

First John Chapter 5 – John Karmelich

1. I was seriously considering calling this lesson "nike", but I don't want you to think this is a lesson about sports equipment. "Nike" is a Greek word that's usually translated "overcome" in most of the English translations including the one I'm using here. Unfortunately the word "overcome" is not part of our modern English vocabulary. The word implies ultimate victory, which is why it's used as a corporate name for sports equipment. It means more than winning a sporting contest. The word implies such a complete victory there is no questioning the contest. With that concept understood, let me explain why "overcoming" is so critical to understanding First John Chapter 5.
 - a) To begin let's take a look at the big picture: John was inspired to write his Gospel to make the case that Jesus is God and always will be God. It's also written to prove to us that He became human at birth and remains fully human to this day. Now realize the purpose of 1st John is for us to have confidence we are eternally saved if we believe in the concept of Jesus as fully God and fully human. If we're willing to accept that concept, then we have that type of "nike" ultimate victory that those of us who believe Jesus is and always will be fully human and fully God will get that privilege for eternity.
 - b) Chapter 5 is the final chapter of this book and lays out the final set of proofs that each of us who believe in Jesus that way, are eternally secure no matter what. If you ask people what is their biggest fear, most would say death and taxes. While John can't say much of the reality of taxes, he can teach us a lot about the reality of death. That reality is that we don't have to worry about death as for the Christian it's simply a transfer into a new life.
 - c) So if we have to humble ourselves to always put the needs of others before our own, how is that ultimate victory? First, it's the greatest way to have joy in this life is to think of the needs of others before our own. Second, if God told you we had to win some great sport contest to enter heaven, most of us would put on our "nike" equipment to try to win that race if it means we get eternal life. Yet, if we accept the fact Jesus has already achieved a complete and ultimate victory before we were ever born, why struggle to train for a race if we already have that ultimate victory guaranteed? That's why we're to live by showing a strong sense of gratitude for that victory by putting other's needs in front of ours. If you grasped that, you've just grasped what it means to be a Christian and the purpose of First John while I'm at it. With that said, let me explain how we've "overcome" in Chapter 5.
2. Chapter 5 begins with a statement that if we believe Jesus is the promised Christ, that's the Greek word that is the translation of the Hebrew word "Messiah". The next statement is if we believe He came from God (that is, Jesus always existed) then we have that "nike" victory. John's point is we can't love God the Father, unless we love God the Son as they are one.
 - a) Let me give a quick example. Suppose you work for a company and you think your boss is a pretty good person. Now you meet his son for the first time and you can see he acts exactly like his father acts. How can you not appreciate the son, when he's just like his father in every way? That's why you can't do an "end run" around Jesus to get to God the Father, as that would be an insult to the Father who loves His Son as much as life itself.
 - b) Another way we know for sure we have that "nike" (overcoming) ultimate victory in Jesus is that it is our desire to obey His commandments. For example we shouldn't have a view of not wanting to help others as we have our own problems. The Christian should desire to put the needs of others first as that is our "nature". If we love God we desire to do what it is He wants us to do, and that is be a witness for Him by putting the needs of others as a priority over our own needs. Personally I want joy in my life. The best way to have joy is that attitude of putting others before us. When we live that way the joy we have is greater than any other pleasure we can have in this lifetime. What we may not realize is it pleases the Father when we act that way as "giving" is His nature as well.

- c) My key point here is if we believe Jesus is God and is fully human to this day, we do have that "nike" ultimate victory whether we fell special or not. That's John's main point in the first few verses of this final chapter. Don't feel like an ultimate victor? Spend some time making a difference for others, then experience the joy of that giving without expecting a reward for doing so, and you know for sure you have that ultimate victory in Jesus.
