

First John Chapter 4 – John Karmelich

1. In the scientific community today, there is almost an unexplainable hatred of the concept of God in that world. Part of the reason is they only deal with things that can be observed or measured. Even when evidence is presented to them that is beyond random chance, they'll usually refuse to accept the idea of God because it doesn't fit into their universe of what can be observed. When I face such arguments, I state, "What about love? Do you think love is real even though it can't be measured?" If they respond that humans are built with a desire to love things, how did men ever develop such traits, as it often flies against the instinct to survive? To use an illustration I gave in the last lesson, how does science explain a soldier giving up his life by falling on a grenade? That act is not instinctive to man's survival.
 - a) I start with that premise, as this lesson and this chapter are all about things that can't ever be measured, but we "instinctively" know they exist. That includes the concept of love for each other, God's existence and a spiritual world that can't be measured scientifically. For us to believe in God, we must believe in a god that can't be seen or physically described.
 - b) There is an old joke among religious Jews that goes, if someone says to you, "God is love", you know you're talking to a Christian, as religious Jewish people think of God first as a god of justice and not primarily a God of love or a God of grace. Yes all those factors do make up what we call God, but it was Christians that first emphasized the idea of God as being a God of love.
2. I state all of this as Chapter 4 is all about things that can't be physically observed or measured by any form of scientific method. Yet we Christians believe in all these things and must realize that it is part of our faith in God. I'm not saying we have "blind faith". I'm saying we have faith based on the evidence of history, archeology, prophecy and predictions. The question becomes if we do have faith in God the Father's existence and God the Son's existence, what do we do about it? It's a key question in this 21-verse chapter. Therefore, as we go through this chapter, keep in mind it is all about immeasurable things like the spiritual world and God's love, and more importantly a question of what do we do about all things as believers in Jesus? If you're wondering how we're supposed to react to this or curious what I'm talking about, read on as I explain this chapter.
 - a) The first three verses deal with the fact that the "spiritual" world exists and interacts with our world. For example we Christians believe angels and demons interact with our world even if we've never seen one. Most of us who've lived for a while as Christians have seen "stuff happen" that we can't explain other than the fact that some non-human forces made it happen. John's key point here is not every spiritual "thing" is God ordained. Because a thing maybe supernatural doesn't mean it's pro-God. That's why we have His word as a guide by which we test spiritual things. To explain it another way if someone says a thing sounds religiously impressive, no matter who says it, including myself, the bible text is to be the test by which that "thing" is of God or not.
 - b) Another test is whether or not a person claims Jesus is fully God AND fully human. This is not the only spiritual test but an important one. Many cults will claim Jesus is only one or the other. Cults deny both of them to be true. A good test if one is orthodox (small "o") Christian is if they believe Jesus as being fully God and fully human. Let me explain why both are important: As I explained last week, if Jesus was just for example, "Angel #2747" that was sent to die for our sins, then it wouldn't be fair for that angel to suffer for us. If it was God Himself paying the price for our sins, it's the only way God can show a sense of complete forgiveness and complete justice for our sins at the same time.
 - i) As to being fully human, that's important because that way we know Jesus relates to us as humans and understands the highs and lows of our own lives. He needed to be and remain fully human in order to relate to as humans.

- c) As I love to state, I know I'm "preaching to the choir" here, but it's important we get down that fundamental foundation of our faith in order to explain the good and bad aspects of the spiritual world to nonbelievers.
 - d) From there we get the reminder that God's power in the believer is greater than all "dark" powers that are not in us. The way we recognize that God's power is working within us is simply by the fact we care about obeying His word, we study what it means, and consider how it impacts our lives. His word (i.e., the bible) is how we can tell what's true as in pro-God" in the "spiritual world" from what is false.
 - e) From here we get into the main point of the chapter that "God is love". Without repeating my statement about this is a "Christian thing", let me make a few obvious statements that show God's love for all people: If God didn't care about people, would He have created a world we can survive in? If God didn't care about people would He have given us a set of commandments to obey as given to us through Moses? If He doesn't care about us would He have paid the price Himself for our sins so we can be with Him forever? The answer to all of these questions is obviously yes. One of the points John is making here is that one way we can be sure of our salvation is we realize just how much God loves us as He's the one who created us and had love for us even before we were born.
3. The rest of the chapter focuses on what's the benefit of knowing that "God is love". First, let me define it. I'm not talking about a feeling or an attitude. I'm talking about the fact He cares about us enough that He's willing to pay the price Himself for our sins.
