

SPECIAL STUDIES NUMBER NINE

Colossians 1:15-17

Colossians 1:15 reads as follows:

"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature."

The "Who" of this text is the one of whom we read in verses 12-14 as follows:

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

Colossians 1:15 is coupled with Revelation 3:14, by the enemies of Christ, in an effort to prove that the Son of God is a creature, the first creature created by Jehovah. One verse speaks of "the firstborn of every creature", and the other speaks of "the beginning of the creation of God", and both speak of Christ. We have already considered Revelation 3:14, showing there that the words "the beginning of the creation of God" cannot mean that the Son of God was the first creature created by Jehovah. The idea that the Son of God is a creature, whether the first to be created, or the second, or the last, flatly contradicts John 1:3, which reads:

"All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."

The New International Version reads as follows:

"Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."

The American Standard Version, 1901 edition, reads thus:

"All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made."

The text unequivocally affirms that "all things were made by him." It does not read, "some things", nor does it read, "All other things". Since "all things were made by him", then Christ, "the beginning of the

creation of God", can be nothing except "the originating source" of all created things.

In John 1:1,2 the word "was" is from a Greek word which means "to exist". The word "was" in John 1:3,6,14 is from an entirely different Greek word, and means "to come into existence". The eternal "Logos" did not "come into existence". He existed. "All" created things passed from nothingness "into existence" as a result of the creative power of "the Word". Since "all" things were made by him", He preceded "all" created things. Since He preceded "all" created things, He is uncreated. Since He is uncreated, He is eternal. Since He is eternal, He is God, and not God in some lesser, inferior sense, but God in the highest sense in which the word can be understood - God, the Creator of "all" things.

Therefore, Revelation 3:14, "the beginning of the creation of God", is explained by John 1:3, "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." Similarly, the context of Colossians 1:15 shows, not that the son is there placed on a level with the creature as opposed to the Father, but that He is on the same level with "the invisible God" as opposed to the creature.

The expression "firstborn of every creature" in Colossians 1:15 cannot be interpreted in such a way as to militate against John 1:3, and, more immediately, the context of Colossians passage. Notice the Colossian context:

"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist," verses 16,17,18.

These words show exactly the same truth stated in John 1:1-3. In John, "In the beginning existed the Word." Therefore, He antedated "the beginning". Similarly, in Colossians, "And he is before all things." The verb "is" emphasizes His absolute existence. Again, in John, "All things were made by him", and in Colossians, "For by him were all things created...all things were created by him...he is before all things."

To make the Son of God a creature, by the wording of Colossians 1:15, is to take a position that flatly contradicts the Colossian context, and the Word of God elsewhere. We, therefore, believe that the word "firstborn" in Colossians 1:15 actually means something other than what one might think at first glance. We are accustomed to think of the "firstborn" as a creature, and as one who is the eldest, or whose birth

preceded the birth of someone else in the same family. In the first place, the Son of God is not a creature. He preceded "all" created things, and is the source of their existence. In the second place, scripturally speaking, the word "firstborn" may mean something other than the eldest. For instance, consider the case of Joseph's "two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim" (Genesis 48:1). Of the two, Ephraim "was the younger", and "Manasseh was the firstborn" (Genesis 48:14). Yet, in Jeremiah 31:9 reference is made to "Ephraim...my firstborn". See Genesis 41:51,52. Thus, in one place Ephraim was "the younger", and in another place he was the "firstborn". Thus, the word "firstborn" in this case means something other than what is customarily understood. One will, however, define the word "firstborn" according to what he believes about the Lord Jesus Christ. If he denies the Deity of Christ, then he is going to use the word "firstborn", as he does the word "beginning" in Revelation 3:14, to support the view that the Son of God has not always existed. If he holds to the Deity of Christ, then he is not going to define either word so as to militate against that premise.

In reading the Colossian text, it is impossible to arrive at the conclusion that the Son of God is a creature. As a matter of fact, the context proves the contrariwise. Colossians 1:16 reads, "For by him (the One identified as the firstborn in verse 15) were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him." Twice it is affirmed, "For by him were all things created...all things were created by him." This is exactly what John 1:3 affirms. Added emphasis is given in Colossians 1:17, "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

The qualifying phrases, "that are in heaven, and that are in earth" speak of classification by locality, and the phrases, "visible and invisible" speak of classification by essences. "Heaven and earth" make up space. All created things are bound by space. But, "height" and "depth", which make up space are "created things" (Romans 8:38, margin). Thus, the One who "created all things", one of which is space, is not confined to space. See Jeremiah 23:24 and I. Kings 8:27. This Creator of "all things", material and immaterial, is the Son of God.