- d) From here we get some more proofs that Jesus is who He claims to be. We get an unusual proof text in that John sites Jesus baptism (referred to as "the water"), the cross (referred to as "the blood") and the Spirit living within us as our proof that we are "over-comers". One reason John wrote like that is because he's dealing with people who denied His humanity. That's why John refers to Jesus being human at both his baptism and his death. Then John refers the fact that Holy Spirit convicts us of the truth of the Gospel. The reason the bible says the only unforgivable sin is the "Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 12:31-32) is that refers to a life long denial that Jesus is God. One of functions of the Spirit to drive us to God and closer to Him through our lives.
- e) OK John (me), you're "preaching to the choir" again. Why should I care about any of this basic Christian stuff? Because sooner or later you're meet a wonderful person with a great outlook on life that doesn't believe in Jesus as God. You're going to start thinking, why is the only way to heaven through Jesus when "x" is such a nice person? You have to realize what an insult it is to God the Father to think, "I don't need Your Son to pay the price for my sins, look what a great person I am (or that person is)". The writer John is reminding us that we are "over-comers" (have ultimate victory in God) if we reject that "he or she is really a nice person mentality" and realize that perfection is required to be with a perfect God forever in heaven. Therefore, perfect forgiveness is required. To steal a classic joke, "There are two ways to get into heaven, one is to never sin once in your life, and the other is to accept Jesus perfect payment for our sins". As for people who've never heard of Him, I take the view that a fair God will judge people perfectly, including children who die.
- f) After John spends about half of this chapter convincing us of this ultimate victory we get of eternal life, then he explains the almost incomprehensible benefits. The first is that all of our prayers get answered. That doesn't mean if I pray for a big pile of money, I'll get it because I asked for it. It means that if I pray for something that's God's will to occur at the present time He'll grant us that prayer request because it's His will. Another old Christian expression is, "Without God, we can't. Without us, God won't". That means He desires to make us part of His plan for the world. The reason we pray "unanswered" prayers is that we don't usually know His will, and a method of trial and error is to pray for things as to discern what is His will for our lives. I've accepted a long time ago, that any prayer I give that's unanswered is not His will, and I don't let it bother me.
- g) Then we get a weird "left turn" by John. It's about praying for sins committed by believers in that "sin ultimately leads to death". John's saying we should not pray for sin that leads to death. My question is, how do you tell the difference? For example, if we see a person we know is a believer doing something wrong, we should pray that the person turns from that sin. However, God can also allow a person to die, not that they'd lose their salvation, but because He doesn't want that sin to "infect" the church. It's like when a surgeon takes away a part of our body that is cancerous, so God can work that way in the church. What I believe the point is that we can pray what we want, but God's in charge of all life.
- h) The bottom line of the last section is the importance of believers to keep away from sin as much as possible. It's not about losing our salvation, but about not being able to enjoy an "ultimate victory" by wasting the greatest gift God's given us, our lives. John's final line in this epistle is to "keep ourselves from idols" which is John's way of saying avoid sin as it'll harm our witness for Jesus let alone get us into trouble in many ways. The point is we are saved no matter what, but to really appreciate the ultimate "nike" victory we have in Jesus we're to use our lives for His glory. The rest is the details. Speaking of which, let's start:

3. Chapter 5 Verse 1: Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.
- a) I have to admit that it's tough at times to comment on John because he loves to return to the same issues over and over again, each time only adding a few new phrases. That is what I mean when I say John likes to write in "circles" constantly returning the same ideas over and over again. One of those themes is the reminder that each of us who believes in Jesus as "The Promised Messiah", that is God Himself coming into the world. If you ask a religious Jewish person if the "Messiah" is God or just a human, they'll say he will only be a human which is one reason why they deny Jesus as the Messiah as He claimed divinity.
 - i) One of the main reasons John wrote the Gospel of John was to show Jesus divinity as well as His humanity. However, none of that is John the writer's point here. In Verse 1 the point is simply if we believe Jesus is the Messiah promised to Israel as a nation and believe He is God's son, then we can know for sure God loves us as we have love for His son.
