

First John Chapter 3 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is the phrase, "Children of God". What does it mean and why should we care? Realize that term is used six times in this chapter (once as "child of God"), so whatever it means, it's important to the author. First let me tell you what it doesn't mean: All people who've ever lived. It also doesn't refer to all people so will be in heaven. It only refers those of us who've dedicated their lives to serving God by believing Jesus paid the complete price of our sins. If that is case, why not call, "Children of God" Christians? By the time John wrote this epistle, I'm pretty sure "Christians" was a commonly used term. The reason he wanted to use the specific expression "Children of God" is he wanted to describe how those of us who are Christians are distinct from those who've not dedicated their lives to serving Christ and that term is a better description.
 - a) The point is John wants us (the readers) to realize how we can tell we're saved and how is it we're supposed to act as Christians. My last lesson on Chapter 2 focused on we can tell for sure we're saved based on our behavior. This lesson continues that theme, but we also will get into the benefits of being "Children of God".
 - b) To explain this term another way, we have wonderful eternal benefits for being children of God. My job in this lesson is to explain in more detail what that term means and why it is we should care what it means. Therefore bear with me while I highlight Chapter 3 with the rest of this introduction as I explain how "Children of God" should act and are blessed:
2. The first few verses explain that we're called Children of God, because God loves us. If you ever think you're not special or that you've messed your life up too much to ever be special, my job is to help change your attitude about your life. Whether or not we feel special, realize that if you're trusting Jesus for the complete payment of your sins, you're special because the entity that we call God thinks you're special enough that He specifically picked you to spend eternity with Him. If you say there are multitudes of Christians, then ask is the God you believe in big enough that He can have a personal relationship with all those people? My point is God's big enough not only to care about all those people, but also big enough to care about each of us individually as He wants to get involved in our lives and guide them for His glory. If you get that, you're starting to get the idea of what a "Child of God" is about. That's also why the term "Christian" isn't a strong enough word to describe that special relationship we each have with God.
 - a) Then the first few verses make the point that even though we can't fully comprehend God there will come a day when we'll each see Him clearly enough that we'll understand what He's like. Personally for Christians, I've never liked the word death, as we don't really die as much as we're transformed into a new reality. My favorite analogy is like a child when he or she falls asleep somewhere and is then carried to bed. They may wake up pondering how they got from where they were to bed. That's sort of how I picture our transfer from our present life to the next one. My point is after that instant transformation occurs, we'll see God far more clearly than we do at the present time.
3. The next issue about being a "Child of God" is about sin. The term sin literally refers to "missing the mark", like shooting at a target and missing after we shot. The idea is about realizing here's how God wants us to live. When we fail to live by His rules, we "miss the mark" and sin. I'm not saying we have to be perfect. The issue is about how we habitually live. If we don't care about pleasing God, then we can sin all we want, as we don't believe God will judge us. When we do make the effort to avoid sin, it's because we realize that's the best way to live and we care about pleasing the one who created us in the first place. Think about sin this way: If we do something we know isn't pleasing to God, do we feel guilty about it and want to turn from it? If that's the case, we don't habitually sin in the sense we care about pleasing God. In summary it's not about being perfect. It's about the fact we've made the decision to change our lifestyle, as we desire to live a life pleasing to God in all that we do.

4. Then the text changes from the negative to the positive. One way to tell if we're Children of God or not is whether or not we care about putting the needs of others ahead of our own needs. This isn't about being perfect or not taking care of ourselves, say when we're sick. The issue is do we go through life thinking in terms of caring about other's needs more than our own? If that's the case, that's a sign not only that we're saved but we're "Children of God" since we realize we can't earn our salvation, all we can do to please God is be a good witness for Him by caring about the lives of others as a priority over our own lives. If we only care about ourselves or say our family how would anyone ever know we're Christians? That's why it's part of Christian's nature to care about others, even strangers and people we don't like as priority over our own needs.
 - a) From here we get a strange example. The book of Genesis includes a story of one of the sons of Adam and Eve named Cain, who killed one of his siblings out of jealousy. It's the first recorded literal act of murder in the bible. It's mentioned here as an example of how a "Child of God" should act. Among the issues implied is Cain's jealousy. Let's face it, we wouldn't want to hurt anyone unless we're jealous about what they've done or if we think they're behavior is harmful to us. My point is we can't satisfy our hatred by murdering a person we don't like. Even if we murder to cover up our sins, that's still problems as we don't want what they know to spread to others. How Cain acted in that Genesis story is a reminder to us to show kindness to others and not be jealous of what others have done or not done to us.
