

Text: John 1:4

Title: "Eternal life"

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Introduction: Dr. James Tour is the T.T. and W.F. Chao Professor of Chemistry at Rice University. His is one of the ten most cited chemists in the world, having produced over 600 research publications and holding 120 patents.

Tour is a Christian believer who published a long article on the current state of scientific research into the evolutionary origin of life titled, "Animadversions [strong criticisms] of a Synthetic Chemist." In the article he concluded:

"Those who think scientists understand the issues of prebiotic chemistry [the chemical processes that lead from nonlife to the origin of life in the theory of evolution] are wholly misinformed. Nobody understands them. Maybe one day we will. But that day is far from today. It would be far more helpful (and hopeful) to expose students to the massive gaps in our understanding. They may find a firmer – and possibly a radically different – scientific theory. The basis upon which we as scientists are relying is so shaky that we must openly state the situation for what it is: it is a mystery."

Tour comments about his article: "But even in that article, I never addressed the issue of information. The information or coding within the DNA (or RNA) that corresponds to the sequence of the nucleic acids is primary to the entire discussion of life. Some would rightly argue that the information is even more fundamental than the matter upon which it is encoded. I merely showed that the requisite molecules (lipids, proteins, nucleic acids and carbohydrates) are so unlikely to have occurred in the states and quantities needed, that we could never have gotten to the point of figuring out the genesis of the requisite code or information. The code is analogous to the

difference between the Library of Congress and a big box of alphabetic letters – the library has a huge amount of embedded information while the random box of letters has little. So origin of first life is the ‘nail holding the coffin closed’ on the emergence of biological evolution. Without that first life, or simple cell, which requires the four molecule types plus information, all proposals regarding biological evolution are without the base of life. And it is difficult to discuss biology without life.”

Tour is certainly correct that it is difficult to discuss biology without life. *Biology* means *the study of life*. *Bios* is a Greek word meaning *life*, but it is not a word John uses for *life*. In fact, the Gospel of John makes perfectly clear that while it is impossible to speak of biology without life, it is certainly possible to speak about life without biology.

Life is a major emphasis in the Gospel of John. He uses the verb *to live* (*zao*) 17 times, which is only one shy of the usages in the other Gospels combined. Only Romans has more NT usages of this verb than John’s Gospel. More significantly, John uses the noun *life* (*zoe*) 36 times. John’s Revelation places second with 17 usages, and then Romans with 14. Clearly, John wants us to understand God’s truth about life, and in none of these verses is John ever talking about biology.

Science has been unable to provide a definition for life. The Bible does not suffer from that limitation, because the Creator’s understanding of life transcends the reproducing cells and programmed DNA He created as the building blocks of biology. Amazing though those creations are, they do not factor into scriptural teaching about life.

The Bible simply tells us that life is the opposite of death. In John 5:24, Jesus speaks of people who “have passed from death into life.” So if you are dead, you are not alive; and if you are alive, you are not dead.

So a good way to define *life*, according to Scripture, is to begin with the definition of *death*. Once we understand the biblical definition of *death*, we will understand that its inverse is the biblical definition of *life*.

Biblically, *death* is simply separation. The Bible teaches that a living man is made of a physical human body and a nonphysical human spirit. When that man dies physically, the human spirit separates from the physical body. None of the chemistry of the body changes in the moment of physical death. All the DNA is still there with its information. All the molecules needed for life are still present. But death has occurred because the human spirit has been separated from the body. Physical death is this separation.

The Bible also tells us about spiritual death, and it too is a separation. Spiritual death is a separation of the human, both body and spirit, from God. This separation happened to the human race when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden. Rom. 5:12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Sons and daughters of Adam, we are born into this world spiritually dead, meaning that we are separated from God.

God is holy. He cannot tolerate the presence of sin. Because humans are sinners, our sin separates us from our holy God. Adam and Eve died the day they ate of the forbidden tree. They could no longer walk with God in the Garden. Ever since, their children have been born into this world spiritually dead, equally separated from God due to sin.

The opposite of this condition of spiritual death is what John mentions 36 times in his Gospel. It is not biological life; it is eternal life. Eternal life is the antidote to spiritual death, which is separation from God. And so John quotes Jesus, who defined eternal life as no longer being separated from God:

“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

To be eternally dead is to be separated from God by sin. To have eternal life is the removal of that separation, to know in a personal relationship of reunion the true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Do you know God? Do you have a relationship with Jesus Christ? Or are you still spiritually dead?

These are important questions, for John warns that to be spiritually dead is dangerous. It includes being under the judgment of God for our sin, which caused this separation (3:36, “He that believeth on the Son hath life. He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him”).

And so John wrote his Gospel to tell us about eternal life, which is reunion with God. I want us to note three truths from about eternal life this morning.