- a) Here's another characteristic of His love we don't think about: Ever go through a period where you are really scared about something? It may be legitimate and I'm not saying it's going to be fixed either our way or on our timing. My point is if we focus on the fact God loves us no matter what, no matter how tough the situation or how much pain we're in at the moment, it's hard to be fearful if we consider that God loves us to a point where He's willing to become fully human for us and pay the price Himself for all the sins we've ever committed or ever will commit.
 - b) The next point key point of this chapter is what are we doing with His love? A way to tell we're saved is if we're putting the needs of others as priority over our own needs without expecting anything in return. When we learn to think and live in terms of "What can I do for you", without expecting anything in return, then we're showing the type of love that God wants us to show that reflects the type of love He showed us. When I gave examples of proof how God loves us, did He get anything in return for that love? No, God doesn't need anything from us. If God is perfect by definition, then He just shows love to people because that's His nature, and not that He expects anything for Him in return of that love other than our gratitude to Him. The point is if God loves us with an unconditional love, we are to have that same type of attitude in our dealings with other people.
 - c) I can just hear people thinking, "But you don't know how mean that one person has been to me. You expect me to love them?" Remember that the golden rule is to treat others on the idea of how you want to be treated, not based on how they treat us. The secret to live as God desires is to draw upon His power, as opposed to willpower, to live as He desires we live. My point is when we encounter the really tough people we have to deal with, it is not about "sucking it up and being kind", it's about realizing how much God loves us unconditionally and focusing on His love when we have to deal with those tough people. To state the obvious some more, this often takes time. I've spent many a morning praying for those who've hurt me in some way. I've learned to pray that, "OK, God, they're Your problem as I can't deal with them, and give me the strength and wisdom to do Your will in my dealings with them".
 - d) In summary, this chapter focuses on our dealings with the spiritual world. It can be both positive and negative as we discern if spiritual "things" are there to help or hurt us. It can also be positive as we draw on God's power to show His love to people around us.

4. With that positive ending stated, let's start on Verse 1 itself: Chapter 4, Verse 1: Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.² This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.
- a) The first thing I want you to notice is that John refers to fellow believers here not as "little children" as He did to start this letter, but "Dear Friends". This is John's way of saying we Christians are all equal in the struggle to recognize what is and what isn't from God when it comes to discerning "spiritual things". We're all to realize that such spiritual things will occur and John wants to remind us how to recognize if they're pro-God's desire for us.
 - b) If you say, "I've never seen an angel or had to deal with that stuff", realize that they're all around us. I can recall a few times in my life where things happened that I can't explain. To make it even easier, we may hear a great speaker and think, "They must be ordained by God to say what they said". It can also be someone knocking on our door claiming we can use their help to draw closer to God. My point is not every spiritual encounter is an appearance of some sort of angelic being. It can be as straight forward as hearing a talk by someone who claims they know the way to draw closer to God. Cults are all around us today just as they were in John's day, with the one goal of driving us away from Jesus.
 - c) To steal a line I heard this week, demons don't mind you praying to Jesus or believing in Jesus as long as it's a "false Jesus". It's when we're praying to the true and living God that we're dangerous to them as now we're using our lives to make a difference for God. Such demonic creatures know that the power within us is greater than they're power so that is why they do all they can be it "great speakers", cults at our door or even angelic visits that can draw us away from the true and living God.
 - d) So how do we know what's true and what's false? The answer is in Verse 2. To answer it, first we have to remember a little something about the culture at the time John wrote this letter. What was popular then and was for the next century or two, was to claim Jesus is God, but to deny He was fully human. That's why John emphasizes the fact that a test of whether or not someone is of a cult, is whether they deny Jesus was fully human as well as fully God. Such groups will make impressive sounding statements like, "God can't be fully human as humans are flawed creatures. It is only what's spiritual that matters and what is "flesh" is wasted. For example, Muslims teach that Jesus was a great teacher, but He can't be God, because God can't die. The Jehovah Witnesses teach Jesus is a powerful angel that was sent to suffer for our sins, but is not fully God. My point is we have many groups all around us that will publicly deny Jesus as both fully God and fully human. We don't have to look far to realize such groups are all around us.
 - e) We don't have to fear such groups as again, the power that's in us is greater than what's in them. We just have to realize what they believe and if asked, explain why we disagree.
