antecedent, conditioning the creation. [It is doubtful, whether it is better to take πάσης κτίσεως, collectively: "the whole creation," or individually: "every creature," the context favors the former, so ALFORD; the polemic aim of the Apostle, the latter, so ELLICOTT.—Braune makes this predicate refer exclusively to priority in time. On this ELLICOTT speaks of "His deigning by the mouth of His Apostle to institute a temporal comparison between His own generation from eternity and their creation in time," but he admits "the possibility of "a secondary and inferential reference to priority in dignity." ALFORD seems to include both views; "not only first-born, of His mother in the world, but first-begotten of His Father before the worlds—He holds the rank, as compared with every created thing, of first-born in dignity." To the view which makes the latter thought the chief one, as held by WHITBY, BARNES, EADIE ("the acting President of the Universe and therefore the first-born of every creature"), it may be objected; 1. that it confuses the aspects in which this verse refers to the Son of God's love, see above; 2. it gives to πρωτότοκος a secondary and figurative meaning, where a more literal one seems more appropriate; 3. it ignores, or at least throws too far into the background, the relation to the Father which is not only expressed in πρωτότοκος, but given further prominence by the close connection with the preceding clause; hence those who adopt it consistently refer that predicate also mainly to the revelation of the Father in Christ, rather than

to the relation of the Son to the Father. Yet it must be admitted that there is an inferential reference to priority in dignity, a consequence of the priority in time of the Begotten to every creature; not only so, but as Braune well remarks: He is antecedent, conditioning the creation—for the context, giving a reason (ὅτι) for this verse, goes on to set forth in detail His relation to the creation. So that while His priority in time shows His independence of creation, creation is not independent of Him, as He is here described. In this His relation to the Invisible God is to be found the ground or condition of the whole creation. The 16th verse asserts that He is the *causa conditionalis*, this one seems to intimate that in virtue of His relation immanent and permanent to the Father, as the Image and Only Begotten, He holds the relation to the creation subsequently defined. SO WORDSWORTH quotes Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch: “when God desired to create the world, He begat the world as προφορικόν, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως.” While He is thus placed out of the category of the created, He is the more intimately linked with “every creature.”—R.]

Therefore the view of the Arians that He is the first creature is incorrect, as also that of the Socinians, GROTIUS and others, who refer κτίσεως to the new moral creation, in which case καινή would not be wanting (2 Cor. 5:17). To make of the two predicates but one and join πρωτότοκος as an adjective to εἰκόν (SCHLEIERMACHER, Stud. und Krit. 1832, p. 497) is not only harsh, but grammatically inadmissible. To read, πρωτότοκος, “first bringer forth” (ISIDORE of Pelusium, ERASMUS and others), is not allowable, since this is applied only to the female sex, and πρῶτος in that case would be irrelevant.

John Peter Lange et al., A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Colossians (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 21.

The partitive gen. may be used predicatively as well as attributively: Lk 22:58 Jn 18:17 1 Co 12:15. 16 ἐκ, Ac 21:16 1 Ti 1:20 (ὃν ἐστὶν Ὑμέναιος). It is debatable whether we have partitive gen. in Col 1:15 (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως) and Rev 3:14 (ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως)= among, or whether the idea is not rather that of rule and supremacy.

James Hope Moulton and Nigel Turner, A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Syntax., vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963–), 210.

ARTICLE 2

Colossians 1:15 – “Firstborn of all creation”

April 21, 2012

According to [Colossians 1:15](#), Jesus is the “firstborn of all creation.” There are two primary views regarding what this means:

1. Jesus is supreme *over* all creation.
2. Jesus is supreme *among* all creation.

In the first view, Jesus *is not* counted among created beings but is declared to be supreme over them. In the second view, Jesus *is* a created being, albeit the supreme one. A representative of the first view is Wayne Grudem who writes in his [Systematic Theology](#) (pp. 243-4, emphasis original):

Colossians 1:15, which calls Christ “the first-born of all creation,” is better understood to mean that Christ has the rights or privileges of the “first-born” — that is, according to biblical usage and custom, the right of leadership or authority in the family for one’s generation. . . . So Colossians 1:15 means that Christ has the privileges of authority and rule, the privileges belonging to the “first-born”, but with respect to the whole creation. The NIV translates it helpfully, “the firstborn over all creation.”