 - ii) Suppose you think, I don't feel any emotional attachment to Jesus, but I read His Word and try to obey the commandments as best I can. If that's the case we don't have to worry about "feelings" because the way to tell if God loves us for sure is if we do carry out His commands. The "command" is what I've been preaching for the first few pages of this lesson: We care about others as priority over ourselves and we desire to see the Gospel spread.
 - iii) What about the 10 Commandments? I thought all people are judged by them. Yes we are, but not in the sense of keeping them perfectly to get into heaven. What we will discover is that if we do care about pleasing God, then we just "naturally" (for the lack of a better term) want to obey those commandments, as it is our desire to please the God who created us and gave us life in the first place.
 - iv) That brings me back to the idea of our "emotional" attachment to God. If we live to make a difference for Him, the emotion will come. It's like a relationship with a spouse or even a very close friend, if we care about them, we just want to do stuff for them because we care about them, often more than ourselves. I was reminded of that just a few minutes ago as I had to pause this writing to help out my wife as she's dealing with "things" that required the help of someone else and my desire is to put her needs as priority over my own desire, to say write at this moment.
 - b) Bringing this "home", the point of the first few verses of this chapter is a proof that we do get an ultimate victory not only of eternal salvation, but an intimate relationship with the God of the Universe. A few days back I was dealing with a person who was complaining about how messed up his life was and he felt like nothing special. While I can't make his problems go away, I can help with his perspective. That perspective should be that we're something special no matter what we're dealing with in our lives as all of us who believe in Jesus as God's Son (and being fully God and fully human) do get an ultimate victory no matter how we feel about ourselves at the present moment.
 - c) Let me make it simple: Would you like to know for sure you're going to heaven? Then all we have to do is believe Jesus is God and the Son of God and we can know for sure we are eternally saved. We can't earn that salvation. All we can do out of gratitude for that fact is to use our lives to make a difference for Jesus since we can't earn our salvation.
 - i) Suppose we think, "But you don't know how much I've messed up in the past even as a believer in Jesus"? As I love to say, welcome to the club. As Christians we're not under condemnation for not doing enough for others. As my wife loves to say we can't change our past, only learn from it, so we can change the future. So does that mean we quit our lives to help others? No it just means we use our lives to do that. sSo as through our day, look for opportunities to be a witness for Him.

4. Verse 3: This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.
- a) What's easy to think, is "having to live to carry out God's commands is a burden". It's like a person who always goes around complaining how difficult their lives are as they aren't happy about life. No one wants to be around a complainer all day, as it wears us out. I live not far from Disneyland. They sell shirts with the words "Grumpy" and "Eeyore" that are designed for people who are either mad all the time or complaining all the time. What I'm getting at is if we believe Jesus is God and we know that we're supposed to obey all of His commandments, we shouldn't go around like we're "Grumpy or Eeyore" complaining how hard it is to live that way. As the text says, it shouldn't be a burden to us.
 - b) Let me explain this concept a different way. If we go around thinking, all I've done today is focus on my own life, and I haven't done anything for anyone else today, I'm burdened as I'm not a good witness for Jesus today. "Woe is me, I haven't done enough for Jesus as I haven't been a good witness for Him today". Congratulations, if you're thinking like that, you've have just earned your "Eeyore" shirt.
 - c) The point is it's "natural" for a Christian to want to help others. The problem is we easily get focused on our lives and forget to look for opportunities to be a witness for Him. My point here is we don't have to think of God's commands as a burden we have to carry, but just a part of our nature. A way to tell that we have that ultimate victory in Jesus, is part of our nature is to care about others. If we don't think of God's commands as a burden we have to carry, but think of them as just "part of who we are as Christians" then we've got that ultimate victory translated "overcomes" in these verses or "nike" in the original Greek.
 - d) Let me return to the type of person who is helpful to others, but doesn't believe in Jesus as God, but is just a kind person. What about them? Well, they may be full of joy and lead a wonderful life, but eternal salvation requires perfection. As we all know, nobody's perfect which is why we must accept Jesus payment for our sins to spend eternity with God. All I'm saying is a natural output of accepting Jesus as fully God and fully human, is a desire to please Him. Let's face it, if we're grateful for our salvation, we'd want to do something about that salvation. Since we can't repay God for that victory, all we can do is do what it is He desires we do, and show love to others unconditionally as He's shown us that same type of unconditional love.