 - f) Most of you know that I make a living as a real estate appraiser. I occasionally get clients who fall into one of these many categories. First, I do my job, as that's why I'm there. I'll often simply ask questions to learn what makes them "tick". I'm not there to convert all I meet to Christians. My job is to be a good witness for Jesus in those situations and often the best way to show one's faith is just to be loving to them to care enough about them to ask questions about their work or life without expecting anything in return. My point is most of the time, we don't have to fear what such groups can do, unless of course we are living in a place where to be a Christian is a death sentence. Remember that Jesus taught us to live as "lambs among wolves", which means to proceed with caution as the world is a dangerous place and make wise decisions as we make a difference for Him.
 - g) In summary, we don't have to fear groups that don't believe what we believe. It's just to be aware that they're out there and they deny Jesus as both fully human and fully God.

- h) One more thought about witnessing to others. I've always liked Dennis Prager's comment that "I don't mind Christians telling me about Jesus, I have a problem if they're obnoxious about it." (If you don't know, he's a nationally syndicated radio talk show host who's very religious as a devout Jew.) My point here is that when we encounter a "spiritual person", we can tell whether or not such a spiritual person is God ordained by their view of Jesus as being fully God and fully human, but we don't have to be "in their face" to tell them of God's love and grace. Jesus didn't say people would know we're His by us screaming the gospel at them when we encounter them. He said people would know we're believers by our love for them.
- i) That reminds me of another Christian expression, "You can't out-nice a Mormon". What I mean by that is some of the nicest people you'll ever encounter are Mormon missionaries. They generally have a great attitude and are nice people even if we believe they're wrong on their views about Jesus. My point is a person can be sincere and still be truly wrong in their beliefs about Jesus as God. The point is we can't lead people closer to Jesus just by being nice to someone, as sooner or later we have to explain to them the truth about who Jesus is. The point is we do show our love for others by being kind to others, but we also have to be willing to share our beliefs when (key word) asked. Coming back to my work as an appraiser, often I will ask about other's lives as people's favorite topic is themselves. As we develop relationships with others and people see us as caring about them, sooner or later, they'll ask us how we have that type of love, and that's when we can share with them about God's love working through us.
- j) My point is if we encounter someone we know belongs to a different religion or a cult, it is best to ask them questions about what they believe and then share our beliefs if we're in that type of conversation. First one has to find common ground to have a conversation with others, then we can ask questions about their lives and over time, we can explain of God's love for them once we've developed a relationship with them. All of this leads me back to the idea of not being obnoxious about our faith as it only makes people defensive of their own views. Relationships must be cultivated first before we can talk to others of their views about "spiritual stuff".
- k) You may think I've wandered too far from the text, but in reality I haven't. Remember the point of these verses is how we can tell if a person is of God or not. The test is whether or not they deny Jesus as being fully God and fully human. What I expanded upon over the last page or so is how we should react in our dealings with nonbelievers. We're not to run away, unless of course it's a life-threatening situation. We can be a great witness for Jesus simply by showing love to others and developing a relationship first by asking about their lives and learning what makes them tick. Again everybody's favorite topic is themselves, so it's only long after we develop a relationship with others, that we can share what we do believe as people will see the joy in our lives and want to know how we get that joy.
- l) OK, enough of all of that back to the verses. John states that those who deny Jesus as fully God and fully human are of the "anti-Christ". I talked about this in Chapter 2. When we see that word "anti-Christ" we tend to picture some demonic looking cartoon creature. It just means that group or person is against Jesus as He's meant to be seen. Therefore, don't be frightened by the term "Anti-Christ" as it simply refers to all people who don't believe in Jesus as being fully God, fully human and being in charge of their lives.
- i) It's sort of strange to consider the fact that most of the people we meet through a day are technically "anti-Christ", from a waiter in a restaurant to those driving on the same road as road. Again, it's not something to fear. It's just to realize that we live in a world where the majority of people don't believe in the same God that we as Christians believe in. No we don't yell in their face, "You're going to hell" as it would only scare them away and not drive them to God. If we show that we care about their lives that's the start to being a witness and living as God desires we do.

5. Verse 4: You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.
- a) In Verse 1, John calls believers "Dear Friends". Here in Verse 4, he calls us "dear children" again. No we haven't shrunk in stature in three verses. The reason John uses that term in this verse is to remind us that we're all to grow in our relationship with God. It's a lot like the last lesson that focused on the term "Children of God" that John loves to use to describe what is a Christian and how we should act. The point of Verse 4 is that as we are God's children and the fact that He lives in us is greater than any and all spiritual powers that exist in the world that oppose what God's called us to do. Remember what we're to do as Christians, "Go into the world making disciples of all nations". My point is as we're using our lives to make a difference for Jesus, we're not to fear the "anti-Christ's" that I've been lecturing to you about over the last few pages. The power we have inside of us as His "children" is far greater than the powers that demonic based spiritual entities have to oppose us.
