

From earliest times in the history of the Christian Church the *Doctrine of the Trinity* has been subject to many and various forms of opposition & denial. In more modern times this opposition is still present – liberals, modernists in various denominations, the “oneness” churches and the cults. The opposition & denial of such groups with regard to the Trinity is merely the presentation of Satan’s old heresies under new “owners.”

Prior to the Reformation

In Christ’s time the Jews strongly emphasised the *Unity of God* – an orthodox & Scriptural truth. Two parts:

- (a) Unity of Singularity – there is one living and true God
- (b) Unity of Simplicity – there is one indivisible divine essence.

But the Jewish emphasis on the *Unity of God* encompassed a rejection of the Trinity. The unity of God to them was that there was only one Divine person. This emphasis carried over into the Christian Church paving the way for error & departure from the apostolic doctrine of the Trinity. Some taught that there is only one Divine person; others gave some place to Christ & the Spirit but denied their deity.

Arianism – named after Arius. Taught the heresy that the Father alone is eternal; that Christ was the first creature; and some Arians went on to teach that the Spirit was the first & greatest creature made by the Son. Rejected at the Council of Nicea in 325AD. Champion of orthodoxy was Athanasius who declared that Christ was of the same substance as the Father. The Council proclaimed that Christ was “*Son of God, light of light, very God of very God, being of one substance with the Father.*”

Sabellianism – named after Sabellius, a 3rd century African bishop. Promoted the view that God is one single person. Thus the titles *Father, Son, & Spirit*, are not the names of three individual persons in the Godhead but three modes of the one person in his dealings with men.

Reformation & afterwards

Socinianism – heresy named after an Italian theologian, Faustus Socinus, 1539 to 1604. He was the forerunner of present-day liberals, modernists, & Unitarians. He denied just about every major doctrine including the Trinity. Taught that Christ was a mere man; that He did not make atonement for sin; that sinners are pardoned on the ground of repentance & reformation; denied the personality & deity of the Holy Spirit; original sin; total inability; endless punishment.

DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

The term was first used by *Tertullian*, who also formulated the doctrine. The word *Trinity* is derived from Latin & Greek terms meaning *three in one or the one which is three and the three which are one*. The word expresses the great fact taught in Scripture of the one divine essence eternally subsisting in three persons.

It must be stated that in dealing with the subject of the Trinity we deal with an inexplicable mystery. The finite mind of man cannot grasp the infinite, thus we cannot reach a complete understanding of the doctrine. (And for this reason proud man opposes it.) But we are able to obtain knowledge of the Trinity from the revelation God has given in Scripture. Scripture nowhere sets out to prove the doctrine of the Trinity, but Scripture does reveal it. Same is true with the Doctrine of God. Scripture does not present proofs of the existence of God but reveals that He is, Gen.1:1. The Bible presupposes the existence & being of God; and requires belief & acceptance of such, Heb. 11:6.

Scripture reveals the Trinity in various ways.

1. In certain statements that cannot be understood in any other way except that of teaching the Trinity.

See Gen. 1:26 – very definite change in the language of Genesis 1 at this point with regard to Creation. Up to this point it is *the language of command*; but here it is *the language of consultation*. But with whom does God consult? Some have postulated – with angels. Not so, for nowhere in Scripture is it taught that angels had any part in man’s creation. Moreover, the verse says *our image*. Men were not made in the image of angels. See Heb. 2:16 – to see that there is a distinction between angelic nature and human nature. Moreover, Gen. 1:27 says “*so God created man in His own image.*” There is no mention of angels here. But see Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10 to learn that the N.T. in dealing with regeneration proves that man was originally made in God’s image; and in the new birth is being restored to that image.

Who then is in view in Gen. 1:26? The answer is given by other Scriptures that attribute creation to the Son of God & the Holy Spirit also. See Ps. 33:6 for a statement of the entire Godhead operating in creation. For the Spirit see Gen.1:2; Ps. 104:30; Job 33:14. For the Son see John 1:1. Thus, by interpreting Scripture by Scripture it can be clearly said that Gen. 1:26 is a reference to the three divine persons consulting over the creation of man.

