

Jesus Christ as the “Firstborn” - Colossians 1:15.

Colossians 1:15 (NASB)

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Colossians 1:15 (AGNT)

15 ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου, πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως,

15 hos estin eikōn tou theou tou aoratou, prōtotokos pasēs ktiseōs,

I. “He is the image of the invisible God”.

1. The meaning of the Greek word εἰκὼν (*eikōn*) - “image”.

1.1. The Greek word εἰκὼν (*eikōn*) - “image” - does not just mean similarity, but representation/manifestation. In Hebrews 10:1 it is contrasted with the word σκιά (*skia*) - “shadow” - and has the meaning “the things themselves”, “the very form of things” (NASB), “the realities themselves” (NIV), “the true form of these realities” (ESV).

Hebrews 10:1 (NASB)

1 For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.

Hebrews 10:1 (AGNT)

1 Σκιὰν γὰρ ἔχων ὁ νόμος τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν, οὐκ αὐτὴν τὴν εἰκόνα (*tēn eikona*) τῶν πραγμάτων, κατ’ ἐνιαυτὸν ταῖς αὐταῖς θυσίαις ἅς προσφέρουσιν εἰς τὸ διηνεκὲς οὐδέποτε δύνανται τοὺς προσερχομένους τελειῶσαι·

Jesus Christ is not a Being resembling God, but God manifest. God, who is otherwise invisible, has manifested Himself through Christ.

John 1:18 (NASB)

18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

John 14:9 (NASB)

9 Jesus *said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

Hebrews 1:3 (NASB)

3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

2 Corinthians 4:6 (NASB)

6 For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

1 John 1:1-3 (NASB)

1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life — **2** and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us — **3** what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

From eternity past (John 1:1; Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2) Christ has existed in the form of God:

Philippians 2:6 (NASB)

6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

Now apart from being God He also became a man in order to pay for our sins, and in Him, the God-man, the “fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form”:

Colossians 2:9 (NASB)

9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

He is the radiance of God’s glory and “the exact representation of His nature”:

Hebrews 1:3 (NASB)

3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

1.2. Although Genesis 1:27 says that God created man in His own image and man is also called “the image of God” in 1 Corinthians 11:7, the word “image” does not have the same meaning when applied to man as it has in reference to Christ. Firstly, being created in God’s image is not the same as being God’s image. Secondly, the designation “image of God” in 1 Corinthians 11:7 applies to all men, thus being used in a general sense, as opposed to referring specifically of Christ alone both in Colossians 1:15 and 2 Corinthians 4:4 (it should also be noted that despite the Greek word εἰκών [*eikōn*] being anarthrous in all these three verses, it has a definite sense in the latter two through the close proximity of the pronominal adjective ὅς [*hos*] that refers to Christ, with both verses using an identical expression ὅς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ [*hos estin eikōn tou theou*]; R.D. Luginbill, personal communication, 4.5.2020).

Man is the image of God only in a limited sense. He demonstrates only some of God’s attributes, the key one that distinguishes him from the rest of the creation being his free will, a reflection of God’s sovereign Will. It is never said of man, however, that he has “the form of God” (Philippians 2:6), that “the fullness of deity” dwells in Him (Colossians 2:9), that he is “the exact representation of His nature” (Hebrews 1:3), or that one who has seen man has seen the Father (John 14:9). Christ is the Creator (Colossians 1:16) and Sustainer of the universe (Colossians 1:17), while man is himself a creature (Genesis 1:26-27). Although man was perfect and sinless when God created him, he was not eternal, self-sufficient or omniscient.

2. The Divine can only be manifested and pictured in its fulness by the Divine.

It is impossible for a created being to fully disclose and represent God, as He is in His nature eternal and uncreated. The Infinite cannot limit itself to the finite. The Divine can only be manifested and pictured in its fulness by the Divine. That’s why it is only in Christ that God is fully represented. Christ is God’s image, because He is God incarnate (John 1:14) and in Him “fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9). A visible God can alone be the image of God (Eadie, 1884).

God the Father is invisible, but He did not leave the universe without palpable, perceptible divine presence. Christ is “the visible manifestation of that in God which is invisible: the λόγος [*logos* - “Word”] of the eternal silence, the ἀπαύγασμα [*apaugasma* - “radiance”/“shining forth”] of the δόξα [*doxa* - “glory”] which no creature can bear, the χαρακτήρ [*charaktēr* - “representation”] of that ὑπόστασις [*hypostasis* - “nature”/“essence”/“actual being”/“reality”] which is incommunicably God’s: in one word the ἐξηγητής [*exēgētēs* - “the One who explains/shows/describes”] of the Father whom none hath seen” (Alford, 1974; transliterations and translations added).