I. Where: Eternal life is in Jesus Christ (1:4, “In Him was life”).

Illustration: Death is universally understood to be an enemy against which we must fight. We recognize that people who want to die are suffering from mental illness. Last Thursday a pastor friend of mine conducted a funeral for the family of a man who committed suicide, leaving behind his wife and three granddaughters. We all understand when we hear this news that our sister church is dealing with a severe tragedy. Our culture’s glorification of death is unnatural and unholy.

Application: In John 10 Jesus tells us that He is the Good Shepherd, and he explains our need for a Good Shepherd this way in v. 10: “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” Satan came to the Garden of Eden, and man died. Man was stolen, killed, and destroyed. The Good Shepherd came to restore life.

The chapter tells us how He restores life to sinners: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (v. 11); "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep" (v. 15); "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (v. 17).

That last phrase, "that I might take it again," is a key to why it is that eternal life is in Jesus Christ. He not only died for His sheep; He arose. In death Jesus paid for our sins; in His resurrection Jesus conquered our death. He told His disciples on the night of His arrest, "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also" (14:19). So as the Risen One, He alone is our life-source: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (14:6). Only the Good Shepherd loved the sheep this way: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (15:13).

John's Gospel tells us that, because eternal life is in Jesus Christ, His words have the power to impart eternal life (6:63, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are life"; 6:68, "Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life"; 12:50, "And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak").

This power to give eternal life extends to the Scriptures, the Word of God (5:39, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me"). John's Gospel is included: (20:31, "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name").

Best of all from our perspective, the truth that eternal life is in Jesus Christ means that eternal life is a free gift from God to

us, for God gave us Christ freely (3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"; 17:2, Jesus prays to the Father about Himself: "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him"). Have you received this gift? Perhaps you would, but you are asking, "How?"

II. How: We receive eternal life by believing on Jesus Christ (1:5, 9-12).

Illustration: Charles Blondin was one of the greatest highwire performers in the world. The story is told that one time he wheeled out a wheelbarrow on a wire extended between two London high-rise buildings. The wheelbarrow contained all he needed to cook and eat his breakfast out there.

After doing so, he returned to the top of one of the buildings where a group of young admirers had assembled. Blondin asked their spokesman if he had been afraid when Blondin was out on the wire. The boy said he had not been. The performer then asked if the boy believed he could take a man in his wheelbarrow across the wire to the other building. The boy confidently asserted he believed so. But when Blondin asked the boy to get in the wheelbarrow, he ran away.

Application: We receive eternal life by believing in Jesus to save us from our sins. Jesus has a wheelbarrow, and He asks us to get in. At times in the Gospel of John, the unbelief of some who say they believe in Jesus is exposed. They eventually run away. They never entered Jesus's wheelbarrow of saving faith for eternal life. Theirs was a false claim to faith.

In John's Gospel, saving faith is distinguishable from false faith in important ways. Saving faith is a faith that comes to Christ (5:40, "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life"). Saving faith is a faith that can see Christ for who He tru-

ly is (6:40, "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day"). Saving faith is a faith that hungers and thirsts for a Savior (6:54, "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day"). Finally, saving faith is a faith that asks for salvation (4:10, "Jesus answered and said unto her, 'If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, "Give me to drink"; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water'").

Are we in the wheelbarrow? Have we truly believed on Christ for eternal life? Have we come to Him having seen who He truly is? Were we ever hungry and thirsty for His salvation, so much so that we asked Him to save us? This believing on Jesus Christ is how we receive eternal life.

III. When: True believers are born anew and so possess eternal life now, not merely later (1:13).

Illustration: In his *Gettysburg Address*, President Lincoln described the need of a nation torn by civil war as "a new-birth of freedom." He got His "new-birth" language from the Bible.

Application: John's Gospel speaks of the gift of eternal life as a new-birth (John 3). Unlike the temporal freedom of which Lincoln spoke, however, which could be lost and had to be fought over to be gained again, this new-birth results in eternal life, which is just that - eternal. It cannot end.

It is on the one hand a future blessing that happens after we die physically (11:25, "Jesus said unto her [Martha], I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"), but on the other hand it is also a present blessing, which means the believer shall never die spiritually (11:26, "And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?").

That the life of the age to come is the life that we believers possess even now is a unique emphasis in the Gospel of John (5:29, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”) When John quotes Jesus as saying “hath everlasting life,” he uses the present tense, meaning the believer has it now. When he says “is passed from death unto life,” he uses the perfect tense, meaning this has happened in the past, and its results continue on.

Conclusion: This is eternal life. And so, what is the only responsible response from those who have been so blessed as to be right now in possession of eternal life? John tells us plainly:

“Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed” (6:27).

“He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal” (12:25).

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*