 - b) From there we get even a stranger transition. We get the reminder that Jesus died for us, a little like a soldier falling on a grenade in order to save the lives of others around him. The point being that if God has that much love for us that He's willing to die for people, shouldn't we have that same sort of attitude toward others? How do I practically do that? It's about relying upon God's power so we can make a difference in the world around us as we do put the needs of others as priority over our own needs. It's to realize if God has forgiven us of all our sins, and we can't use our lives to prove our worth to Him, then all we can do is use our lives to be a witness for Him and we do that by caring about others.
 - c) The chapter ends with the reminder that if God loves us "that much", shouldn't we have a love for others that reflects that type of love? Again, I'm not saying we have to be perfect. I am saying that if we do have a heart for God and are grateful for what Jesus did for us, it should be reflected in how we live out our lives. That's how we know for sure we're saved as we're willing to help others just as God's helped us.
5. In summary, to be a "Child of God" is a good thing in that it's all about realizing how much God loves us individually and wants to guide our lives for His glory. What He wants us to do as His children is act as He acts. That just means we rely upon His power working in us to care about others and seeing others drawing close to Him with their lives as we've drawn close to Him. We can know for sure we're saved when we live with that attitude that sin is to be avoided as much as possible and we use our lives to make the world around us a better place as we care for others. If you get that, you understand what being a Child of God means.
6. With that said, you just read a summary of what God wants us to know from Chapter 3 of "First John". If you're interested in more details, I encourage you to follow along with me as I go verse by verse through this chapter. If you liked it so far, you'll probably love the rest of the lesson:
7. Chapter 3, Verse 1: How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.
 - a) Verse 1 begins with John stating the fact that God must really love us individually as well as collectively as Christians, which is why John uses the term "Children of God". When I think of John, I think of the "contemplative" type of person. He's the kind of person who likes to think about and contemplate life's meaning. Here he's thinking about God's love.

- b) Pause for a moment and think about John's life. He's an old man at this point. He's aware that all the original disciples and Paul (not one of the original 12) are no longer alive in his world. John's seen his own brother martyred for believing Jesus is God, who died for our sins. He's seen, or is aware of lots of people including his fellow disciples being killed for believing Jesus is God. John also realizes to live in a Roman world, believing there's only one God, is a danger at the least, and at many times a death sentence. Yet despite all that negative background, John is saying to all his readers including us, that God loves us so much, the word "Christian" (which just means "like Christ or little Christ") doesn't cut it as the word Christian doesn't explain just how much God loves us. Therefore John uses the term "children of God" to describe to us how special we are if we believe Jesus is God and did die for our sins.
- i) So you know, John didn't make up that term. Jesus used it to describe believers in Matthew 5:9, John 1:12, 11:52 and Paul used that term several times in Romans 8 as well as Galatians Chapter 3 and Philippians 2:15. My point is that phrase is used by other New Testament writers. John's the only one who describes it. The other references mainly describe that we "are" children of God if we do this or that.
 - ii) Here in First John, John's contemplating how much God loves us as He considers us Christians "His children". But doesn't God love all people as is stated in one of the most famous verses, John 3:16? The difference between His love for Christians and His love for the world is the Christian realizes how much He loves us as we accept the fact He died on our behalf. Think of God's love for us as "concentrated" as we realize He first loved us and we react by accepting His love for us.
 - iii) As I said in the introduction, if you think you're nothing special, or just a Christian stop and think how much God loves you as an individual that He's willing to die for you individually and give His life for yours. What if you think, I've messed up my life to date? Welcome to the club. If you realize God knows all of that, and He still was willing to die for you, then we should use the rest of our lives to make a difference for Him. That's what He desires. So where do I start? The answer is, where are you "at"? What can I do "around here" to make a difference? What do you love to do anyway, and how can you use that love for God's kingdom? If we start to think that way, we can show love to others as God showed His love to us.