He is “the Word” (John 1:1; 1:14), because just as a “word” is that by which we communicate with others, so Jesus is the One by whom God communicates with the world and makes Himself known, by whom He manifests Himself (John 14:9; Hebrews 1:1-3).

Jesus is designated as the “image of the invisible God” because He does not belong to what was created, but stands with God the Father who, in Him, is acting upon the world and with the world (Lohse, 1971) as it is Christ who is its Creator and Sustainer (Colossians 1:16-17).

2 Corinthians 4:4 (NASB)

4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Christ can represent God the Father, because He is one with Him.

John 10:30 (NASB)

30 I and the Father are one.

3. False teaching of the Watchtower about Christ lowers the concept of God.

The above truth that it is only Christ, being Himself God, that is qualified to be the image of God and represent Him can be reversed to show the error of Jehovah Witnesses – since in declaring Jesus Christ as a created being, they have only succeeded in lowering the concept of God (Dunagan, n.d.). If a created being can “exist in the form of God” (Philippians 2:6), be indwelt by “the fullness of deity” (Colossians 2:9), be “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), “the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Hebrews 1:3), say of itself to be one with the Father (10:30) and claim that who has seen it has seen the Father (John 14:9), then what does that say of God?

II. “the firstborn of all creation”.

1. The meaning of “firstborn”.

1.1. In the scripture the title “firstborn” is used not only in the sense of being born first, but also to designate supremacy and pre-eminence.

a) In Psalm 89:27 God says of David that He will “make him My firstborn”:

Psalms 89:20 (NASB)

20 “I have found David My servant;
With My holy oil I have anointed him,

Psalms 89:27 (NASB)

27 “I also shall make him My firstborn,
The highest of the kings of the earth.

b) In Jeremiah 31:9 God calls Ephraim “My firstborn” despite Reuben being Jacob’s firstborn son and despite Manasseh, and not Ephraim, being Joseph’s firstborn, a transfer of primogeniture proclaimed by the prophetic blessing of Jacob:

Genesis 41:51-52 (NASB)

51 Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” **52** He named the second Ephraim, “For,” he said, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

Genesis 48:17-20 (NASB)

17 When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on Ephraim’s head, it displeased him; and he grasped his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. **18** Joseph said to his father, “Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head.” **19** But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people and he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.” **20** He blessed them that day, saying,

“By you Israel will pronounce blessing, saying,
‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!’”
Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.

Jeremiah 31:9 (NASB)

9 “With weeping they will come,
And by supplication I will lead them;
I will make them walk by streams of waters,
On a straight path in which they will not stumble;
For I am a father to Israel,
And Ephraim is My firstborn.”

c) In Exodus 4:22 God calls Israel His “firstborn” despite them clearly being neither the first nor the oldest of all nations:

Exodus 4:22 (NASB)

22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord, “Israel is My son, My firstborn.

d) In Job 18:13 the expression “the firstborn of death” is used to describe a particularly fatal malady:

Job 18:13 (NASB)

13 “His skin is devoured by disease,
The firstborn of death devours his limbs.

e) In Isaiah 14:30 “the firstborn of the poor” is the poorest of the poor:

Isaiah 14:30 (ESV)

30 And the firstborn of the poor will graze,
and the needy lie down in safety;
but I will kill your root with famine,
and your remnant it will slay.

1.2. “Firstborn” does not mean “first-created”.

It must be noted that πρωτότοκος (*prōtotokos*) – “firstborn” – does not mean “first-created” and if Paul wanted to express the latter idea, He had a Greek word available to do so – πρωτόκτιστος (*prōtoktistos*) – which has exactly this meaning. *Prōtoktistos* would have meant that Christ is homogenous with the creation, but Paul used the *prōtotokos* to teach that Christ is preeminent over creation, but Himself not a part of it – since He created all things (Colossians 1:16) and He is before all things (Colossians 1:17; point 2 below).

2. Paul used the word “firstborn” with the meaning “preeminent” rather than “born/created first”.

The context of Colossians 1:15-20 makes clear that the word “firstborn” is used by Paul in Colossians 1:15 in this former sense which refers to preeminence, as in the immediately following verses he teaches that Christ is the Creator and removes Him from the category of creation¹. This teaching is consistent with the rest of the scripture.

