

Biblical Notes — Colossians 1:15

15 — He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (15. ὃς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος πάσῃς κτίσεως)

16th and 17th verses are the proof of this. The phraseology is Jewish; and as they apply it to the supreme Being merely to denote his eternal pre-existence, and to point him out as the cause of all things; it is most evident that St. Paul uses it in the same way, and illustrates his meaning in the following words, which would be absolutely absurd if we could suppose that by the former he intended to convey any idea of the inferiority of Jesus Christ."

— Adam Clarke, Adam Clarke Commentary, Commentary on Colossians 1:15.

"Firstborn must be understood in the sense of supreme rather than in the temporal sense of born before.

— Donald Guthrie, op. cit., 1144.

"It is not used in a time sense at all, but in the sense of special honor. Firstborn is a title of the Messiah."

— William Barclay, op. cit., 118.

"Over all creation, Christ occupies the relation of supremacy such as is accorded the firstborn; and such is preeminently due to the 'firstborn of all creation'."

— David Lipscomb, op. cit., p. 259.

"the firstborn of every creature; not the first of the creation, or the first creature God made; for all things in Colossians 1:16 are said to be created by him, and therefore he himself can never be a creature; nor is he the first in the new creation, for the apostle in the context is speaking of the old creation, and not the new: but the sense either is, that he was begotten of the Father in a manner inconceivable and inexpressible by men, before any creatures were in being; or that he is the "first Parent", or bringer forth of every creature into being, as the word will bear to be rendered, if instead of πρωτότοκος, we read πρωτοτόκος; which is no more than changing the place of the accent, and may be very easily ventured upon, as is done by an ancient writer^{F7}, who observes, that the word is used in this sense by Homer, and is the same as πρωτογονός, "first Parent", and πρωτοκτιστής, "first Creator"; and the rather this may be done, seeing the accents were all added since the apostle's days, and especially seeing it makes his reasoning, in the following verses, appear with much more beauty, strength, and force: he is the first Parent of every creature, "for by him were all things created", &c. Colossians 1:16, or it may be understood of Christ, as the King, Lord, and Governor of all creatures; being God's firstborn, he is heir of all things, the right of government belongs to him; he is higher than the kings of the earth, or the angels in heaven, the highest rank of creatures, being the Creator and upholder of all, as the following words show; so the Jews make the word "firstborn" to be synonymous with the word "king", and explain it by רָאשׁוֹן, "a great one", and "a prince"^{F8}; see Psalm 89:27."

— John Gill, John Gill's Exposition of the Whole Bible, Commentary on Colossians 1:15.

"Note, 2. Christ is here described, as by his eternal relation to God, so by his eternal relation to the creatures; He is the first born of every creature; that is, 1. He was before every creature, and therefore he himself cannot be a creature: The apostle says expressly, That he is before all things, Colossians 1:17 that is, Christ had a being before there was any created; he was before all creature, both in point of dignity, and in point of duration."

— Expository Notes with Practical Observations on the New Testament, Commentary on Colossians 1:15.

"To this refer Colossians 1:16, things visible and invisible.— πρωτότοκος πάσῃς κτίσεως, the first-begotten of every creature) He was begotten; and that, too, before the creation of all things. The πρὸ, which is contained in πρωτότοκος, governs the genitive κτίσεως. Time is an accident of the creature. Therefore the origin of the Son of God precedes all time."

— Johann Albrecht Bengel's Gnomon of the New Testament, Commentary on Colossians 1:15.

"The first-born of every creature; or, the first-born of all creation. Since Christ is the creator of all things, verse Colossians 1:16, he is not himself one of the creation. But he is the first-born of all creation, as being before all things, verse Colossians 1:17, and above them as their supreme head, verse Colossians 1:20."

— Justin Edwards' Family Bible New Testament, Commentary on Colossians 1:15.

"πρωτότοκος. [1] Two meanings are possible.

(a) The primary meaning of the word, according to which the Son is here regarded as preceding πᾶσα κτίσις in point of time. Cf. "Adam was the Firstborn of the world," אָדָם הָרָאשׁוֹן בְּכָבוֹרוֹ שֶׁל עָלָם, Num. R. § 4. 6.

(b) The secondary meaning of the higher position and privileges attached to a firstborn. So perhaps Exodus 4:22, σὺ δὲ ἔρεις τῷ Φαραὼ Τάδε λέγει Κύριος Γιὸς πρωτότοκός μου Ἰσραὴλ, for Israel was by no means the eldest of the nations, though first in honour. Yet in that passage the phrase may merely mean that Israel is as the eldest son, i.e. in point of time, with very indirect reference to the privileges belonging to such.

A clearer instance is Psalms 88[89]:28 of David, and thus of Messiah, κάγὼ πρωτότοκον θήσομαι αὐτόν, ὑψηλὸν παρὰ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν τῆς γῆς, where the reference is to the position He shall hold; He is to be as the eldest son enjoying his privileges, as is brought out by the parallelism of the second clause. Sirach 36:17 [14], Ἰσραὴλ ὅν πρωτοτόκω (καὶ πατρωτογόνω B) ὡμοιώσας, is only a reference to Exodus 4:22 as is evident from its original Hebrew, *ישראל בכור כניתה ה*, "Israel whom Thou didst surname Firstborn." Compare Jeremiah 38[31]:9 of N. Israel, Ἐφραίμ πρωτότοκός μού ἐστιν."

— Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges, Commentary on Colossians 1:15.

"A correct rendering would read, the firstborn before every creature, that is, every kind of creature; and in Scripture, whatever is before any creation is from eternity. So the Nicene Creed expresses it, "begotten before all worlds," that is, from eternity. In his eternal relation to the Father, the Son is the only begotten: in his relation to his creatures, he is before them all. Besides priority in time, he also has the priority in dignity and right which belong to the firstborn."

— Whedon's Commentary on the Bible, Commentary on Colossians 1:15.

"First-born" (Gr. *prototokos*) may denote either priority in time or supremacy in rank (cf. Colossians 1:18; Exodus 4:22; Psalm 89:27; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 1:15)."

— Thomas Constable, Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable, Commentary on Colossians 1:15.

"Though it is grammatically possible to translate this as "Firstborn in Creation," the context makes this impossible for five reasons: (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 [Colossians 1:16], upholder of Creation [Colossians 1:17], 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 angels (Hebrews 1:6), but creatures should not be worshiped (Exodus 20:4-5). (5) The Greek word for "Firstborn" is *prototokos*. If Christ were the "first-created," the Greek word would have been *protoktisis*."

— Norm Geisler, 672-673.

"The firstborn of (or, 'before') every creature (or, 'all creation'). 'The first born with respect to every creature; He was born before every creature. He is not the first created, the previous clause as well as the terms here chosen forbid such a view.'

— Philip Schaff, Schaff's Popular Commentary on the New Testament, Commentary on Colossians 1:15.