 - e) That's the point of these verses. We don't think of God commands, as a "burden we have to bear" like a burden, but a natural outflow of gratitude for what God's done for us. It is just part of our new nature, as we live to make a difference for Him in others as God has done in our own lives. Why do this? Joy. If we can't earn our salvation, by working hard to make others happy, why bother? Again joy. I don't know about you, but I don't want to go around wearing a "Grumpy or Eeyore" being associated with me, I want to be filled with joy as I use my life for something greater than myself, and that's to use it to make a difference for the God who created us in the first place.
 - f) The reason John keeps coming back to the same themes over and over again in this book is he's trying to get across to us just how special it is to be a Christian. The reason he likes to use the word translated "overcome" is for us to realize just how special we are in God's eyes not that we deserve it, but just because He loves us unconditionally. But doesn't He have that love for all people? Yes, but only some people chose to respond to that love and use their lives to make a difference for Him. That's what God's calling each of us to do as we use our lives for His glory. Want a quick summary of what I'm describing here? If we use our lives to make a difference for Jesus, we have "overcome" whether we feel special or not. If we believe Jesus is God, and we act on it by obeying His commandments, then we don't have to fear whatever happens to us in this life and can have joy through it all.

- g) So what does the writer mean by "overcoming the world" in Verse 5? Consider what it is that nonbelievers in Jesus want: They want a good life for themselves and to do things to enrich their own lives. "Overcoming" is about the desire to help others and not just help ourselves to enrich our own lives. What we learn when we "overcome", is we do end up enriching our own lives when we learn to think of others as a priority over ourselves. We get far more joy thinking that way than we can if we just live for our own success. That's what John means by "overcoming the world". The "world" as it is used here is a metaphor for all who don't believe Jesus is God and want to use their lives to make a difference for Him in this world. Stop and think about life this way, "No matter how bad it gets, or no matter what I'm dealing with at this moment, I can't lose my salvation if I believe in Jesus as John describes here in this book." If I can't lose that salvation, then how can I have joy in my life despite what I'm dealing with? By putting others as priority over ourselves.
- h) Let me give an illustration: When we are hurting, (and assuming we can "get out of bed" despite that pain), I find that if I do something for someone else as opposed to just sitting there feeling sorry for our self, then I get joy. A great way to deal with our problems and have joy is to focus on someone else. It lifts up our spirits and brings joy despite whatever it is we have to deal with in our lives. That's the type of joy God wants us to experience by obeying His commands to make a difference for Him by putting other's needs ahead of our own.
- i) OK, now that I've been that point to death, we can move on.
5. Verse 6: This is the one who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.⁷ For there are three that testify:⁸ the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.
- a) To understand where John's going with this, I need to discuss history at the time he was writing this letter. There was a growing moment late in the 1st Century that denied Jesus was fully human and fully God from His birth through His death. That moment would make statements like God "entered" Jesus at His baptism and He left the body prior to the events of the crucifixion, as God can't die. Islam argues that Jesus was a great prophet but He didn't bodily rise from the dead because God can't die. That lie exists to this day.
- b) With that background understood, keep in mind that John wrote about and witnessed the key events of Jesus life. God the Father "spoke" when Jesus was baptized and John was at the cross when Jesus died. To deny the "water" (baptism) and the "blood" (crucifixion) is to deny what John personally saw and witnessed. John's point here is that Jesus was, and always will be fully God and became fully human at his birth. That's why John states that the water and the blood both "testify" who Jesus is.