2.1. Colossians 1:16.

Colossians 1:16

1 It should also be noted that beyond the statement that Christ is “the image of the invisible God” Colossians 1:15-17 does not deal with the relation of the Son to the Father – the purpose of this passage is to describe Jesus in relation to the creation, just as Colossians 1:18-20 describes Him in relation to the Church.

16 For in Him all things were created: things in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him.

a) In verse 15 Paul calls Jesus the “firstborn of all creation” and explains this designation in the immediately following verse 16 which starts with the Greek word ὅτι (*hoti*) meaning “for”, “because”. Christ is the “firstborn of all creation” because “in Him all things were created” (Colossians 1:16a) and “all things have been created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16b). Paul’s argument is that Christ is preeminent over all creation, because He created all things.

Colossians 1:15-16

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation. **16** For in Him all things were created: things in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Paul’s argument is, however, deprived of its sense when the Watchtower’s false doctrine of Christ being a creature is adopted, as there is no logic in the statement that “Christ was created first, because by Him all things were created” (?). Christ stands as the preeminent “firstborn” over all creation, because He is the Author of all creation.

b) In Colossians 1:16 Paul states that Christ is the Creator in a way that leaves no room for ambiguity. He says that “in Him all things were created”, that “all things have been created through Him and for Him” and still lists the different parts of creation – “things in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities”. It would have been enough to say that Christ is the Creator or that He created everything, but Paul presents this truth in an exhaustive manner to his readers to prevent any error.

c) The fact that everything was created ἐν αὐτῷ [*en autō*] - “in Him” - indicates that Christ is not only the Agent through whom God created the universe (as indicated by the clause “all things have been created through Him” at the end of the verse), but Himself the origin, source, centre, causal element of creation. The “in” states Christ’s creatorship in even stronger terms than the “through” used in the second part of the verse.

d) “All things” include angelic ranks which Paul lists (“thrones or powers or rulers or authorities”) in order to leave no room for the worship or adoration of any created being, even angelic – an error that the Colossians needed to guard themselves against (Colossians 2:18-19) and one that despite this clear teaching still became a part of the Watchtower’s doctrine through a false identification of Jesus with the archangel Michael.

2.2. Colossians 1:17.

Colossians 1:17 (NIV)

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

a) In verse 17 Paul says that Christ “is before all things”, clearly indicating that He preceded all creation.

b) Although in Colossians 1:16 Paul says that “in Him all things were created” and “all things have been created through Him”, of Christ He does not say that He “was created” or “came into being” before all things, but rather “He is before all things”, with the present form of the verb indicating the permanence and absolute character of His existence (Exodus 3:14; John 1:1; 8:24, 58; 17:5; cf. Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; Revelation 22:13; Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2). Being before all things, Christ is eternal.

2.3. Apart from Colossians 1:16-17 the truth that Christ is the Creator is also taught in other places in the scripture:

John 1:3 (NASB)

3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

John 1:10 (NASB)

10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

Hebrews 1:2 (NASB)

2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Paul Himself, who in Colossians 1:16 teaches that Christ is the Creator of all things, attributes creation to God in other passages, showing he understood that Christ was divine.

Colossians 1:16

16 For in Him all things were created: things in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Colossians 1:16 (AGNT)

16 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη (*hoti en autō ektisthē*) τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὄρατα καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι· τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἐκτίσται (*ta panta di' autou kai eis auton ektistai*).

Ephesians 3:9: “God who created all things” (Colossians 1:16: “For in Him all things were created”, “all things have been created through Him and for Him”).

Ephesians 3:9 (NASB)

9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;

Ephesians 3:9 (AGNT)

9 καὶ φωτίσαι [πάντας] τίς ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων ἐν τῷ θεῷ τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι (*tō theō tō ta panta ktisanti*),

Romans 11:36: “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things” (Colossians 1:16: “all things have been created through him and for him”).

Romans 11:33-36 (NASB)

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! **34** For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? **35** Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? **36** For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Romans 11:33-36 (AGNT)

33 Ὡς βάθος πλοῦτου καὶ σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως θεοῦ (*ō bathos ploutou kai sophias kai gnōseōs theou*): ὡς ἀνεξεραύνητα τὰ κρίματα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνεξιχνίαστοι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ.