The words "he is" in Colossians 1:17 denote the same things as the words "I am" in John 8:58. The "I" denotes personality. The "am" denotes eternity. Equally so, the "he" denotes personality, and the "is" denotes eternity of existence. "He is before all things". Therefore, He cannot be one of the "things" that "he is before".

The truth of Colossians 1:12-17 is simply that the Saviour, verses 12-14, is God the Creator, verses 15-17. This is exactly the same truth as that presented in John 1:1-3,14,29, only in the reverse order, namely that God, the creator of "all things", is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world". And, this is the same truth presented in Isaiah 9:6,7 involving "a son given" and "a child born". And, this is the same truth presented in Philippians 2:6-8 that One who existed "in the form of God" divested Himself of the "form" for the "form of a servant...and became obedient unto death." And, this is the same truth presented in Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23, namely that "God was manifest in the flesh" (I Timothy 3:16).

We have learned throughout this article, and in keeping with God's word, of Christ. He is "the Lord of glory" (I Corinthians 2:8), the "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36), yea, "the true God" (I John 5:20), even "the great God" (Titus 2:13), and "who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen" (Romans 9:5). He is the "I am" (John 8:58), and all the attributes and incommunicable perfects of "Jehovah" belong to Christ. He is holy (Acts 3:14), immutable (Hebrews 1:10-12,13:8), omnipresent (Matthew 18:20), "the first and the last" (Revelation 22:13), yea the "Alpha and Omega" (Revelation 1:8; 22:13). The works which only "Jehovah" can do are done by this Christ. He created all the worlds (Colossians 1:16), and upholds all things by the word of his power (Hebrews 1:3). The power of His thundering voice will summon the dead to come forth. He will judge all (John 5:22,28,29). Although multiplied millions are involved, yet He will perfectly recollect all their actions, words, and thoughts from the birth of creation to the end of history. He is the only Saviour of Mankind. He is the source of all grace and eternal salvation. We pray in His name, and we worship and serve Him. What stronger attestations than these have we of the existence of "Jehovah"?

In an effort to escape the truth of John 1:3, stating clearly that "all things were made by him", Jehovah's Witnesses have deceptively altered the texts of Colossians 1:16,17. The New World Translation of the Jehovah's Witnesses reads in part as follows:

"because by means of him all [other] things were created... Also, he is before all [other] things, and by means of him all [other]things were made to exist" (end quote).

The word "other" is inserted in Colossians 1:16,17 because it conforms to their unbelief, and gives them a basis for denying what other verses of scripture positively affirm. This is precisely the same method they use in their "a god" theory of John 1:1. I have many

translations, and many scholarly commentaries, but not one translation inserts the word "other" in Colossians 1:16,17, and not one scholar testifies as to its being found in the original manuscripts. This fabrication, and deception, is a real blight upon honesty, sincerity and integrity.

How do they justify this unscrupulous method of handling Colossians 1:16,17? The New World Translation committee inserts a footnote that refers the reader to Luke 13:2,4 for support. In turning to Luke 13:2,4 the first thing you will see is that the word "other" does not occur in any translation, except their own, just as in Colossians 1:16,17. Yet, in the New World Translation of Luke 13:2,4, we read as follows:

"So in reply he said to them: 'Do you imagine that these Galileans were proved worse sinners than all other Galileans... Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, thereby killing them, do you imagine that they were proved greater debtors than all other men inhabiting Jerusalem? (end quote).

Here, the Jehovah's Witnesses insert the word "other" on the ground that it is implied in the context by the Lord's comparison. Well, even if the Lord presented a contrast between one group of Galileans and another, by what process of reasoning does one have the right to insert the word "other", when, in fact, it is not found in the original documents? Let them produce the manuscript evidence where the word "other" is found in either Colossians 1:16,17, or Luke 13:2,4! It is amazing how they can palm such a lie off on their followers. They use Luke 13:2,4 as a means of proving that the word "other" belongs in Colossians 1:16,17, on the ground that it is implied, yet, I repeat, the word does not actually occur in either text. Thus, they use their own fraudulent translation of Luke 13:2,4 to prove their equally fraudulent translation of Colossians 1:16,17. The same kind of dishonesty is manifested by them in handling Colossians 2:9, as we pointed out in considering that verse, where they substitute the word of Romans 1:20 for the word that is actually found in Colossians 2:9. The word "Godhead" in Romans 1:20 is from an entirely different Greek word than the word used in Colossians 2:9. It is of different meaning altogether. The word of Colossians 2:9 means "Deity", not "divine quality" as they translate it. Colossians 2:9 says literally, "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Deity bodily." But, if you are Jehovah's Witnesses, that poses no problem! Because, you just substitute one for another, as they do in Colossians 2:9, or just add a word that is not in the original documents from which the translations come, as they do in Colossians 1:16,17 and Luke 13:2,3, or just change the fact that "the Word was God"

