

Lee Irons has posted a summary of his unpublished paper on MONOGENES

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Just a quick follow-up on my [last post](#). Lee Irons has posted a [summary](#) of his unpublished paper at The Gospel Coalition website. Obviously, there is much more to his argument than what is included in a single blog post. Still, you can see the broad outlines of his work [there](#).

I should also mention that the paper that convinced Grudem to change his view is nearly two years old. Lee has collected even more evidence and data since 2014, and the case for “only-begotten” has gotten even more compelling as a result. The results of that research will appear in a forthcoming volume edited by Fred Sanders and Scott Swain, *Retrieving Eternal Generation* (Zondervan, 2017).

In Lee’s TGC summary, he is careful to point out that the interpretation of MONOGENES is but one exegetical proof for the doctrine of eternal generation. The doctrine is rooted in a broad array of texts covering the canon of scripture. Having said that, MONOGENES appears in the Nicene Creed as a linchpin. The Nicene Fathers appear to give it special prominence in their formulations. Just one example of this outside the creed, I’ve been reading St. Basil the Great’s “On the Holy Spirit,” and he repeatedly refers to the Son as the “only-begotten” or the “only-begotten God.” The interpretation of MONOGENES was a crux in 4th century formulations of the trinity.

I cannot overstate how entrenched the non-generative rendering is among New Testament scholars. For that reason, I expect a lot of scholarly back-and-forth on this question over the next few years. But I think Lee’s argument will eventually carry the day. The evidence is overwhelming.

UPDATE: Dan Wallace has written a [brief response](#) to Lee’s TGC article. Three quick thoughts on Wallace’s remarks:

(1) Wallace thinks the term’s use with “offspring” language is evidence *against* its being generative. Why? Because it’s tautological. That is not a very compelling argument. The NT is filled with pleonastic expressions. I don’t think this objection is going to be very convincing.

(2) Lee is not engaging in the etymological fallacy. On this point, it would be helpful to read Lee's full paper in light of Moody's 1953 article, which set the terms of the present discussion. Lee brings up the etymological argument because that is at the heart of Moody's contention about the meaning of the term. Lee is showing that the etymological situation is not what Moody described it to be. And Lee is exactly right about that. In other words, if an etymological argument tilts in anyone's favor, it tilts in the direction of "only-begotten."

(3) Everyone would do well to remember what the root fallacy is. The root fallacy is not that words *never* reflect the meanings of their component parts but that they may not *necessarily* reflect the meanings of their component parts (see D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, pp. 28, 32). Some words do (butter-knife), and some words don't (butterfly). The question at hand is to what extent MONOGENES may reflect the meanings of its components (MONO "only" + GENES "kind" or "begotten") and whether the -GENES suffix encodes the idea of generation. Answering those questions requires careful attention to usage of the word in biblical and non-biblical Greek literature from the Koine period. And that's exactly what Lee's article provides. As Wallace observes, "If 'begotten' is the routine meaning diachronically, and especially synchronically during the Koine period, Irons may well have a point."

(4) It would be wise to withhold judgment until seeing the evidence Lee has amassed. Lee has 60+ examples of MONOGENES from 2nd century and earlier. That is a decent data set. Also, other nouns with the suffix -GENES are certainly relevant to the discussion. If some or most are generative (like with the raft of proper names—Hermogenes="offspring of Hermes"), it would be absurd to rule that evidence out as irrelevant.

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