

Confusing Terms Describing Jesus Christ

By Dr. Gary M. Gulan, © 1990 (2001)

Introduction: Many of the false religions and cults misunderstand some of the terms used to describe Jesus Christ. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses in particular. I believe that God deliberately has used these terms that could be easily confused so that false religions and false prophets can be detected. Without the Holy Spirit living inside you and without a knowledge of Scripture one cannot understand who Jesus Christ really is.

By understanding the terms used to describe Christ, we will appreciate Him more.

1. DID CHRIST HAVE A BEGINNING?

A. Usage of "beginning" in God's Word

The word "beginning" (Greek "arche") is used with "Jesus Christ" three times: "And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the **beginning**..." (Col. 1:18); "... the **beginning** of the creation," (Rev. 3:14); and "I am the Alpha and Omega, the **Beginning** and the end..." (Rev.22:13).

B. False teaching from the word "beginning"

There are several false teachings derived from this phrase "the beginning." First, Christ had a definite beginning and second, Christ was the first of the creative acts of God. These false views would incorrectly imply that: first, Christ is not truly God as equal with the Father because He was created. second, Christ would just be one of the many christs to come.

C. Truth from God's Word about "beginning"

We know that Christ was always with the Father in eternity past, (John 1:1-14). We also know that there is only one true Christ, (Mark 13:22; 1 John 2:18).

The word "beginning" seems to carry the idea of "rank" rather than "time," (Col. 1:17 "before all things;" 1:18 "That He might have the preeminence").

The idea of "origin of and ruling force over God's creation," (Rev. 3:14). The idea of an "authority status over creation and existence before anything created," (Rev. 22:13)

2. WAS CHRIST A BEGOTTEN GOD?

A. Usage of "begotten" in God's Word

The word "begotten" (Greek "gennao" or can be translated "born" or "birth") is used with "Jesus Christ" three times: "... this day have I **begotten** Thee," (Acts 13:33); "... this day have I **begotten** Thee," (Heb. 1:5); and "...thou art my Son, today have I **begotten** Thee," (Heb. 5:5)

B. False teaching from the word "begotten"

There are several false teachings derived from the word "begotten." First, the belief that Christ was a born offspring of God; and that second, the Father who is the eternal God brought Christ into existence as a God. These false views would incorrectly imply that: first, Christ is not truly God; and second, Christ is not equal with the Father, because Christ was created.

C. Truth from God's Word about "begotten"

There is only one true God, of which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are co-existent and eternal, (Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; 1 Tim. 2:5; Eph. 4:6; Ja. 2:19). This means that God has not given birth to more Gods and does not give birth to more Gods. The term "begotten" doesn't always refer to a physical offspring relationship, but can refer to a special relationship, to a one-of-a-kind or very unique relationship.

This can be illustrated with the relationship between Paul and Onesimus (Phile. 10). Paul wrote, "... my son Onesimus whom I have begotten in my bonds." Physically, Onesimus could have been old enough to be Paul's father. Paul was speaking of the fact that he led Onesimus into a special relationship with the Lord. There are many of these special relationships described by using family terms in a non-literal usage, (1 Cor. 4:15; Jn. 1:13; 1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 4:7).

3. WAS CHRIST THE "ONLY BEGOTTEN" GOD?

A. Usage of "only begotten" in God's Word

The word "only begotten" (Greek "monogenes" can be translated "only born") is used with Jesus Christ four times: "...the glory of the **only begotten** of the father," (Jn. 1:14); "...the **only begotten** Son..." (Jn. 1:18); "...God sent His **only begotten** Son..." (Jn. 3:16); and "...hath not believed in the name of the **only begotten** Son of God," (Jn. 3:18).

B. False teaching from the word "only begotten"

There are several false teachings derived from the words "only begotten." First, Christ was the only one created as a God in the sense of being equal with God the Father through birth; and second, Christ was born a God at some point in time and this was the only time God the Father produced an offspring such as Christ.

These false views would incorrectly imply that: first, Christ is not truly God, as equal with the Father; and second, Christ was created.