34 Τίς γὰρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου;

ἢ τίς σύμβουλος αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο;

35 ἢ τίς προέδωκεν αὐτῷ,

καὶ ἀνταποδοθήσεται αὐτῷ;

36 ὅτι ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα (*hoti ex autou kai di' autou kai eis auton ta panta*): αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

And there is a direct parallel to Colossians 1:16 in Hebrews 2:10: “for whom are all things, and through whom are all things” (Colossians 1:16: “all things have been created through him and for him”).

Hebrews 2:10 (NASB)

10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

Hebrews 2:10 (AGNT)

10 Ἐπρεπεν γὰρ αὐτῷ, δι' ὃν τὰ πάντα καὶ δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα (*di' hon ta panta kai di' hou ta panta*), πολλοὺς υἱοὺς εἰς δόξαν ἀγαγόντα τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας αὐτῶν διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι.

2.4. Conclusions.

a) Since “all things” were created by Christ (Colossians 1:16), since “apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3), and since “He is before all things” (Colossians 1:17), then He cannot be a creature. The “Firstborn” cannot be part of creation if He created “all things”. Both Colossians 1:15-17 and other scriptures discussed above teach that Christ is the Creator and remove Him from the category of creation.

This also means that we should understand the genitive in “firstborn of all creation” not as partitive, with Christ being firstborn of creation of which He is Himself a part, but comparative, with Christ being firstborn in relation to/with regard to all creation, i.e., preeminent over all creation. Paul calls Christ the “Firstborn of/over all creation” exactly because He is the Creator (“He is . . . the firstborn of all creation. For in Him all things were created”), thus making it clear that the title refers to His preeminence over all creation (point 2.1.a above).

b) God exists outside of time and space, but a creature exists within time and space. All things, the universe, including time and space, were created by Christ, so how could Christ exist within time and space He was yet to create (Luginbill, n.d.)? No creature can exist prior to creation (Whedon, 1876). If we accept the clear teaching of the scripture that Jesus Christ created “all things” and if we accept that God had existed “before all things” then it must be concluded that Jesus is God – which is a consistent teaching of the Word of God (John 1:1; 1:18; Isaiah 9:5; Matthew 1:23; Romans 3:3-5; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; etc.).

2.5. The teaching of the Watchtower.

The only way this conclusion can be avoided is by perverting the Word of God and this is what the Watchtower does in their New World Translation. Since only God can create “all things” and be “before all things” and since Jehovah Witnesses reject the deity of Christ, their New World Translation wrongly adds the word “other” four times in Colossians 1:16-17 (and the fifth time in verse 20). Colossians 1:16 says:

Colossians 1:16

16 For in Him all things were created: things in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Colossians 1:16 (AGNT)

16 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα (*ta panta*) ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, τὰ ὀρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα, εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι· τὰ πάντα (*ta panta*) δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἐκτίσται·

But the New World Translation says:

Colossians 1:16 (NWT)

16 because by means of him all other things were created in the heavens and on the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All other things have been created through him and for him.

Colossians 1:17 says:

Colossians 1:17 (NIV)

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Colossians 1:17 (AGNT)

17 καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων (*pro pantōn*) καὶ τὰ πάντα (*ta panta*) ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν,

But the New World Translation says:

Colossians 1:17 (NWT)

17 Also, he is before all other things, and by means of him all other things were made to exist,

The word “other” is not present in the Greek in any of the places underlined above and is a false addition by the NWT. Perverting the Word of God in order to defend one’s false doctrine is a most serious offence (Deuteronomy 12:32; Proverbs 30:5-6; 1 Corinthians 4:6; 2 Corinthians 2:17; 4:1-2; 2 John 1:9; cf. 2 Timothy 2:15).

It is remarkable that despite Paul so clearly teaching that Christ is the Creator of all things, including the angels, and thus Himself not a part of creation, the Watchtower should still falsely proclaim Him to be a created being and an angel.

3. The designation “firstborn” referring to preeminence is used to describe Christ in other places in the scripture.

3.1. Jesus is called the “firstborn” in Hebrews 1:6 and in verse 8 He is called “God”:

Hebrews 1:6-8 (NASB)

6 And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says,
“And let all the angels of God worship Him.”

7 And of the angels He says,
“Who makes His angels winds,
And His ministers A flame of fire.”

8 But of the Son He says,
“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,
And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom.

It must be observed that in verse 6 God commands the angels to worship His “Firstborn”. It is the most fundamental command of the Word of God that only God is to be worshiped (Deuteronomy 6:13; Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8) and worship must not be given to any creature (Romans 1:18-28; Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9) – yet worship due only to God is given to Christ throughout the scripture (Matthew 28:9, 17; Luke 24:50-52; John 9:38; 20:28; Isaiah 45:22-23 and Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 13:21; Revelation 5:11-14).