- c) OK, now that I've got us all pumped up thinking we're something special, realize the way we do make a difference for God is by relying upon His power to do so and not through our own strength or gifts. As I like to point out, I get up early to write, as I can't stand not doing so. That should be each of our lives, figuring out what we love to do anyway, and making an effort to use our time based on what brings us joy and use it for the benefit of others around us.
- d) Believe it or not, all of that does lead us back to the first three verses. After John gets us to know how special we are for being "Children of God", John tells us in the second part of Verse 1 that the "world" (i.e., nonbelievers that Jesus is fully God, fully man and fully paid the price for every sin we'll ever commit) do not get that privilege of that title. Then John asks the question in effect, "so what?" So we get that love, what's the benefit? The point is none of us can fully comprehend that love in this lifetime. We sort of see God in a "fuzzy way" based on what is said about Him in the bible. However, there will come a day after we're no longer living in this world where are knowledge of God is no longer limited.
- i) A good example of this is Paul's comment in 1st Corinthians 13:12. Paul describes our knowledge of God like looking in a mirror. A mirror in Paul's day was not a clear mirror like we have today. It was a fuzzy reflection to use that word again. The point being is when we are transformed from death to life in heaven, we will no longer see God dimly based on what we can learn about Him in the bible, but it will now be a personal close relationship as we're with Him forever in heaven.

- e) Believe it or not, I'm still not done with the first three verses. Verse 3 then says all of us who have this hope "Purifies our self as we are pure". Does that mean we're perfect? Of course not. However, if we are fully forgiven of every sin we've ever committed or ever will commit, that would make us "pure" in God's eye's. The point being is if we believe in a God that's perfect by definition, then wouldn't we need to be perfect to be with Him? Again, of course, which is why we as "Children of God" are made pure by Jesus payment for our sins. I know I'm preaching to the choir here, but as we go through the rest of this chapter, it's important that we first understand and realize what a privilege it is in this life as well as eternity it is to be a child of God. Now that I've beaten that point to death, let's go on to Verse 4.
8. Verse 4: Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.⁵ But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.⁶ No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.
- a) The first thing to grasp about these verses is the difference between sinning and what I'll call "habitual" sinning. Do Christians sin and I do sin? Of course we do. I suspect if we had to stand before God and confess every sin we've ever committed, we'd each be there a long time. What I mean by habitual sinning is if we care about pleasing God, then it will bother us when we sin. Consider it this way: Do you feel guilty if you've lied to someone recently? Does it bother you when you did something you know God doesn't approve of? Congratulations, you're not part of the "habitual" bad group John's describing here. John is referring to the type of people who think, "So what if I stole that, I got away with it! So what if I lied there or so what if I never go to church, it's not like God really exists or cares if I go or not!"
- b) My point is if we care about pleasing God with our lives, then we seriously care whether or not we sin. Again it's not about being perfect, but we care about our relationship with Him to a point where we do our best to avoid sin in the first place. What if someone says, "Hey I can sin all I want as I'm forgiven of all my sins!" My response is if you are grateful for your salvation, why would you want to be unpleasing to God by living that way? We don't avoid sin to earn points with God, we avoid sin as it does harm to our lives as well as the fact it disappoints the one we love and are grateful for rescuing us from sin.
- c) Think about it this way: If we steal, murder, lie, or even avoid a relationship with God, besides the fact we're hurting innocent people, aren't we also hurting ourselves? Aren't we also wasting the most valuable thing we own, our lives and our time? Consider that God didn't for example give us the 10 Commandments for His benefit, but for ours. This is about what's the best way for us to live out our lives. We're definitely better people as we live by avoiding sin as much as possible and live to try to please God with our lives. Again, not to "earn points" with Him, but because that's the best way for us to live.
- d) I'm well aware I'm "preaching to the choir" again, but in order for us to realize what John means by the idea of not sinning habitually, it's important to understand the distinction between us as Christians sinning but regretting it later, versus someone who doesn't care about pleasing God, sinning all they want as they figure it doesn't matter. That's why we read in these verses that there is no sin within Jesus and no one that cares about pleasing God chooses to willfully sin without any fears of regrets of the consequences of those sins.