 - b) I happen to be a big fan of apologetic ministries. Let's face it, someone who's a member of a group that doesn't believe in Jesus as God can often make arguments that are impressive enough that we don't know how to answer their questions. That's why ministries do exist to help us give answers to tough questions. John's point in these verses is we don't have to fear whatever accusations they make, no matter how impressive they may sound at first.
 - c) My point is we don't have to fear arguments that sound impressive. There is no question about Christianity that can't be defended. If one is facing one of those issues, there's help out there that's a "Google away". Never hesitate to say, "I'll get back to you on that issue, if it's a question you can't answer." When I first got saved, I used to debate with someone who literally was a Jewish "anti-Christian missionary". Despite our debates, we're friends to this day but we agree to disagree. My point does lead back to these verses. My point is we can't lose because we have the "Spirit of God" working on our side. Ok then how can we tell who's right in debates on religious things? Remember that Christianity is based on not accepting God's truth not based blind faith, but on the evidence.
 - i) As I've stated every now and then, we can know the bible is the word of God due to archeological evidence, prophecy (30% of the bible is written well in advance of the actual events), predictions and statistics. I'm not saying we don't come to Jesus based on faith, I'm saying our faith is based on evidence.
 - ii) Then why do people reject that evidence? Because some people refuse to accept it no matter how overwhelming the evidence, such as the scientific community that I brought up to start this lesson. It also applied to my Jewish friend who I still pray for on occasion.
 - d) Gee John, that's interesting. What does any of this have to do with these verses? To start it means we don't have to ever fear arguments presented by nonbelievers. I still swear to this day when I had those debates and I was young in the faith, I saw an angel behind the head of the man I was talking to, shaking his head as if to say, "Don't worry about what are his arguments, and to this day, none of them have ever shaken my faith". This doesn't mean if we debate, we'll each get an angel helping us out. What it means is God's there to defend us even if we don't win the argument then and there. The evidence is there within the pages of the scripture to defend the truth that Jesus is both fully human and fully God as I've been stating through this lesson.
 - e) All of that leads me to these verses. They say that whoever is of God "hears us". That to me means nobody will be in hell or heaven that wasn't meant to be there in the first place. Yes we're to witness for Jesus, it's the Holy Spirit's job to open people's hear to the truth.

- f) What all that means to us, is that no matter how great our arguments, it's up to the Spirit of God to draw people to Him. That's why I pray for hearts to be open to the truth of His love and not my ability to be a great witness for Him. I ask that God lead me and do what is right in any situation, but I also know I don't get a "notch in my bible" for every person I lead to Christ. Does that mean we should never learn how to be better witness for Jesus? Of course not. It just means we leave the results to God, as it's our calling to be a witness for Him. So does all that mean if someone rejects our message, we're to curse them as if to say "you're going to hell for rejecting what I say". Of course not, as again, it's not up to us and we never know what is God's timing on salvation. I'm positive we'll all be shocked as to who is and who isn't saved one day in heaven.
 - g) That concept is also part of these verses as John says we can recognize who's saved as well as who isn't saved based on how people act. That was his point in Verse 6. Those who do believe the truth of the Gospel will believe the message and those who don't, won't. I give this little speech about never knowing who's saved for sure, or about who's really open to the idea God's love through Jesus for us to grasp that what we believe is the truth but we don't know who will and who won't accept it over one's lifetime.
 - h) Bottom line, some will accept it, some won't and we have to accept that fact.
6. Verse 7: Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.
- a) If some people will "get it" and live forever and some people won't, what do we do next? Here is where John returns to the idea of "love" in the sacrificial sense. This is about love in the sense of helping others without expecting anything in return. I'm not saying we do have to ignore our own needs. I'm saying the way people can tell we're believers in Jesus is by our sacrificial love for others. The idea is to realize God loved us unconditionally on the evidence that He was willing to die for our sins long before we were born or ever even contemplated His existence let alone His sacrificial love for us. If we realize God loves us that much, what should we do about it? Treat others with that same type of love.