2. By making a number of propositions.

- (a) **That God is one** – Deut. 6:4, “*The Lord our God is one Lord.*” That is, one supreme, eternal, infinite Being. There is only one such being; and there can only be one such being.
- (b) **That the Father is God, the Son is God, & the Spirit is God** – 1 Cor. 8:6, “*there is one God the Father.*” Then John 1:1 establishes that Christ is God; and Acts 5:3-5 establish that the Spirit is God. Other Scripture shows the true deity of each person; e.g., by attributing Divine qualities to each person such as *omniscience* – Matt. 6:32; John 2:24, 25; 1 Cor. 2:10, 11.
- (c) **That the Father is not the Son; the Son is not the Father; & neither of them is the Holy Spirit** – see Is. 48:16. The speaker is one being sent by the Lord God & the Spirit – the Messiah. But the speaker is a Divine person, see v.12b & cf. Rev. 1:8,11,17. The speaker has been there from the beginning, v.16 & John 1:1. He is sent by the other two persons who are obviously equal – the Lord God & the Spirit. Thus, here is one divine person being sent by two other divine persons, obviously distinct one from the other.

Thus, since there is one God, & since the Father is God, the Son is God, & the Holy Spirit is God, & these three are clearly distinguished in Scripture, we have revealed to us the glorious truth of the Trinity: one God eternally existing as Father, Son, & Holy Spirit, each possessing the whole essence of deity.

This glorious Trinity of divine persons operates together in perfect harmony & unison in all the works of the Godhead: in creation, in providence & in redemption – 1 Pet. 1:2.

In our brief study on the doctrine of the Trinity, mention was made of various heretical groups, which, throughout the ages, have denied the doctrine of the Trinity. As we have noted, the doctrine of the Trinity is revealed in Scripture, but it is not explained. No man can come to a complete understanding of the Trinity because we are dealing with the infinite, therefore, from a human perspective, with the inexplicable. However, the proud, arrogant, mind of man will not permit him to submit to and accept the revelation in Scripture that there is *one God, eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*. Consequently, he will ransack Scripture in an attempt to disprove the doctrine by wresting the Word of God to his own destruction.

Before us is a Scripture that is seized upon by liberals, modernists, & the cults in their inveterate hatred of truth. With this verse they attempt to build a case of denial of Christ's deity, & thereby deny the Trinity, for if Christ is not a divine person there is no Triune Godhead.

The church of Colosse was subject to false teaching, teaching that detracted from Christ's person and work. Therefore, Paul's letter was designed to exalt Christ, which is clearly what the apostle is doing in the verses before us. But how ironic that a Scripture, designed to counter the heretical attacks being suffered by the Colossian church, should have been seized by the enemy to be used as a tool of the perverted teaching of the enemies of Christ. The final words of v.15 are – *“the firstborn of every creature.”* Wrestling these words heretics purport that Christ is a mere creature, not a divine person, thus there is no trinity of divine persons, there is no Godhead. Let us note the following facts about Christ presented here:

I. NOTICE CHRIST'S PERSON

V.15 begins by stating that Christ *“is the image of the invisible God.”* Cf. 2 Cor. 4:4, *“Christ...is the image of God.”* Heb.1:3 tells us that Christ is the *“express image of His person...”* i.e., God the Father's person. This word “image” therefore denotes exact likeness.

Note here that this language is used of Christ in His position as the Mediator & Saviour. *“Who”* at the head of v.15 relates back to *“His dear Son...”* in v.13. Christ is the “dear Son” in that He is appointed Saviour sent forth by the Father to redeem His people, thus v.14. But part of Christ's work as the Mediator & Saviour is to reveal God, thus He is the *“image of the invisible God.”* God's invisibility does not merely mean that He is unseen, but that He is incomprehensible to men unless He reveals Himself. This He has done through Christ the Mediator, so Christ is “the image” of God in that sense that He reveals God to men, John 1:18, John 14:9, *“he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.”* For example in Christ's life & ministry His being the image or revelation of God was seen in that He performed miracles & wrought deeds that could only have been done by a divine person & were a manifestation of the glory, the power, & the majesty of God.