- e) Let me finish up my comments on these verses by assuring us that if we're in a mess with our lives due to a bad habit that we're still fighting, again welcome to the club. I'd argue that every Christian has at least one battle that they have to fight all of their lives. It can be as simple as the desire to gossip about other's problems to something as dangerous as a battle with a bad drug. My point is the desire to sin does not decrease with age or time as a believer. When a tempting situation comes along, we need to think, how can I get away, or else, not now. I know it's tempting, but my love for God is greater than my desire for whatever "this" is, and I know by committing that sin I'm not pleasing to God right now.

9. Verse 7: Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. ⁸ He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. ⁹ No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.
- a) Way back when I was a kid, there was a popular comedian named "Flip Wilson". He used to do a sketch with the tag line, "The devil made me do it". The point was if he did a thing that was wrong, instead of taking the blame, he'd blame the devil for his deeds. That will lead me to a quick discussion of the devil:
 - b) First, he's not some sort of monster looking creature with a long fork in his hand. He's a real entity that is occasionally described all over the Old and New Testament. My point is he's a real being. He can't be everywhere at once, but think of him as a general of a large army whose main function is to drive people away from God. Even when people become believers, the function of his army is to make us ineffective witnesses for Jesus. As I love to say on occasion, if you don't believe demons are real, try being a witness for Jesus and watch "things" happen. I'm not saying we lose to demons, because the reason God allows them to exist is to show us that God's power that works in us, is greater than the methods such demons use to drive others and us away from God in the first place.
 - c) Some people who know their bible well wonder why does the book of Revelation describe a 1,000 year period of time that scholars call the "millennium" where Jesus reigns over the world and the devil is locked up during that time? Why not just destroy him and be done with it? The answer leads me back to the Flip Wilson sketch. Having a time period where the devil isn't around shows the world that people can and do sin without the influence of the devil or his demons. The point of having a literal 1,000 year time period is to show the world that people sin without having a devil to blame it on. If you're not familiar with the scripture reference, it is Revelation 20, Verses 1 to 3, which I believe is very literal.
 - d) All of that theology about the devil leads me back to these verses. Verse 7 begins with the expression: "Don't let anyone lead us astray". The "anyone" refers to anyone and everyone trying to get us away from being devout Christians by saying something like, all of that is a waste of time. Such people are under demonic influence even if they refuse to think so. There is an army expression that one shouldn't waste the ammunition given to them. My point is the reason nonbelievers don't feel like they have any sort of demonic influence is such demons don't "waste their ammo" on those who are not using their lives to make a difference for God. Again, such demons are not "bogey men" who make us do strange things. They're simply spiritual beings that believe God exists but don't want to do His will and want to reign over this world as long as they can, before Jesus returns to wrap it up. That's why Verse 8 effectively says he or she who's habitually sins (that is, not caring about the consequences) is "of the devil" even though such people refuse to believe they're influenced by such demons to begin with.
 - e) That leads me to the second sentence of Verse 8. It effectively says Jesus came to destroy the work of the devil. The logical question is if He did that why is there still sin? First, we need to grasp the idea that Jesus death wasn't to bring to an end all sin from occurring. It was to satisfy God's wrath for the damage caused by sin. What the cross did was end the effect of eternal damnation due to sin. Does that mean nobody was saved before Jesus? Of course not. People were saved then as they are today, in the belief that God exists, and it's our job as those who believe in His existence to use our lives to make a difference for Him. I'm convinced people will be fairly judged based on what we do know about God and what we did with that knowledge of His existence.

- f) All of this leads us back to what are "the children of God". The point is a way we can tell if we are such "children", is we don't habitually sin in the sense we do care about pleasing God and make the effort to avoid sin as much as possible.
- g) The next thing I should discuss is why John uses the term "children". Why not say "adults of God" or "humans that God focuses His love upon"? Notice in Verse 9 that one way we do know we are God's children is His "seed" remains in us. OK, what does that mean and what does that have to do with the fact that God calls us His children? So glad you asked!
- i) There is a term bible scholars like to use called "direct creation" of God as opposed to something that's an offspring of something already created. For example Adam was a direct creation of God and all people are Adam and Eve's offspring.
 - ii) That leads me back to Verse 9 where it says God's seed remains in us. In one sense it's describing the fact that as believes God is making a "home" within us so He can guide our lives for His glory. It's called a "seed" in that it's a start of a new life and as we grow in our trust of God, that seed grows in the sense that we grow in trust of how God's guiding our live for His glory.