A representative of the second view may be found in [Reasoning from the Scriptures](#) published by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society (p. 408):

According to the customary meaning of “firstborn,” it indicates that Jesus is the eldest in Jehovah’s family of sons.

So, proponents of the first view see “all creation” as the *realm* over which Christ’s authority as firstborn extends (Grudem uses the words “with respect to”). Proponents of the second view, on the other hand, see “all creation” as the group of which Jesus as firstborn is the preeminent *member* (cf. “the eldest in Jehovah’s family of sons”). Which of these views most faithfully represents what Paul intended to convey when he paired “firstborn” with “all creation”?

The phrase “firstborn of all creation” in Greek is *prōtotokos pasēs ktiseōs*. That phrase in Greek contains no words between “firstborn” (*prōtotokos*) and “all creation” (*pasēs ktiseōs*). It is translated “firstborn *of* all creation” though because the words “all creation” (*pasēs ktiseōs*) are in a form known as the genitive form. To better understand what Paul meant when he paired “firstborn” with “all creation”, we can look to other biblical examples where “firstborn” is paired with the genitive form of a word.

In the New Testament, there are eight instances of the word “firstborn” (*prōtotokos*). Of those eight instances, half are followed by the genitive form of a word. The three instances excluding Colossians 1:15 which are followed by a genitive are as follows:

- Colossians 1:18 – [Jesus is] the firstborn from the dead

- Hebrews 12:23 – [You have come to] the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven
- Revelation 1:5 – [Jesus Christ,] the firstborn of the dead

The Hebrews passage can be excluded because the genitive in that instance is simply giving further description of the firstborn. That is, the firstborn ones are one and the same as those who are enrolled in heaven. This is clearly not parallel to Colossians 1:15, for the firstborn in that case, Christ, is certainly not one and the same as “all creation”.

The two other passages (Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5) are very similar to each other, and both seem to indicate that Jesus is not supreme *over* the dead but rather supreme *among* the dead. In other words, among those who have died, Jesus is first and has the preeminent role and position of authority.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, there are 132 instances of the word “firstborn” (prōtotokos). Of those 132 instances, 75 are followed by the genitive form of a word. One instance (Numbers 3:12) of those 75 can be excluded because the genitive is similar to Hebrews 12:23; that is, it is used appositionally. Of the remaining 74 instances, there are two distinct ways in which the genitive functions.

The most common way the genitive functions with “firstborn” in the Greek translation of the Old Testament is to indicate possession. That is, the genitive word or phrase describes the one who owns or produced the firstborn. This is the usage in [59 of the instances](#). Here are some examples (the genitive word or phrase is emphasized in each):

- Genesis 35:23: The sons of Leah: Reuben, the firstborn *of Jacob*, ... [Reuben is Jacob’s firstborn]
- Exodus 12:29: Now it came about at midnight that the LORD struck all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born *of Pharaoh* who sat on his throne to the first-born *of the captive* who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born *of cattle*. [The firstborn is Pharaoh’s, the captive’s, and the cattle’s]
- Psalm 134:8 (English 135:8): He smote the first-born *of Egypt*, Both of man and beast. [The firstborn is Egypt’s]

This function is clearly not indicative of Paul’s use in Colossians 1:15, though, for Christ is obviously not owned or produced by creation. The other way the genitive functions with “firstborn” in the Greek translation of the Old Testament is to indicate that the firstborn is a part of something. This is referred to as the partitive use of the genitive. This is the usage in [16 of the instances](#) (note that Exodus 13:13 has two separate genitives, one possessive and one partitive, and it is thus included in both the list of possessive usages and the list of partitive usages). Here are some examples (the genitive word or phrase is emphasized in each):

- Genesis 4:4: And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings (lit. “firstborns”) *of his flock* and of their fat portions. [The “firstborns” are part of Abel’s flock]

- Exodus 22:29: You shall not delay the offering from your harvest and your vintage. The first-born *of your sons* you shall give to Me. [The firstborns are part of the sons]
- Deuteronomy 12:6: And there you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the first-born *of your herd and of your flock*.
[The firstborn is a part of the herd and a part of the flock]

So, the two primary uses of “firstborn” followed by a genitive in the Bible are *possessive* and *partitive*. Since Paul does not use the genitive in the possessive sense in Colossians 1:15 (again, Christ is clearly not owned or produced by creation), does that mean he is using it in the partitive sense? Is he saying that Christ is a part of creation, albeit the supreme part?