C. Truth from God's Word about "only begotten"

The term "only begotten" doesn't always refer to a physical offspring relationship, but rather refers to a one-of-a-kind or very unique relationship.

One example of this "one-of-a-kind or unique relationship" is illustrated by Abraham who offered up his only begotten son, (Hebrews 11:17). In fact God's Word referred to Issac as Abraham's only son, (Genesis 22:2). However, the use of the word "only begotten" and "only" son does not refer to an only born son as though Abraham had no other sons. Because we know that Ishmael was the first born son Abraham, (Genesis 16:1-15) and Isaac was actually a second born seed to Abraham. Not only was there a son born before Isaac to Abraham, but there were six sons born through Abraham after Isaac, (Genesis 25:2). Thus, Abraham offered up his "unique" or "one-of-a-kind" son. He was unique in that he was the one that related to the blessing of the covenant. Likewise, Christ is the unique Son, which the Father offered up to fulfill the terms of redemption.

4. WAS CHRIST THE "FIRST CREATED" GOD?

A. Usage of "firstborn" in God's Word

The word "firstborn" (Greek "prototokos") is used with "Jesus Christ" five times: "...the **firstborn** among many brethren," (Rom. 8:29); "...the **firstborn** of every creature," (Col. 1:15); "...the **firstborn** from the dead," (Col. 1:18); "...the **firstbegotten** into the world," (Heb. 1:6); and, "...and the **first begotten** of the dead," (Rev. 1:5).

B. False teaching from the word "firstborn"

There are several false teachings derived from the word "firstborn:" first, Christ was the first of the created creatures of God the Father; and second, Christ was the first thing to be created.

These false views would incorrectly imply that:

first, Christ is not truly God, as equal with the Father; and second, Christ was created.

C. Truth from God's Word about "firstborn"

There is only one true God and God does not create more Gods. The words, "first born" refer to a highly exalted position or a special position due to a unique privilege.

In English we use the term "first" to speak of a special position due to a unique privilege. For example, the "first lady" of our country refers to the special place of the President's wife, not the first lady in the country. Another example is with David. David is spoken of as the "first born" yet he was the youngest son, the eighth son, of Jesse, (Ps. 89:19-29). When used with Christ the term "firstborn" carries the meaning "highly exalted position" referring to the rank, privilege and accomplishment of Christ, (Col. 1:15, Heb. 1:5, 12:23).

5. WAS CHRIST GOD'S MALE OFFSPRING?

A. Usage of "son" in God's Word

The word "son" (Greek "huios") is used with "Jesus Christ" 65 times: "...only begotten **son**...", (Jn. 3:16); and "...Jesus the **Son** of God...", (Heb. 4:14).

B. False teaching from the word "son"

There are several false teachings derived from the word "son:" first, the Father-Son relationship shows that the Son was created by the Father, second, Christ is a lesser God than the father, third, other Gods were also created since the Father procreated Christ. These false views would imply that: first, Christ is not equal with the Father, second, Christ was not eternal like the Father, third, Christ was a created God, and fourth, there are other Gods that the Father created.

C. Truth from God's Word about "son"

Christ is was fully God while having a physical body, (Col. 2:9). Christ could not be a "son" of God in keeping with the human analogy of a created offspring, because He existed in eternity past as God, (Jn. 1:1-1,14). The term "son" may mean a physically created male offspring, however, it doesn't always mean that. The term may also mean the following: one, a pupil or follower of another, second, someone with personal ties to another, third, someone who shares in the same privileges, fourth, someone who is worthy of the same privileges, or fifth, someone who stands in close relationship with another. All of these thoughts apply in some way to Christ.

The Jews understood Christ to mean that He was equal with God by claiming God was His Father, (Jn. 5:18). The Jews sought to kill Christ because He called Himself "God" by using the term "son of God," (Jn. 10:31-39). Jesus was found guilty of blasphemy because of His claim of equality to God in the phrases, "The Christ" and "the Son of God," (Matt. 26:63-66).

Conclusion: Jesus Christ is not merely a man, nor a created god, nor the first created god, but is "the God in the flesh. "