 - iii) That leads me of course back to the term "children". John calls us children not just because we're newer in the faith than Him, but also because as each of us now live as a "new creature". That is a human with God "inside of us" guiding our lives for His glory. The reason we still sin is God still gives us the free will to choose to do His will or not. My point is "child of God" is describing what we are as Christians, human beings that desire that God guides our lives for His glory.
- h) Before I move on, I should also pause at this moment and remind all of what "righteous" means. Verse 7 reads, "what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous". Since John refers to Jesus as "righteous" and God desires we be "righteous", let me define that. I checked an online dictionary, and I discovered that most major religions use righteous to describe if a person is doing the right thing. In both Judaism and Christianity, that word is reminding us that God's perfect by definition. What I mean by that is He cannot sin; is not capable of sinning, lying or learning. If God could do any of those things, He wouldn't be perfect. I can show you bible verses that support that idea, but hopefully you get that idea by now.
- i) The point for you and me is we can never be good enough for God based on what we do in life. We can only be truly righteous by trusting in His righteousness.
 - ii) That leads me to part of Verse 10 that says, "Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God". Doing what's right is all about living as God desires we live. It's about doing our best to live by His commandments. I'm not saying we'll ever be good enough for God. I'm saying a salvation proof for our lives, is if we live as He desires we live. We become righteous because we trust in His payment for our sins and His guidance for our lives and not based on proving our worth to Him.
- i) All of that leads me back to a discussion of the devil sinning and us sinning. The text says the devil has been sinning from the beginning and we as Christians no longer sin. I'd say that requires a quick explanation: OK, let's return to a little devil theology: Why does he sin if God created him? The answer is he has free will, and he chose to not be under God's authority for his life. His life effectively ends with Jesus' return. Therefore, he's doing all he can to delay that return by trying by preventing as many people as possible from either committing their lives to Jesus, or being an effective witnesses for Him so as witnesses, we can lead others to Jesus.
- j) OK, most of us get that. We also get the idea that Jesus came to "destroy Satan's work" in that by Jesus dying on the cross, it is possible for us to be "perfect" by accepting Jesus full payment for our sins. In that sense, what Jesus did on the cross was destroy Satan despite the fact he's still around and still doing all he can to delay Jesus Second Coming. What we have to realize is while we can't prevent the devil from trying, we realize the power God's given us to overcome Satan's work is greater than what he's capable of doing to us.

- k) Believe it or not, we're still not done with these verses. The next tough line to deal with is the phrase, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin". Since we obviously still sin, how can John say that no Christian will continue to sin? Again realize that the issue isn't salvation, it's our behavior. The overriding topic here is ways we can know we are saved. The word "continue" as John uses it implies continuing to do a thing without caring about the consequences. It'd be like saying, "I love to get drunk, I can't help getting drunk, and I don't care who it affects because it's part of my nature". My point is if we do believe Jesus is in charge of our lives, then we care about pleasing Him and we don't want to live a life that's displeasing to Him. Do we still mess up? Of course, all the time. But because we do care about pleasing God, we're going to make the effort to turn from sin, even get help as needed because we realize sins we commit are not pleasing to Him.
- l) All of that leads to Verse 10. The point there is a way we can tell if we are Christians is we care about pleasing God. A sign that we're "putting our mouth where our thoughts are" is we care about our behavior with all people. John uses the phrase "love our brother". He's going to expand on what he means by love in the next few verses. It would help here if I paused for a moment to define love as John meant it, and then I promise we'll then move on to Verse 11.
- i) In the original Greek language, there are four words that can be translated "love". One is erotic love, which refers to sexual activity. One is for brotherly love as in caring for one's extended family. One is for a love of a thing as for example if we love ice cream. The most powerful of these Greek words is "agape" which is when we care about someone else more than we care about ourselves. That's the type of love John's using in these verses.
 - ii) Therefore when John says we're to "love our brother", he's talking about putting a need of others as priority over what we want for ourselves. As a simple example, we may want after a long day to "veg out" at home and not be disturbed. But let's say our spouse needs help cleaning the kitchen. Putting our spouses needs as a priority over our desires is an example of "agape" that God desires of his children.
 - iii) With that definition of love fresh in our minds, we're actually ready for Verse 11.