- c) While I'm on the topic of Jesus baptism, let me state a few things about it. First, remember that John the writer of this book is NOT "John the Baptist", as they're two separate people. John the Baptist was killed before the crucifixion so he couldn't have written this book as it discusses the crucifixion itself. Next, let's remember why Jesus was baptized. It wasn't for His own sins as He had none. It's a symbolic way of saying Jesus desired to clean all the sins of people, by Him paying the price for our sins. There's a classic debate over who killed Jesus. The answer effectively is "no one", as Jesus freely gave His life for our sins. The closest comparison I can think of is if a soldier dies by falling on a grenade so others around that soldier can go on living. I'm stating all of these fundamentals so that we can realize when John says "the water", he's saying that Jesus baptism is proof of who He is at the time Jesus began His public ministry. Jesus didn't "become God" then, it was just the time when the ministry work began. Therefore John says the "water" testifies who Jesus is based on what occurred when that event happened.
- d) That leads us to the crucifixion. John's related point is Jesus was "fully God" at that point and His "blood" being shed testifies to that idea that Jesus was always fully God.

- e) I admit it's tough to grasp the idea of God "dying". That's why Islam and other religions can't accept the Gospel message. After all, if God is God, how can He die? The same way you and I can "die" and still live forever. As we all know by now, Jesus didn't really die as much as "transfer" into His new eternal body. I'm not sure what that body is like, but as I stated in the last lesson, Jesus could enter a locked room (See John's Gospel, 20), and that's stated as a fact. An old joke states that the only man-made thing in heaven will be the nail prints in Jesus arms and the side that's been pierced. I'm not sure what our eternity bodies will be like, but they have to be something that doesn't wear out or age with time. I know we eat a meal with Jesus as stated in Revelation, but I don't suspect we actually digest that food as I don't believe heaven requires a "sewer system". My point here is although none of us can fully comprehend how God can die and rise again, we accept the concept that if "God is God" He can do what He wants when He wants and that includes Him becoming human and dying for our sins.
- f) That in summary is why John says the proof of Jesus being God and becoming human is what He went through at the "water" (baptism) and the "blood" (crucifixion).
- g) All of that leads to John's next point. John says there are "three things that testify of who Jesus is. The third (after the water and blood) is God's Spirit, or the "Holy Spirit" as we'll commonly say today. OK, what does that mean? Remember that the underlying question of First John is effectively "How do we know for sure that Jesus is God and did rise from the dead?" After giving a bunch of proofs that John himself personally saw such as Jesus being baptized as a symbolic act of the cleansing of our sins (not His) and seeing Jesus die and rise again, the third method is by the Holy Spirit. This is John's way of saying, I know all of you reading this epistle didn't witness these events like I did. I know that all of you are studying the bible as evidence, so let me tell you about the job of the Holy Spirit:
- i) The reason we consider the Spirit of God to be a separate entity from the Father as well as Jesus is that He convicts some people of the truth of the bible, but many do not believe it even if the evidence is overwhelming. Others think, I think the story is true, but I'm not going to change my life based on the truth of the Gospel. That is why the Holy Spirit exists, to convict us that the Gospel story is God's word.
- ii) I admit, it's difficult to explain the Holy Spirit, because like God Himself, the Spirit can't be physically seen. Those of us who are trusting in Jesus as being fully God as well as fully human "just know that we know", because the evidence that Jesus did all the bible said He did convicts us to do something about it. That's how we know the Holy Spirit is guiding us, because we can't stand not responding to how we've been saved by the Gospel. A good way to tell that the Holy Spirit does live in our lives is the fact we can't stand not praying, or we can't stand not singing to God, or we can't stand not doing something about our faith or we can't stand not obeying His word or can't stand not being kind to others. All of that is the Spirit of God working in us to convict us to do something about the Gospel.
- iii) That is John's point, even though we didn't actually see Jesus being baptized or see Jesus Himself on the cross, we "know that we know" because we're convinced this is all true. That's the Holy Spirit working in our lives. That's also what motivates me to write every day and hopefully motivates you to use whatever gift or talent that God's given you to make a difference for Him.