II. NOTICE CHRIST'S PRE-EMINENCE

V.15 then, continues with these words *“the firstborn of every creature.”* It is actually amazing that men would dare to place upon these words their wicked constructions, standing as they do in inseparable connection with the first part of the verse that declares that Christ is the “image of God.” As noted, only a divine person could be the *exact likeness* or image of another divine person. Thus, He cannot be a creature. But by the cults & other blasphemers, in incredible malice, these words are taken & employed against the deity of Christ fully expressed in the first part of the verse. According to these enemies Christ is a creature; perhaps the highest of creatures but a creature nonetheless.

However, such a heresy is a failure to understand the meaning of the term *firstborn*. The roots of this word are in the O.T. where the word *firstborn* is also used. In the Hebrew *firstborn* is used with reference to that which is primary, prominent & illustrious. Job 18:13, *“the firstborn of death...”* i.e., a disease of the most fatal kind. Isaiah 14:30, *“the firstborn of the poor...”* i.e., a pauper of the paupers. Ps. 89:27, *“I will make Him my firstborn higher than the kings of the earthy...”* – this is a Messianic psalm; and the Lord speaks of Christ, saying that He will invest Christ with royal dignity, pre-eminent splendour & majesty over all the kings of the earth.

In the N.T. also *firstborn* is used of pre-eminence or rank. See Rom. 8:29, Christ is the *“firstborn among many brethren.”* This is with reference to the spiritually begotten sons of God, sinners adopted into God's family. Christ stands out as chief in the family. Heb. 1:3, *“When He bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world He saith, ‘And let all the angels of God worship Him’.”* Firstbegotten – the same word as *firstborn*. Note that as the “firstbegotten” Christ is brought into the world by the Father, implying pre-existence. And when He was brought in the angels worshipped Him, and worship is to be given only to a Divine being. The point is clear: Christ is called the *firstbegotten* with reference to His entrance into the world because He came as the pre-eminent one, Lord over the angels & was worshipped by them. Now see Col. 1:18 with Rev. 1:5 – where He is referred to as *“the firstborn or firstbegotten from the dead.”* Signifies that He was the first to rise from the dead with an incorruptible body. But it teaches more: as the One who was the first to rise never to be subject to death again, He rose in pre-eminence over death, having secured the resurrection of His people.

Therefore, the term in v.15 *“firstborn of every creature”* simply denotes Christ's pre-eminence over all creation. Note that the word *“creature”* means creation. In other words taking all of v.15, as we must, it is teaching that since Christ is the image of the invisible God in that He reveals God, then it is made known through Christ that He is the God who is over all creation. Christ Himself, therefore, as “the firstborn of all creation” is Lord of creation, its chief and governor, the one to whom its management is entrusted. Thus, the term has nothing to do with Christ's essence or being but with His function as the pre-eminent one, who is Lord over all.

In keeping with this meaning of v.15, note the verses that follow. V.16 clearly reveals that Christ is Lord of creation for He made all things. *“All things”* in v.16 literally is *the all*. It means *the universe, the whole of creation*. The verb *created* is in a tense that signifies the act of creation as a past & complete work. Note – if Christ is a creature Himself but is said to have made all things, then we have a serious anomaly: He must have made Himself! This is absurd, of course. The point is that Christ as the pre-eminent and pre-existent one created all things. Note the end of v.16 – *“for Him.”* That is, not merely to exhibit His glory, but made for Him as the stage on which the drama of redemption would be enacted. Then, v.17 – Christ maintains or sustains His own creation. Word *consist* means, “to hang together.”