10. Verse 11: This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹² Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.
- a) So you know I'm on the right track, John repeats "love one another" in the sense of putting the needs of others as priority over our own desires in Verse 11. Realize again, there's not anything new about that commandment. The most common prayer that religious Jewish people recite includes the idea of loving God as much as possible and loving our neighbor as ourselves, which is essentially the same idea. That's why John says in Verse 11 that the message "you heard from the beginning" is about love. John realizes that most readers of his letter here are aware of the Jewish concept of putting others first. Even if they're from a non-Jewish background, most Christians are taught early of the importance of putting others needs as priority over our own needs.
 - b) From here, John gives a strange example that of course requires another explanation. He says that Cain, (one of Adam and Eve's children) killed his brother Abel because Cain's actions were evil and his brother's were "righteous". The story of these brothers is told in Genesis Chapter 4. The short version is both brothers made a sacrifice to God. We read that Abel's sacrifice was accepted and Cain's was not. The text doesn't say why. What we suspect is Abel offered his sacrifice based on a desire to please God, while Cain offered his out of "necessity" because he believed he had not, not wanted to.

- c) The point of that short story in Genesis is that Cain killed Abel because he was jealous of the fact his brother's sacrifice was accepted and his was not. The point for you and me is we have to realize as Christians that some people will hate us, simply because we make an effort to go to church every week or make the effort to live by God's standards for our lives. We'll hear lines like, "You think you're better than me" or "You think you're going to heaven and I'm not because you make the effort to obey God's commandments for our lives". In parts of the world, just to be a Christian can be a crime. The point is Christians have to deal with hatred whether they like it or not. We may not act superior to others, but we have to deal with the fact some people will at the least criticize us for something as simple as having a desire to go to a Christian church every week.
- i) All of that theology leads me back to these verses. Cain killed his brother because he couldn't live with the fact his brother was considered "right" in God's eyes. We don't have to go around living in fear of being attacked in most parts of the world. We do have to be aware that believing in Jesus and making an effort to live, as He does desire we live can be a dangerous thing. In Matthew 10:16, Jesus says that He will send us out as "harmless sheep in the midst of wolves". The idea is to warn us of the danger of being a witness for Jesus as "wolves" are all around us. As I stated earlier in the lesson, if you don't believe Satan is real, try opposing him, and watch what happens. As one of my best friends taught me many years ago, a way to tell we're making a difference for Jesus is all of sudden bad stuff just happens that we have to deal with. That's John's point here in these verses.
- d) Remember that the main theme of First John is what the "signs" we're either saved or not saved. One sign is whether or not we have hatred in our heart toward people. Remember we can't do much about other's behavior. It's ours we should be concerned about. If we hold onto anger over something done to us, we have to let that anger go as it harms our relationship with God the Father. My personal favorite example of this was many years ago when someone stole money from me. I had to pray for that person's salvation daily for months to let go of that pain. Again it's not about being perfect. It's to realize when we do suffer, we give that pain to God so we can have peace with Him and let go of how others have hurt us. Yes some people are physically scared for life based on what others have done for them. There's a big difference between having the authorities deal with problems or getting medical help for our problems versus letting go of how we have been hurt by others. The shorter version is we have to do what we can to deal with pain, but lashing out or being angry with those who've hurt us never takes away that pain.
- e) Believe it or not, this ties in well with what John's talking about here. Going back to Cain killing his brother, he took out his anger on his brother as opposed to seeking God to have peace in his heart. While we may have the authorities deal with how others have hurt us, we give that anger over how others have hurt us to God in order to have peace with Him. That's how we "move on" in life as well as having peace despite whatever pain we feel.
- f) Finally, let me comment on the phrase, "no murderer has eternal life in him". Does that mean if we commit murder we can never be saved? To use some famous Old Testament examples, Moses and King David were both guilty of murder at point in their lives, and I am pretty positive they're in heaven. What about people on "death row" in prison who've given their lives to Jesus, can they be saved? What about those who've had abortions, are they beyond help for salvation? The answer in all these cases is no. The only unforgivable sin is a lifelong denial of Jesus as payment for all our sins. While we may suffer in this life if we've killed someone, that's separate from what John's talking about in Verse 15.