 - b) Let me approach this idea a different way: In effect, Jesus only gave two commandments to those of us who believe in Him. The first is to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations that He paid the price for our sins. The second commandment is the method by which we do that, by showing the type of sacrificial love that He gave for us. My point is what draws people to God is if they see believers caring about them as if their own lives don't matter nearly as much as theirs. If we see people and think in terms of what can we do for them instead of what can they do for us, that fact alone will make them want to be with us as we're putting their lives as priority over our own.
 - i) Ask yourself, who would you rather be around, a person who's only interested in what you can do for them, or what they can do for you? The way we develop the strength to love like that is not by willpower, but by relying upon God's power to work through us. That's the type of love John wants each of us to have.
 - ii) Let me repeat a couple of tough situations to discuss: What if we're suffering with say a sickness at the moment? Then we have to be willing to show love by letting others serve our needs. What if we're dealing with a death of a loved one? Then in that situation too, we show love by letting others help us. What if it's someone we can't stand who God wants us to help? Then we rely upon His power to make that difference. We have to see those people as needing God and not as someone who we can't stand. My point is there are always situations where God can work.

- iii) A few more ideas and I'll get back to the verses. What if I have a ton of homework to do at the moment? Get it done and focus on what's important. I'm not saying we have to interact with people every moment of the day. I'm saying we look at a situation we're in and think, am I using this situation to make a difference for God or am I using it just for my own gain. In essence this is about making God part of every aspect of our lives. It's a matter of learning to think in terms of what would God want me to do in this situation? That doesn't mean we think about Him for every situation, but we learn to think in terms of what's the best use of my time at this moment and am I doing what I believe God wants me to do? If we go through life thinking that way, not only will we enjoy it more, but we'll now use what time we have to make a difference for Him. That's the type of love John wants all of us to have as we go through our lives.
- c) With that speech out of my system, let me come back to the idea that "God is love". I view God's love as something built into His nature. The best way I can describe it is to consider what we love to do without financial compensation or expectations of anything in return. I may love to paint or play a musical instrument and I'll do it just because I love to do it. In that same sense, God cares about people so much just because He does and nobody can explain why He picked humans to love, but He did. We know He has that type of love by the fact He created a world we can live in, He gave us commands as the best way to live a life in this world and He Himself paid the price for our sins so He can spend eternity with us again, just because He loves us.
 - i) If all of that is true, what does God want us to do about it? Show the same type of unconditional love to others as He shows to us. What God "gets" out of His effort to show that type of love for people is eternity with those who appreciate that type of love and are grateful for His love. That's the same type of people who'd want to share His love with others not to get anything in return, but only do it as we know that's what God expects us to do with that love.
 - ii) So are you saying I have to quit my life and go find people to give my "all" to? No, I'm saying you live your life while looking for opportunities to share that love. If you want joy in your life, the greatest way to have joy is by giving of ourselves to others without expecting anything in return. That's the type of love God has for us and the type of love God wants us to express on others to understand the joy we're capable of feeling when we love others in that same unconditional way.
- d) I just reread these verses to make sure I'm on track and talking about them correctly. My little speech about loving others as God loved us fits in well with these verses. The only other point John makes in these verses that I haven't talked about is the fact that none of us have ever seen God, but we get the fact He loves us unconditionally and we're to love others the same way. That leads me to another logical question: Why has no one living ever seen God? If He exists and we believe He exists, why doesn't He ever make Himself visible to us in this world? There is a famous story of Moses "seeing God's back side" at a late point in his life (See Exodus 33:23). What I believe that means is God revealed a part of Himself to Moses. Still God's beyond our complete understanding and I'm convinced it will require an eternity to fully comprehend who He is and what He's done and capable of doing. The reason no one's seen God is He's beyond our complete understanding. All we get to understand of Him by the evidence of what He's done for us in this world. The point is He loves us unconditionally and desires we share that love with others around us.
- e) Since I've been pounding that point home for many pages now, I believe we can move on to the next point John wants to make about God's love. That is, God gave us His Spirit to live within us (that is, the Holy Spirit). In other words, the reason we can comprehend all of this "stuff" about God is He put that knowledge within us to begin with.

7. Verse 13: We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.
- a) Let me ask a logical question: How can we tell for sure if someone else has the Holy Spirit in their lives? Let's be honest, a person can explain the facts about Christianity pretty easy if they simply read a little bit or study a bit. The key is do they believe it? An interesting example is of all things, tour guides in Israel. There are Jewish people working in Israel as bus tour guides to Christian religious sites. They can sound very sincere as they explain a scene such as here is where Jesus did "this or that", and sound convincing they believe He did what they're saying he did. For them it's just a job, and many of them don't believe in their heart what they're saying. If you talk to them outside the tour, they'd say something like, "We believe Jesus had great powers, but He wasn't God". My point is a way we can tell if someone truly believes in Jesus is if question them and they're being honest with us, they'll state they do believe Jesus is fully God and fully human as well.