3.2. It is exactly in this sense denoting preeminence that Paul again calls Christ the “firstborn” in Romans 8:29:

Romans 8:29 (NASB)

29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

The expression “so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren” clearly refers to Christ preeminence over other believers, rather than Him, the God and Creator, being born first among created human beings – whom He has Himself created and for whom He is the object of faith.

4. Christ as the “Firstborn” is the preeminent One representing the Father in the creation.

According to the biblical usage of the term, the firstborn would have the position of preeminence and would take over the chief position of his father. This is also why he would be allotted a double portion of his inheritance. Christ is Himself the “heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2) and just as no creature can create all things, so no creature can be an heir of all things.

It is in this sense that Christ is God's firstborn – He is “the image of the invisible God” and “the firstborn of all creation”, because He is the Father's representative and acts in the Father's name. Creation's existence came through Christ, its arrangement and supervision belong to Him, in Him all things hold together (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). Christ is the One through whom the Father approaches the world and who represents Him in His external relationships (Pett, n.d.). As the management of the house is entrusted to the firstborn, so the Firstborn of the whole creation is He who is its Governor and Lord, and whose prerogative it is to exhibit to the universe the image and attributes of the unseen Father (Eadie, 1884).

5. Christ as the “Firstborn” is the One through whom the fallen creation was reconciled to God the Father.

The creation of men endowed with free will required Christ to become a man (John 1:14) if sinful mankind was to be given a way of salvation and reconciliation with God (Colossians 1:13-14, 19-20) – since He knew that man would sooner or later use his free will to disobey Him and it is only by becoming a man that Christ could pay the redemption price. So Christ is the “Firstborn of all creation” not only because He is the Creator and it is through Him that “all things were created”, but also because it is through Him that God has reconciled the creation to Himself.

Colossians 1:13-14 (NASB)

13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, **14** in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:18-20 (NASB)

18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. **19** For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, **20** and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

6. God took the initiative in our reconciliation and to provide redemption sent His one and only, His unique and beloved Son – not a created being.

6.1. God's righteousness and His love.

God's perfect righteousness demanded judgment for every committed sin. This judgment means eternal condemnation for sinful human beings – because through His absolute holiness God cannot accept any sin in those who are to dwell with Him for eternity and because we are ourselves unable to pay for our own sin.

But God is not only perfectly righteous, He is also a loving God – God is love (1 John 4:8) and out of His love comes forgiveness. God's righteousness and His love may seem irreconcilable, however. If God judges sinners and sends them to eternal condemnation, He is righteous – but He is not loving, as He did not offer forgiveness. If God forgives sinners their sin, He is loving – but He is not righteous, since He accepted sin.

The only way for God to forgive us our sins and make our salvation possible without compromising His perfect righteousness was to provide payment for all sin. And thus we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). “By grace”, because it is a gift of God that He sent His Son to pay for our sins and did not require this payment from us – a payment that as sinners we could never make ourselves. Christ who paid the redemption price by dying on the cross in our stead. “Through faith” – because it is by making the free will choice to believe in Christ as our Lord and Saviour that we accept this payment for our sins and are justified before God.

6.2. God's greatest act of love is sending His Son to die for our sins.

And so the greatest expression of God's love toward us is sending His one and only Son to die for our sins. God took the initiative in our reconciliation and provided the redemption price for us sinners who absent His gracious offer of salvation would all be headed for eternal condemnation. God reached out to us who through our sin were separated from Him by a chasm that we could not bridge ourselves (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 3:23). It is us who needed to be reconciled to God, but it is God who stretched out His hand to us.

Romans 5:6-8 (NASB)

6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. **7** For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. **8** But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

God through His love has undertaken the work of reconciliation and He has done so by sending His one and only Son (1 John 4:14-16).

John 3:16 (NIV)

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

1 John 4:9-11 (NIV)

9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. **10** This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. **11** Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

6.3. Christ is God's one and only Son, not His "only begotten" Son.

Both in John 3:16 and 1 John 4:9 (as well as in John 1:14, 18; 3:18) the Greek word *μονογενής* (*monogenēs*) is used. Although it's often translated "only begotten", it means "one and only", "unique one", "one of a kind".

a) *Monogenēs* – etymology.