- i) Well now that we know what John's not talking about, what is he talking about? It is about those who go to their grave living in hatred of what Jesus did or how they have been hurt by others. It's about the rejection of Jesus' payment for their sins so in effect they've died with anger in their hearts.

- ii) Let me explain this one more way and then I promise to move on. Only God can tell what's in people's hearts. All we can do is judge behavior by what we see. If we have people in our lives we're not crazy about, that's normal. The difference is "hatred" versus someone who "rubs us the wrong way". When we have hatred it harms our peace with God. With someone we just don't get along with no matter how hard we try, we pray for God to give us the strength and ability to deal with that person when we have to interact with them. I just want to assure you that if there's someone who we struggle to get along with, but still don't hate them, that doesn't mean we have "murder" in our hearts. OK, let's move on.
11. Verse 16: This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. ¹⁹ This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.
- a) Remember that John's trying to explain to us how we as Christians are supposed to show love to others. John's example is that Jesus died on our behalf. What John says we should do in response is "lay down our lives for other Christians" based on Verse 16. So does that mean we have to kill ourselves the first chance to get to save other's lives? No. The idea's to be willing to "give of ourselves" the same way Jesus gave of ourselves. Remember how I said that we may be tired after a long day, but we know for example someone else in the house may need help with the kitchen? We can tell them, "give me 30 minutes to rest and then I promise to help you with your needs". The point is to see a situation where we can go help others. The Christian attitude is to go where the help is needed and not get away as if to avoid being helpful.
 - b) Occasionally, one may read a "war story", of a soldier willing to jump on a grenade so as to save the life of his buddies. In a sense, that's what Jesus is asking us to do. No it's not that literal most of the time. The point is we're willing to put others needs as priority over our needs. That's a "sign" we're saved if we're willing to think in those terms. The idea is that we realize how much Jesus loved us by dying for us, so we express that love in return by being that helpful when we can. Does that mean we'll be perfect? Hardly. Still, when we're willing to be led by God's guidance, we put our actions and yes even our money in what we believe. John's effectively saying in these verses he's not impressed with anyone who claims they're a Christian. John's impressed with those who "walk the walk". Again the issue isn't whether or not we're saved, it is, are we living as we claim we believe in our relationship with Jesus? That's a proof of our salvation.
 - c) This might be a good time to quickly discuss the idea of "assurance" of salvation. In much of Christian history, many a church has taught that one can't be assured of salvation. The reason that's taught is that many church leaders fear that if we have that assurance, we're going to sin all we want, without worrying about the consequences. Personally, I'd much rather live out my life with that assurance and then please God because I desire to do so, not out of obligation, but out of gratitude. One of the important points that came from the "Reformation" was the idea of salvation assurance. The point is I want to know for sure if I am saved and that's what John's been preaching all through this letter. All of these signs that John effectively says, "You know for sure you're saved if you act or think this way" is proof of our salvation.
 - i) I'm not saying one is "not saved" if one isn't sure of one's salvation. I'm saying in this book, John's trying to teach us we can be sure of our salvation if we act as we are supposed to act based on what Jesus taught. Personally, I'd much rather live with being assured of my salvation based on how I live and then use my life to go make a difference for Jesus as that's what I've been preaching in all my writings.

- d) With all that said, notice the last line of Verse 20: "For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." Personally, I'd much rather go through life believing in a God that can't learn than one who can. I figure if God can't learn, He can't be shocked by anything I've done in my life. That assures me that despite my mistakes and sins, there's nothing in my life that He doesn't know has happened or will happen. Knowing that I can't prove my worth to God based on my deeds, leads me back to the gratitude of the cross, as again I don't have to prove my worth to Him based on my deeds. My assurance of my salvation is all about doing good works not to earn points with Him, but only to be a good witness for Him in all I do. This is about how's the best way to live out our lives with assurance of our salvation: To "waste it" just living for us, or to use it for His glory by being helpful to others around us and letting others be helpful to us. That's how we as Christians should work together to make a difference for Him. If you get that, you get the Christian life He wants us to live.
- e) Time for the quick, "what if I'm wrong speech". What if God can learn, or what if we are judged by our good deeds outweighing our bad deeds? Let me start with "good deeds". A point is we can never know if we're good enough for God. We may claim we've never killed someone or never mass murdered someone, but how do we know for sure if we're good enough for God? By taking the "God is perfect" view, it saves us from the doubt. If God could learn, and our good deeds do have to outweigh are bad deeds, then living to make a difference is still worth it, if we believe in the concept of eternity with Him.