 - b) My point is when "push comes to shove" we know someone is or isn't a Christian if they are willing to confess that Jesus is fully God and fully human as if they're lives depended upon it. Remember that almost all the original disciples were killed because they refused to deny those facts. The history of the Christian church is full of stories of people willing to be killed instead of denying God's existence. There's a famous testimony that I believe comes from Fox's "Book of Martyr's" that says, "I've been walking with Jesus all of my life so how I can deny Him now that I'm facing death".
 - c) So are you saying we're not really Christians unless we're martyred for Jesus? Of course not. In a sense that's much easier than to live for Jesus. Most Christians would be willing to die for what we believe is true. The harder thing is to continue to live believing Jesus is and will always be fully divine and fully human. The bible doesn't say much about what heaven is like, but however it exists, it must be built in a way where our eternal bodies we get in heaven don't wear out or get old and we can all exist together in heaven so that we can get close to God, yet be distinct at the same time. That's why I love to state every so often, that I believe we exist in more than three dimensions in heaven. Just as Jesus went into a locked room in the Gospel of John Chapter 20, so we'll in heaven be able to move in a way where we can "move" to be close to God yet at the same time be in a world where we still know who everybody is and get to develop close relationships with others.
 - d) I started this lesson by saying it deals with things that scientists can't measure like if God does exist, how big is He, where is He, and how do we know He exists? What's stranger than that is the idea of how multitudes of people can exist in heaven and still all be drawn close to God at the same time. As strange as all of that can seem at first, John's point and my point is by studying the evidence of what God has accomplished in the world to date, we can be sure of God's existence, Jesus eternal existence, His love for us, His desire to be with us forever and the fact we can tell who is and who isn't a believe in Him by whether or not people do show unconditional love to others just as God has shown unconditional love to us. In other words, if people get that immeasurable idea of how much God does love us, we can know for sure we're saved if we show that same type of love to others.
 - e) If all of this is still confusing to you, that's because we're dealing in issues that can't be in any way scientifically explained, but does become obvious if we study the evidence. We can know for sure we're saved, if we accept the idea that God created the world we live in and He did it not to get anything out of it, other than to draw people to Himself based on the evidence of His existence and the fact He loves us unconditionally and wants to spend eternity expressing that love upon us. What He expects in return is we acknowledge His existence, acknowledge what Jesus did for us, and finally realize the only way we can be with Him forever is by being grateful for that love and expressing it on others as well.

8. Verse 16 (cont.): God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷ In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.
- a) It may be helpful at this point to remember that John doesn't write like a lawyer, stating an argument and then making a case for that argument. John likes to "write in circles" as he comes back to the same arguments over and over again, each time expanding upon the original intent and then adding more to that case. As I stated in an earlier lesson, I'm not talking about circular reasoning, which is when one makes a claim without any evidence to support it. I'm talking about coming back to the same issues over and over again with the idea of expanding upon the same ideas with each new thought.
 - b) I state that here because we're back to "God is love". Again, that doesn't mean God isn't a God of justice as well or He's a "God of grace", it just means that part of His nature is that He loves us and wants to spend eternity with us. What He requires of us is that we accept His free gift of salvation of God Himself paying the full price for our sins and accepting the fact that Jesus had to remain fully human as well as fully God in order for Him to pay the price for our sins. I know I'm stating the basics, but if we're going to live out our lives by showing unconditional love to others, we can only do that by first grasping the idea of how much God loves us all unconditionally and wants to forgive us unconditionally.
 - c) I remember many years ago explaining that concept to my father. He told me then, if God does forgive us that way, what's the purpose of life? I responded to use our lives to make a difference for Him and to share His love with others. Yes we're still judged as believers but that judgment determines our rewards in heaven, not our salvation itself. We'll be in heaven, only because we believe God Himself paid the complete price for every sin we'll ever commit or ever will commit. Again I know I'm preaching the basics again, but most people still want to prove their worth to God, which is how my father was, before he did grasp what Christianity truly was.