Monogenēs is a compound word that consists of *μόνος* (*monos*) meaning "the only entity in a class, only, alone" (Danker et al., 2000 - BDAG) and *γένος* (*genos*) which has a range of meanings (BDAG):

1. ancestral stock, descendant;
2. a relatively small group with common ancestry, family, relatives;
3. a relatively large people group, nation, people;
4. entities united by common traits, class, kind.

Those that can be applied to *monogenēs* are the first and the last entry above: "ancestral stock, descendant" and "entities united by common traits, class, kind". Liddell et al. (1940 – LSJ) list the following:

- I. race, stock, kin;
 2. direct descent, opp. collateral relationship;
- II. offspring, even of a single descendant;
 2. collectively, offspring, posterity;
- III. generally, race, of beings;
- IV. sex;
- V. class, sort, kind.

As shown above, the Greek word *genos* refers to race, stock, kin, class, kind, and although these ideas are linked with the idea of birth, with the Greek morpheme *gen-* containing this notion, it does not mean "birth", "begetting", etc. (in a way analogous to English words "race", "stock" or "kin" being indirectly linked with the notion of birth but not meaning "birth" or "begetting"). And so *monogenēs*

can based on its etymology be translated “one of a kind”, “the unique one”, “one in its class”, “the one and only”. In fact, neither BDAG nor LSJ even list “the only begotten” as a meaning of μονογενής.

BDAG:

- 1 pert. to being the only one of its kind within a specific relationship, one and only, only
- 2 pert. to being the only one of its kind or class, unique (in kind) of someth. that is the only example of its category

LSJ:

- μονο-γενής, ἕς, Ep. and Ion. μονο-γενής, (γένος) the only member of a kin or kind: hence, generally, only, single, παῖς Hes.Op.376, Hdt.7.221, cf. Ev.Jo.1.14, Ant.Lib.32.1; of Hecate, Hes. Th.426.
2. unique, of τὸ ὄν, Parm. 8.4; εἷς ὅδε μ. οὐρανὸς γεγονώς Pl.Ti.31b, cf. Procl.Inst.22; θεὸς ὁ μ. Sammelb.4324.15.
3. μ. αἷμα one and the same blood, dub. l. in E. Hel.1685.
4. Gramm., having one form for all genders, A.D.Adv. 145.18.
5. name of the foot --- -, Heph.3.3.

The critical point here is that the second morpheme of *monogenēs* - “*genēs*” - derives from the word γένος (*genos*) meaning “race, stock, kin, class, kind” and not, as was supposed by many, especially in the past, from the verb γεννάω (*gennaō*) meaning “become the parent of, beget; to give birth to, bear; to cause something to happen, bring forth, produce, cause” (BDAG). If Christ had been described with words whose second morpheme comes from *gennaō*, such as μονογεννηθεῖς (*monogennētheis*) or μονογεννητός (*monogennētos*), then a translation “the only born/begotten” would be required – but this is not the case. John in fact uses γεγεννημένον (*gegennēmenon*) – a perfect passive participle of *gennaō* meaning “having been born” - in John 3:6 and 1 John 5:1, but this term is never applied to Christ.

b) *Monogenēs* – usage of the word in the Bible.

Not only, however, is the translation of *monogenēs* as “unique one”, “one of a kind”, “one and only” correct etymologically, but, even more importantly, the meaning of a given word in any language is ultimately determined by its usage and the usage of this word in the Bible shows that it should be understood to mean “unique one”, “one of a kind”, “one and only” and not “the only begotten”.

In Hebrews 11:17 the author of the letter used the adjective *monogenēs* to refer to Isaac, despite him knowing that Isaac was not Abraham's only Son – thus *monogenēs* meaning “the unique one”, “one of a kind” (with Isaac being the son of God's promise) rather than “the only begotten”, which Isaac clearly was not (as Ishmael had been born 13 years before him – Genesis 16:3-5; 17:21, 25):

Hebrews 11:17 (NIV)

17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son,

Hebrews 11:17 (AGNT)

17 Πίστει προσενήνοχεν Ἀβραὰμ τὸν Ἰσαὰκ πειραζόμενος καὶ τὸν μονογενῆ (*monogeneē*) προσέφερεν, ὁ τὰς ἐπαγγελίας ἀναδεξάμενος,

Hebrews 11:17 shows that *monogenēs* was understood as the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word יָחִיד (*yāhîd*) - “only, only one, solitary” (Brown, Driver & Briggs, 1952 – BDB) – used in Genesis 22:2, 12, and 16 with reference to Isaac. This is further confirmed by the translators of the LXX using *monogenēs* to render the Hebrew *yāhîd* (with some versions of the LXX using *monogenēs* to render *yāhîd* also in Genesis 22:2, 12 and 16). Psalms 22:20, 25:16 and 35:17 provide examples of *monogenēs* translating the Hebrew *yāhîd* and meaning “the only one” rather than “the only begotten”:

Psalms 22:20 (NASB)

20 Deliver my soul from the sword,

My only life from the power of the dog.