Dan Wallace does not think so. In his [*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*](#), he argues that the genitive in Colossians 1:15 is either a “Genitive of Reference” (firstborn “with reference to” all creation) or more likely a “Genitive of Subordination” (firstborn “over” all creation) (pp. 104, 128). If Wallace is correct, this is the only example in Scripture of a genitive following “firstborn” being used in this manner. Why would he argue thus instead of considering this a partitive use of the genitive? He gives three reasons (*ibid.*):

1. The “lexical field” of the word firstborn includes the idea of subordination and not just birth order.
2. Colossians 1:16, which gives the cause or reason for Christ’s preeminence, makes good sense if the genitive expresses subordination but little sense if it carries a partitive nuance.
3. Paul consistently presents Jesus Christ in Colossians as the supreme and creating God, not a created being.

Wallace is correct regarding the meaning of “firstborn.” It definitely can express subordination without respect to birth order. For example, in Psalm 89:27, David is called God’s firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. At the same time, the word can express birth order without respect to subordination. For example, in Numbers 18:15, the word is used to describe the “first issue of the womb of all flesh, whether man or animal.” What is more important, though, is to note that the “lexical field” of firstborn *always* includes the concept of a group of which the firstborn is a part. So, in Psalm 89:27, though David is not first chronologically, he is still part of a group, namely, the kings of the earth. And, in Numbers 18:15, though subjection is not in view, the firstborn is clearly a part of a group, whether man or animal. If in Colossians 1:15 Christ as firstborn is not a part of “all creation”, what group does Paul have in mind of which Christ is the supreme? It seems to me that Wallace’s point would carry more force if he either illustrated that firstborn can be used without reference to a group (and not just without reference to order) or explained what group besides “all creation” Paul had in mind when he called Christ “firstborn.” So, while I agree concerning Wallace’s statement about the “lexical field” of firstborn, I do not agree that this is a valid reason for rejecting the partitive use of the genitive here.

The problem I have with Wallace's other two reasons against a partitive genitive here is that they address only one specific interpretation in particular. Namely, Wallace is disputing the idea that Paul was declaring Christ to be the first being created by God (he speaks of "mere chronological order" and of Christ being a "created being"). However, does Christ being a part of "all creation" require that he be a or the first created being? Or, is it possible that Christ could be a part of creation through some means other than being created? If instead Paul included Christ as a part of creation due to His becoming flesh through the virgin birth, would Wallace's two reasons still hold? Certainly Wallace would agree that there is no conflict between Paul's view of Christ in Colossians and His becoming flesh (Wallace's third reason above). And, I wonder if he would agree that it makes sense for Paul to declare the man Christ supreme over all created things on the basis of His existing before all things and having created all things (Colossians 1:16-17 and Wallace's second reason above). And, if Wallace would indeed agree with these two things, this would take away the need to reject Colossians 1:15 as a partitive genitive.

I believe Wallace (and others...there is no reason for me to be interacting with Wallace here except that his Greek grammar is such a great resource) would ask, though: what makes you think that Paul has in mind the incarnation of Jesus here? My first response would be as follows:

- I am driven to Colossians 1:15 being a partitive genitive due to ordinary usage of "firstborn" plus genitive throughout the Scriptures
- I am driven to rejecting Christ as being the first created being due to His presentation throughout the Scriptures
- The incarnation allows me to embrace the first and reject the second

There is more, though. The entirety of Colossians 1:15 reads: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." Those two phrases ("image of the invisible God" and "firstborn of all creation") are placed together without any intervening conjunction. I believe Paul is using apposition here to indicate that the two phrases say similar things, in the same way that I might say, "My friend, Frank, took me to the airport." In the latter, it is clear that my friend and Frank are one and the same person. If, on the other hand, I would have said, "My friend and Frank took me to the airport" (separating "My friend" and "Frank" with a conjunction), it would be clear that my friend and Frank are two separate people. By not including "and" or any other conjunction between the two phrases in Colossians 1:15, Paul helps us to see that he is describing the same thing in two different ways. So, to help understand what Paul meant by "firstborn of all creation", we can consider the meaning of "image of the invisible God."