- h) With that said, one more quick point before I move on. If you read from the King James or the New King James Version of the bible, there is an additional phrase in the last part of Verse 7 through the middle of Verse 8 that's omitted in the text of other versions of the bible. It reads "in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth:". It's not in other translations because the oldest version we have of that phrase is from the 14th century. The short version is I believe the bible in it's original "autograph" is God's word, and this was added much later.

- i) The longer version is the King James translators did the best based on the evidence they had, but mostly relied upon Latin translations. When the renaissance started, there was growing interest in ancient cultures such as Greek. There was a renowned bible scholar in the 15th century who worked diligently to translate the bible from the oldest Greek manuscripts into the modern languages of that day. He agreed to keep that phrase in the bible as he gave his word if anyone produced a Greek copy of that phrase in a bible, he'd promise to include it in what the King James writers did end up using. Someone produced a "recent" Greek copy of that phrase and he used it because he gave his word. If you forget that whole story, just remember it's not used in most translations because the best evidence today is that it's not in the original language.
- ii) Also realize that the verses bible scholars' do debate about are less than 0.1% of the bible. There is no major issue of the bible that can't be proven only by the text that is part of the "debatable" portion of the bible. With that said, back to 1st John:
 - 6. Verse 9: We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. ¹⁰ Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.
 - a) To understand these verses, remember that the writer John's last topic was God's Spirit. What John is saying in Verse 9 is effectively, yes we have the events of Jesus baptism and the cross as evidence of the truth that we believe, but the evidence of God convicting us of that truth is greater because it is "God Himself" doing the convicting that this is true. This is about my phrase of "how do I know that I know" this is true? Because it is God Himself doing the convicting.
 - b) That leads to a powerful point being made in Verse 10: If we deny Jesus is God, whether we realize it or not, we're calling God a liar when we (that is anybody) who denies Jesus as the Son of God. Remember earlier in this lesson I discussed "really nice people who do go around doing good things but they don't believe Jesus is God?" Imagine such people on judgment day effectively calling God a liar because they deny Jesus is God? All I know is I wouldn't want to be in their shoes when they stand before God on judgment day even if they used their life for good things. I know what the bible says about God being a God of justice and I admit it scares me to think of "good people" who deny Jesus as being God in front of God the Father, because whether they realize it or not, they're calling God the Father a liar when they deny Jesus as God.
 - c) Ok, that's scary. What's the specific's that they are lying about? That's Verse 11: The fact that God gives eternal life to those who fully trust in Jesus as the complete payment for all sins they've committed. It's the fact those of us who believe in Jesus as God also believe in the concept that we don't have to prove our worth to God based on how we lived our life. Like I say, I visualize standing in front of God, listening to Satan say I'm guilty of doing a long list of sins. Then God the Father says "I'm guilty as charged" and the only reason I'll be in heaven is because Jesus Himself agreed to pay the price for those sins and not due to anything I did to deserve being there. I know I'm "preaching to the choir" on that point, but John's trying to give us reassurance that "we know that we know" we're saved, and John's doing that in these verses by saying we can know we're saved because the Spirit of God convicts us that all of this is true. If you get that and believe that, you've gotten what these verses are saying to us, that the Holy Spirit works in our lives and convicts believers that all of this is true.
 - d) All of that leads to Verse 12 that simply says in effect those who believe the Gospel have eternal life and those who don't, "don't". Not much more needs to be said about that.

- e) Remember what John's trying to do with this letter, present us proof that the Gospel is the truth. John's Gospel was written to give us evidence that Jesus is God. John's letter here is all about saying, "we know that we know" this is true, based on the evidence of the stories as told in the Gospels as well as the Holy Spirit convicting us that all of this is true. If that isn't enough evidence to convict us, then truly there is no hope for us. So why do so many people refuse to accept all of this as true? A lot of it comes down to many people desire to prove their worth to God. Others simply don't want to change their way of living so they deny the stories and refuse to be convicted of it's truth. That's why the only unforgivable sin is the lifelong denial that Jesus is who He claimed to be.
 - f) On that happy note, Verse 13:
7. Verse 13: I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. ¹⁴ This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.