Psalm 22:21 (BHS)

21 :הַצִּילָה מִחֶרֶב נַפְשִׁי מִיַּד־לֶבֶב יַחֲדָתִי (yēhîdāfî)

Psalm 21:21 (LXX)

21 ῥύσαι ἀπὸ ὀμφαίας τὴν ψυχὴν μου
καὶ ἐκ χειρὸς κυνὸς τὴν μονογενῆ (monogenē) μου.

The sense is “my only (life)” - “my only begotten life” would obviously be a wrong translation.

Psalm 25:16 (NASB)

16 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
For I am lonely and afflicted.

Psalm 25:16 (BHS)

16 פְּנֵה־לִּי אֱלֹהִים יְחַיֵּנִי כִּי־יָחִידִי (yāhîd) וְעֲנֵי אָנִי.

Psalm 24:16 (LXX)

16 ἐπίβλεψον ἐπ’ ἐμέ καὶ ἐλέησόν με,
ὅτι μονογενῆς (monogenēs) καὶ πτωχὸς εἰμι ἐγώ.

The sense is “lonely”, “alone” – not “the only begotten”.

Psalm 35:17 (NASB)

17 Lord, how long will You look on?
Rescue my soul from their ravages,
My only life from the lions.

Psalm 35:17 (BHS)

17 :אֲדַגֵּי כְּמָה תִּרְאֶה הַשִּׁיבָה נַפְשִׁי מִשְׂאֵי־הָם מִכַּפְיָיִם יַחֲדָתִי (yēhîdāfî)

Psalm 34:17 (LXX)

17 κύριε, πότε ἐπόψη;
ἀποκατάστησον τὴν ψυχὴν μου ἀπὸ τῆς κακουργίας αὐτῶν,
ἀπὸ λεόντων τὴν μονογενῆ (monogenē) μου.

As above in Psalm 22:20.

In Judges 11:34 the best most suitable translation of *yāhîd* is “the one and only”, as Jephthah’s daughter was his only child.

Judges 11:34 (NASB)

34 When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one and only child; besides her he had no son or daughter.

Judges 11:34 (BHS)

וַיָּבֵא יַפְתָּח הַמַּצְפָּה אֶל־בִּיתוֹ וְהִנֵּה בָתוּלָה יֹצֵאת לִקְרָאתוֹ בְּתַפְּסִים וּבַמְחֻלּוֹת וְרַק הִיא יַחֲדָה (yēhîdâ)
אֵין־לּוֹ מִמֶּנּוּ בֶן־אוֹת:

Judges 11:34 (LXX)

34 Καὶ ἦλθεν Ἰεφθαε εἰς Μασσηφα εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἡ θυγάτηρ αὐτοῦ
ἐξεπορεύετο εἰς ἀπάντησιν αὐτοῦ ἐν τυμπάνοις καὶ χοροῖς· καὶ αὕτη μονογενῆς (monogenēs)
αὐτῷ ἀγαπητή, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτῷ πλὴν αὐτῆς υἱὸς ἢ θυγάτηρ.

And it is in this sense - “the only child”, “the one and only child” that the adjective *monogenēs* is used in the New Testament in Luke 7:12, 8:42 and 9:38.

It should also be noted that in the biblical usage the Greek word ἀγαπητός (*agapētos*) is used as a close synonym of *monogenēs*. According to BDAG, the meaning of *agapētos* is as follows:

1. pert. to one who is in a very special relationship with another, only, only beloved;
2. pert. to one who is dearly loved, dear, beloved, prized, valued;

For example, as noted above, in Genesis 22:2, 22:12 and 22:16 the Hebrew word *yāhîd* has been translated with the Greek *monogenēs* in some versions of the LXX, but others used *agapētos*, showing that they are semantically parallel. The LXX translates *yāhîd* with *agapētos* in Jeremiah 6:26, Amos 8:10 and Zechariah 12:10 (with a closely related ἀγαπώμενος [*agapōmenos*] used in Proverbs 4:3). In the New Testament *agapētos* is also used as synonym, if not an exact semantical equivalent, of *monogenēs*:

Matthew 3:17 (NASB)

17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”

Matthew 3:17 (AGNT)

17 καὶ ἰδοὺ φωνὴ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν λέγουσα, Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός (*agapētos*), ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα.