to "the Word was a god", as they do in John 1:1. Let them produce the manuscript evidence for their insertion into Colossians 1:16,17, and their substitution into Colossians 2:9. Every competent Greek scholar will be waiting for their effort!

The Colossian epistle is full of superlatives of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is "the image of the invisible God" (1:15). See John 14:9 and Hebrews 1:3. He is "the firstborn of every creature", the beginner, or original bringer forth, since "by him were all things created" (1:15-16). See John 1:3 and Revelation 3:14. "He is before all things" (1:17). See John 1:1,2,3. "And by him all things consist" (1:17). See Hebrews 1:3. Moreover, "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (2:9). The Jehovah's Witnesses cannot let the truth stand. Therefore, they fraudulently change the content.

In a book entitled The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures, copyright 1969, by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, the publisher for the Jehovah's Witness sect, we read of its content as follows:

"Presenting a literal word-for-word translation into English under the Greek text as set out in 'The New Testament in the Original Greek - The Text Revised by Brooke Foss Westcott D.D. and Fenton John Anthony Hort D.D.'" (1948 reprint) together with the New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures, Revised Edition, a modern-language translation of the Westcott and Hort Greek Text..." (end quote)

In Luke 13:2,4,5, in the "literal word-for-word translation into English under the Greek text as set out in 'The New Testament in the Original Greek - The Text Revised by...Westcott...and...Hort,'" read as follows:

"And having answered he said to them Do you think that the Galileans these sinners beside all the Galileans became, because there (things) they have suffered?... Or those the ten eight upon whom fell the tower in Siloam and killed them, do you think that they debtors became beside all the men the (ones) inhabiting Jerusalem? Not, I am saying to you, but if ever not you should repent all similarly you will be destroyed" (end quote, pages 349-350).

Over against this "literal word-for-word translation into English", taken from the "Westcott...Hort" text, we have "the New World

Translation...a modern-language translation of the Westcott and Hort Greek Text" as follows:

"So in reply he said to them: 'Do you imagine that these Galileans were proved worse sinners than all other Galileans because they have suffered these things?... Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, thereby killing them, do you imagine that they were proved greater debtors than all other men inhabiting Jerusalem? No, indeed, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all be destroyed in the same way" (end quote, pages 349,350).

One thing is certain: a comparison of the "literal word-for-word translation into English" from the "Westcott...Hort" text clearly shows that there was no original Greek word which could be translated "other". Yet, in the "New World Translation...a modern-language translation of the Westcott and Hort Greek text", the Jehovah's Witnesses inserted the word "other" although their was no original Greek word corresponding to it.

This book, which they endorse, when read word for word, comparing the original text to their rendition of it, clearly reveals their fraudulent tactics. This is exactly what they have done in inserting the word "other" in Colossians 1:16,17.

Let us notice several other facts revealed in The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures, which Jehovah's Witnesses endorse, as follows:

In John 1:1 we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In the original Greek text revised by Westcott and Hort, the definite article "the" appears before the first word "God", but is omitted before the second word "God". Thus, Jehovah's Witnesses use this as a basis for distinguishing between "a god", Jesus Christ, and "the God", His Father. Hence, they translate John 1:1 as follows:

"In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god."

If the Lord Jesus Christ and Jehovah are one in nature, the doctrine of Jehovah's Witnesses cannot stand. Therefore, they make every effort to change the truth into a lie. In the first place, there are many places in scripture where reference is made to God the Father, yet the definite article "the" does not appear before that designation.

See Matthew 5:9, Matthew 6:24, John 1:6, John 1:12, John 1:13, John 3:2, John 3:21, Romans 1:7, I Corinthians 1:30, and Titus 1:1 as cases to point. In the second place, John 20:28 in The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures, reads as follows:

"Answered Thomas and he said to him The Lord of me and the God of me" (end quote).

Here, the original text has the definite article "the" before both "Lord" and "God". Hence, Jesus Christ is "the God". The original text also says, "and God was the Word". It does not say, "and the Word was a god", yet that is how Jehovah's Witnesses translate it.