Fortunately, there is little debate concerning how Christ images the invisible God. Namely, He images the invisible God by becoming flesh and dwelling among men. However, if this is Paul's point in the first phrase, it is likely that it is in view in the second, and thus it is not a stretch to say that Paul is including Christ in "all creation" by means of the incarnation. Christ is the preeminent part of all creation (that is, all creation is subject to Him), not because He was created first but rather because He was before all things and Himself created all things.

Before ending, I would like to consider two final arguments concerning Colossians 1:15. First, the author of [*Reasoning from the Scriptures*](#) writes:

Trinitarians say that “first-born” here means prime, most excellent, most distinguished; thus Christ would be understood to be, not part of creation, but the most distinguished in relation to those who were created. If that is so, and if the Trinity doctrine is true, why are the Father and the holy spirit not also said to be the firstborn of all creation? But the Bible applies this expression only to the Son.

I am a Trinitarian. However, as argued above, I do not say that firstborn in Colossians 1:15 means that Paul is viewing Christ as outside of creation. Still, I would like to briefly state why I think the Trinity doctrine is true and yet the Father and the Holy Spirit are not also said to be the firstborn of all creation. My belief is that Paul is thinking of the incarnation when he calls Christ the firstborn of all creation. If this holds, it makes sense that he would not refer to the Father or the Holy Spirit as the firstborn of all creation since They did not enter creation as the Son did.

The second argument I would like to consider is given by an author at ScripturalTruths.com:

We should mention that a few Trinitarians [sic] apologists have taken to an argument in order to explain away the partitive genitive of Colossians 1:15. These ones have argued that Christ is only a member of creation as a human, and so it is only when he “became flesh” (Joh. 1:14) that he became part of the created order. This argument, however, disregards the context, where in 16a the basis for him holding this position is defined, and it is entirely based upon his existence before he became a man as the one in whom “all things were created.” The holding of this position has nothing to do with him as a human. Therefore, this argument is nothing more than a weak attempt to explain away the straightforward teaching of the text.

I hope to make contact with the author of this website in order to be pointed to other Trinitarians who hold this view of Colossians 1:15. In the meantime, though, I would like to address his/her argument that the view I proposed above makes no sense when Colossians 1:16 is taken into account. I think I can faithfully summarize the principle behind his/her argument as follows: it is nonsensical to make a statement about the incarnate Christ on the basis of His preincarnate existence. Put differently, if I believe Paul is viewing Christ as incarnate in verse 15, I am required to believe that Paul is viewing Him as incarnate in 16a, and this is obviously not the case.

My first reaction to this argument is that it is *not* nonsensical to make a statement about the incarnate Christ on the basis of His preincarnate existence. In fact, it seems perfectly reasonable to me that if God did become a man (a supposition this author would have to grant me temporarily for the sake of argument) that I would declare to others that He was no *ordinary* man in light of His preexistence. I can think of several Scriptures which do this very thing:

- John 1:1-2, 14 – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- John 1:29-30 – The next day [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He on behalf of

whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’

- John 8:54-58 – Jesus answered, “If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God’; and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” So the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”
- Philippians 2:3-7 – Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

In each of these verses (and more, John 6:62; 17:5, 24-25; etc...), a statement about or the presence of the incarnate Christ is juxtaposed with a statement about the preincarnate Christ. In fact, though I and the author of the website above probably have different interpretations of each of these Scriptures (I attributing *eternal* preexistence to Christ, [s]he *simple* preexistence), we would both agree that the verses address both aspects of Christ’s life.

My second reaction is to consider the first half of Colossians 1:15. I’m not sure what the author of the website thinks about the phrase “image of the invisible God”, but if [s]he also holds to the belief that this is speaking of the incarnation of Christ, I would ask: how is it disregarding the context for me to see incarnation in 1:15b and preexistence in 1:16a but it not for him/her to see incarnation in 1:15a and preexistence in 1:15b?

In summary: I believe Paul in Colossians 1:15 includes Christ in all creation when He calls Him the “firstborn of all creation.” However, I believe he considers Christ to be a part of creation by means of the incarnation, not by means of being the first created being. As part of creation, He is preeminent because in fact He created all things and was before all things.

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