Matthew 12:18 (NASB)

18 “Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen;
My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased;
I will put My Spirit upon Him,
And He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

Matthew 12:18 (AGNT)

18 Ἴδου ὁ παῖς μου ὃν ἠρέτισα,
ὁ ἀγαπητός (*agapētos*) μου εἰς ὃν εὐδόκησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου·
θήσω τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπ’ αὐτόν,
καὶ κρίσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἀπαγγελεῖ.

Mark 9:7 (NASB)

7 Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!”

Mark 9:7 (AGNT)

7 καὶ ἐγένετο νεφέλη ἐπισκιάζουσα αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐγένετο φωνὴ ἐκ τῆς νεφέλης, Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός (*agapētos*), ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ.

Luke 20:13 (NASB)

13 The owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’

Luke 20:13 (AGNT)

13 εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελώνος, Τί ποιήσω; πέμψω τὸν υἱόν μου τὸν ἀγαπητόν (*agapēton*): ἴσως τοῦτον ἐντραπήσονται.

The parallel usage of *monogenēs* and *agapētos* also shows that *monogenēs* is used in the scripture to signify a person who is in a special relationship with another, unique, beloved – and not to mean “the only begotten”.

It is also in this meaning - “the unique one”, “the only one of its kind”, which does not contain the idea of begetting - that *monogenēs* was used in secular Greek, for example:

There is a bird which is called Phenix.

This being the only one of its kind (*monogenēs*) lives 500 years.

Clement XXV. 2 (Moody, 1953, p. 219)

6.4. Summary.

God's incomprehensible love for sinful men found its expression in Him taking the initiative to make their salvation possible and sending His one and only Son to die for all their sins – the only way in which He could provide forgiveness without compromising His perfect righteousness. The greatness of God's love is manifested exactly in the fact that He sacrificed His Son for us. This sacrifice had been decreed in eternity past.

2 Timothy 1:8-10 (NASB)

8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, **9** who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, **10** but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,

1 Peter 1:18-20 (NASB)

18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, **19** but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ. **20** For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you

And was directly foreshadowed in Abraham's sacrifice of his unique/one of a kind/beloved son Isaac (Genesis 22). Contrary to what the Watchtower teaches, God did not just create another being that would pay the redemption price needed to save mankind, a being on which He would pour out His wrath for all committed sin and thus make forgiveness possible. God sent His Son – sent, not created.

The Son took the role of the Redeemer and existing from eternity past as God (John 1:1-2) humbled Himself in the ultimate act of humility and took up human nature (John 1:14; 2 Corinthians 8:9) to die for our sins on the cross.

Philippians 2:3-8

3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; **4** do not look out for your own interests, but also for the interests of others. **5** Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, **6** who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard being equal to God as something to rapaciously hold on to (literally in Greek: "did not regard being equal to God as plunder"), **7** but emptied Himself/deprived Himself of His status by taking the form of a slave and being born in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, **8** He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Thus through sacrificial love that is beyond our understanding God, the Judge, took the judgment due the defendant upon Himself in the person of His Son, the God-man Jesus Christ. This is God's love – the Father sacrificing His Son, the Son sacrificing Himself.

John 3:16 (NIV)

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

What love and what sacrifice would it be for God to just create a new being and send it to pay the redemption price? Not only does that contradict the clear teaching of the scripture about Christ being God and becoming a man for us, (John 1:1; 1:14) but it makes the greatest act of sacrificial love in the history of the universe a trivial transaction involving creation of creature being to solve the problem.

1 John 4:9-11 (NASB)

9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. **10** In this is love, not that we loved God, but

that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:19 (NASB)

19 We love, because He first loved us.

Romans 8:37-39 (NASB)

37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. **38** For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God reached out His hand towards us through His unique, beloved and one and only Son, not through some created being.

7. Only Christ is the Head.

Colossians 1:18 (NASB)

18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

Christ is the Head of the Body, the Church. This “leaves no room or authority for a human head (the pope), governing body (the Watchtower), convention or conference over the Church. Jesus is the sole Head of the Church” (Dunagan, n.d.). The authority lies only with the written Word and the Word incarnate – the God-man Jesus Christ.

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