- f) All of that does lead me back to First John. What he's trying to accomplish in this epistle and in this section is we can be assured of our salvation. By stating God can't learn, he's telling us that despite our imperfections, we can be assured of our salvation based on how we live as Christians. To put it simply, "behavior matters" and I'm saying that as someone who believes I can't lose my salvation if I'm trusting in Jesus payment of my sins.
- g) Let me close with something I recently read: The story of a pastor whose son was having doubts about his salvation. The father told his son to go read 1st John. After his son did that, he was a lot more confident of his salvation. That's the point of this book, to give us assurance of our eternal salvation on our trust in what Jesus did and how we act based on that trust. With that said, we're ready to move on to the last four verses:
12. Verse 21: Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.
- a) OK, how does our heart condemn us? I'm convinced that God designed with a "built in" guidance system that we know right from wrong. We instinctively know to steal or kill is wrong and that's one way our heart can condemn us. We can also be condemned if we go around thinking, "we're not good enough for God based on our actions". That's equally as true, which is why we need the assurance of salvation based solely on what He's done for us and not try to prove our worth to Him.
- b) At this point I've been now "preaching to the choir" for pages based on salvation basics of believing Jesus died for our sins. Now comes time for the tough verse even for those of us who believe all of this. Verse 22 says we receive of God whatever we ask of Him. I don't know about you, but most of my prayers do get rejected. I pray for the salvation of many people or pray for some to get well who don't. How can John say we "receive from Him anything we ask?" Great question. The answer is we do. Sometimes the answer is "no", but we are receiving answers whether we realize it or not. Remember that God only says "yes" to prayers that are His will for our live at that moment. Want to pray a prayer that is a definite yes answer? Pray that God's will be done. Pray that we'll be willing to do His will today and then go through the day making the best decisions possible as we go.

- c) Coming back to Verse 21 for a moment, the point to pound in our head is we're confident that we're trusting in Jesus for all our sins, we can know for sure we're saved and we are "Children of God" which brings me full circle to my lesson title. So if we are such children what do we do about it? Now notice Verse 23: to believe in Jesus and love one another.
- i) I've been preaching the whole lesson about the importance of loving one another in the aspect of putting the needs of others as priority over our own needs. I'd like to also add to continue believing in Jesus is a "growth thing". No we're not more saved as we grow in our relationship with God. It's more like the more we know about Jesus, the more we trust Him. The more we've been through the highs and lows of life as a Christian, the more we realize Jesus lives "inside of us" willing to guide us for His glory. We're called "children of God" as we continue to grow in our relationship with Him.
 - ii) I guess my point is to believe in Jesus is a continuous, growth oriented aspect of life just as we regularly need to pray to remind ourselves to put others as priority over our own needs. My point is Verse 23 is a concept we need to regularly think of as we grow in our relationship with Jesus.
 - iii) With that statement made, I just looked at Verse 24 and realized I just covered it by my statements of "growth" in Jesus. The key question of this whole lesson is how do we know we are "Children of God"? The answer is because we care about pleasing Jesus based on the way we live and we care about putting others needs as priority over our needs. If we learn to think that way, we can be confident we are saved and we are "children of God".
- d) With that said, I can wrap up this lesson for this chapter. Yes it's a basic message on our assurance of our salvation and how we can be assured we're saved. The main points are if we believe Jesus died for all our sins and is fully God as well as fully man and believe God made us into a "new creature" of Him living inside of us guiding our lives, then we can be sure we're not only saved, but ARE "Children of God". If you don't think there is nothing special about this, re-read the introduction and realize how privileged we are to have that title hanging over our heads. With that said, I can close in prayer.
13. Heavenly Father, Thank You that we're entitled to the privilege of being "Children of God". Help us to live a life worthy of that privilege. Help us to do what you've called your children to do, as to continue believing in Jesus as God and that You're guiding our lives for Your glory. Help us to think in terms of being aware of needs around us where you can use us to make a difference for You by putting those needs as priority over our own needs. May we walk in confidence that we are not only saved, but saved for a purpose of being used by You for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.