 - d) Let me discuss situations where we're really scared about something. Let's suppose we're dealing with a big problem and don't see a solution. Now pause and consider how much God loves us and cares for us. If we see life that way, we still have to deal with problems we have to face, but knowing we're unconditionally loved gives us the strength to face the issues we must face realizing no matter what happens, the worst thing that can happen is we suffer during this lifetime and no longer. My point is keeping an eternal perspective always will help us to deal with whatever we have to face at any given moment.
 - e) You may think I've wandered away from these verses, but I haven't. These verses talk of facing our fears. John writes that fear is driven out by God's love here. You may say, the bible writer doesn't know the problems I have to deal with, but God Himself does. That's why we accept the idea of Jesus being fully human. That way as a human He can relate to whatever it is we have to face in this life. As fully God, He can help us deal with this life as we use it for His glory. Whenever I face a problem, the best thing I can think is, "What is it God would want me to do in this situation?" I'll often quickly pray for guidance and then I do whatever is logical to do in that situation realizing He loves me unconditionally and wants to guide me for His glory. Am I perfect at this? Hardly. Do I mess up? A lot. When we're willing to trust in His love, it gives us the strength to face whatever we have to face. That's how God's love "casts out fear" as John's teaching in this text.
 - f) Let me try to explain this one more way: I can just hear people saying, "You have no idea what I'm dealing with", or "you have no idea how impossible it is for me to live with that person". I'm not saying I comprehend your situation. I'm saying there is a God who loves you and wants to guide you through whatever it is you have to face. The point is the way we can deal with our fears, is by letting God be in charge of that issue. It's like realizing, I can't deal with this, but God can. God, take over and let Your love deal with this issue.

- g) Let me move on from God's love in our daily lives to the concept of God's love in the "day of judgment". If any of you have ever been standing in front of a judge, ranging from say a traffic ticket to a much more serious crime, we realize we're at the mercy of whatever the judge says at that moment. We may even be a good public speaker, but at that moment it doesn't matter what we can say as that judge gets final say in our lives. That same type of reasoning applies to our "day of judgment". I'm not sure how billions of people are going to be judged, but I accept the idea that all people will either spend eternity with God or in a place of torment without Him. There's an old bumper sticker that reads, "Heaven won't have me and hell's afraid I'll take over". As cute as that reads, that's not reality. If God's judging each of us somehow, someday, then we have to accept the fact that the only way we get to be in heaven, is for the judge to say, "Guilty as charged, but I Myself have paid the complete price for your sins, so come on in". As to hell, I've always viewed it as where people choose to spend eternity away from God's presence. It's not so much where we'll be tortured as eternal "aloneness". It's like saying, "You don't want God in your live now, then you'll get that choice eternally."
- h) There is an expression attributed to C.S. Lewis that says, "The gates of hell will be locked from the inside" as people who go there, willfully choose to turn down God's free gift of salvation for themselves. They want to live life "their way on their terms" and don't want to live under God's commands for their lives. We as Christians choose to live as God does desire we live even though we're not perfect at it and the point us we don't have to have a fear of judgment day, not because we're perfect, but only because we accept the fact that God Himself agreed to pay the price for all our sins so we get in "Scott Free".
- i) I discussed in the last lesson, that it's common for many Christian churches to teach that we can never know for sure we're saved because the leaders are afraid that if we think in those terms, we'll go do whatever we want and not live to please God. I think it's a much better way to live to realize we are saved no matter what, and then live to please God on the concept of gratitude for His love as opposed to trying to "earn" His love by trying to show God how special we are. That's the concept I was trying to get across to my father many years ago and I'm pretty positive it sunk in as I watched Him change in the latter years of his life based on that concept. I'm sharing that story with all of you so that we too can realize we're saved no matter what, if we're trusting in Jesus' full price for all our sins and accept the fact He's fully God and fully human. My point is we accept that, we don't have to fear God in our own day of judgment, no matter what we do with our lives.
- j) So if we don't have to fear God's condemnation, then what? Love others unconditionally. That's First John in a "nutshell". If we live with no fear of a judgment day, then we can show that type of love to others, as we have nothing to lose. So what's the eternal benefit of living life that way? The bible speaks of eternal rewards in heaven (Revelation 22:12) for making a difference for God in this life. I'm not sure what those rewards entail, but if I experience joy when I'm making a difference for others and are not expecting anything in return, then I expect that joy will also be a part of my next life in eternity.
9. Verse 19: We love because he first loved us.
- a) This is one of the most famous verses in the enter bible. It's about realizing we can show love to others only because God first loved us. OK, what about atheists or people of other religions who show kindness to others? Such people may not be motivated by accepting the fact Jesus paid the full price for their sins, but it doesn't make it any less true.
- b) A point here to consider is who is the "we". Does it refer to all people or just Christians? I would argue just Christians. Nonbelievers at times may show unconditional love based on willpower, or desire to get some sort of satisfaction out of helping others, but they do not realize or consider how God's loved them unconditionally before they were born. So are they not saved if they love others unconditionally, but decline down God's free gift of salvation? Yes, because they're still trying to prove their worth by their actions.

- c) John states an obvious reality in this verse that the God we can't see or fully comprehend, must have loved us before the world began as we believe in a God that can't learn. If He's perfect by nature, then that means He can't learn anything. If He can't learn, wouldn't it also mean that He loved us before we were born? Of course it does. So if we accept that as being true, what's the point? The point is we can't earn His love or prove our worth to Him if He knows all things. If we remind ourselves of this fact, we'll stop trying to prove our worth to Him based on our deeds. We'll just accept His love, with all our faults as we rely upon His love and His power to make a difference in the world around us. That too, is a good summary of what John's trying to teach all of us in this letter. In the meantime, I still have two more verses to discuss in this chapter.
10. Verse 20: If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.²¹ And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.
- a) The last two verses focus on how we should be reacting to God's love. Remember the big picture of 1st John is he lays out ways we can tell for sure that we're saved. One way is to realize we can't earn God's love as He knows all things. Another way we can tell is based on how we treat fellow Christians. If you or I have real hatred at this moment towards a fellow believer, that's a sign one isn't saved. Let me separate for the moment, a difference between hatred and "struggling with". If you see a fellow believer and want them dead or believe they're definitely going to hell, that's hatred. If another believer rubs us the wrong way and we struggle to interact with them, that's a separate issue from hatred.
- b) Let me approach this from another angle. I have a relative of mine who I know struggles with prejudice against people of a different race. I reminded him, "In heaven, will people live in different neighborhoods, or will we all be close together?" If we're going to spend eternity with people from all nations who have a love for God, we better get used to them now in this lifetime, as we'll be spending eternity with people of all races forever. I admit that type of thinking changed my view of seeing people of other nationalities many years ago and now I'm working on occasion to help others see people that way.
- c) Coming back to the issue of people we don't hate, but just struggle to be around, we must remember to ask God to help us see others as needing Jesus and not as someone who has hurt us in some way. I admit, it's really hard to be kind to people who've hurt us in some way but it's not about our love, but His love working through us. Remember the Golden rule is about treating others, as we want to be treated and not based on how they have actually treated us in the past. If we can think in those terms, we can be more loving to others who we struggle to get along with.
- d) All of that is essentially the application of these verses. Notice the chapter ends with John giving us God's command: That if we love God, we must also love our fellow believer. A way people will know we're Christians is by having a sacrificial love for others without an expectation of something in return. That's the type of love one sees Jesus giving for others all through the Gospels and that's the way God wants us to have love for others. I can just hear people say, "But you don't know how tough that person is to deal with?" No I don't, but there is a God who's big enough to handle that situation. It's not a matter of "sucking it up" and trying to love people based on our strength. It's about praying for God to mend that relationship and letting His love flow through us so we can care for that person who we struggle to be around. We can't love others that way based on our strength. We can show love to the unlovable based on asking for God's power to work through us so we do show that type of love for others.
- e) Do I struggle with this at times? Of course. Are there people I'm not crazy about or wish that I can have a better relationship with? Welcome to the club. That too is a situation we must pray our way through as we pray for God to give us the strength to deal with those who to put it kindly, we struggle to love and can't love them based on our own strength.

- f) With that said, this would be a great place to end the lesson and close in prayer. Let's all ask God to help us love others the way He loves us. OK, here we go:
11. Heavenly Father, we realize we live in a world we're we can't full comprehend all things that do exist. We can't fully comprehend You, let alone angelic and demonic creatures that we accept do exist but can't see them working. We just know that by trusting in the fact that You love us with an unconditional love, we're capable of making a difference for You in the world we live in. Help us to rely upon Your love to make that difference in our world and not try to change things based on willpower. The one prayer I am positive You love to answer is if we're willing to be used by You to make a difference, You will work in our lives to make that difference. Help us to express Your unchanging, undeserved love to others as You've shown to us. Thank You in advance for the opportunities You'll give us to express that love and guide us as we rely upon that love as to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.