- a) Remember how I said the purpose of First John is so that "we know that we know", well Verse 13 pretty much says the same thing. Now that John's about to finish this letter, he is stating the purpose of this epistle here in Verse 13. That he's writing this so we know we believe in Jesus as the Son of God and by believing that we do have eternal life.
 - b) Let me go on a quick tangent here and ask what does eternal life mean? Wouldn't we get bored just standing there praising God all day? Even if we get our own heavenly place to live where we can kick back all day, wouldn't that be boring after say, 10,000 years there? I'm not positive what we do there forever, but I'm convinced it won't be boring. God's not saving us for eternity just because He promised to do so. He's saving us for a purpose. I don't fully comprehend that purpose but I'm convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that whatever we do for eternity, it will never be boring. The bible doesn't say a lot about life in heaven as it's mostly a manual about living life here. It's as if God's saying to us, let Me worry about the next life, you just concentrate on living this one for right now.
 - c) I gave that little speech about heaven here, as it leads me right back to my lesson title that we "overcome" the world in that we as believing Christians have such complete victory in Jesus, we "overcome" in that in many ways in heaven we will become "one with God". No I'm not saying we become little gods. I'm saying the goal is to grow so close to God based on how we live that we desire what He desires and He desires that we live as He desires. Believe it or not, that leads to what Verse 14 says about prayer. That verse is saying that He hears all our prayers and answers all of them. As I said in the introduction, that does not mean if we ask for say a huge pile of money, that money will fall out of the sky upon us. The idea is all about praying for His will for our lives, not our will. Because we don't know what is His will, we're free to ask for whatever we want, but He only answers "yes" to what is His will for our lives t that moment.
 - d) I've learned a long time ago to accept the idea that whatever prayer God doesn't answer or effectively says "no" too, not to bother me, as my job is to accept His will for my life. I simply pray what I want to pray and realize that He'll only answer what is His will. I've tried to get into the habit as of late to mainly pray for things I know for sure is His will: It would include me agreeing to accept whatever is His will for my life. It includes asking to be filled with the Spirit so I can make a difference for Him. If all of us as believers have the Holy Spirit living within us, how do we become filled with the Spirit? That just means we agree to let the Spirit guide us as God desires we go through our life. It means we're willing to be led by whatever is His will for us today. It also means we accept the good and bad things that occur in our lives if accept those things as His will for us at this time. I never cease to be amazed of how God allows "things" in my life that are relevant to what I'm teaching at any given moment and that includes some pretty tough things I've had to deal with in my life at any given time.

- e) There is a positive side to all that we go through in life. We have to accept the idea that all the good things we have in life is because we've asked for them whether we realized it or not. When we ask God to bless our day or guide our lives, we're realizing that He's given us what we need to survive and make a difference for Him. As you read this lesson, you can realize that God's given us the ability to use our life to make a difference for Him and that's an answer to prayer that we do "respond" to the Gospel by agreeing to believe it. It's amazing to consider that all our lives as Christians is an answer to someone's prayer that we are saved. I'm convinced that everyone who is saved, is saved because someone else did pray for them prior to being saved. I've met a few people who said they've come from a family where no one was saved. Yet God still picked them to be "overcomers" because someone else did pray for them. My favorite story is about a man who was convinced that no one ever prayed for him to be saved, until he met his future wife, who told him she has been praying for her future husband for years before they met.
- f) Gee John that's nice, but what does any of this have to do with these verses? It's all about realizing that God does hear us when we pray. We don't get a "pat on the back" when we specifically pray something that God answers yes too. We just know we get yes answers based on how life plays out. We pray about certain things that we see come to pass and we can realize that God's been guiding us to do His will the whole time.
- i) Let me try a tough one: Suppose someone we love is sick and we pray for them, and they get better. Isn't that just our bodies God given ability to heal itself or a doctor's ability to assist us getting better? How did prayer make a difference? The point is we didn't know the outcome of that surgery. We don't know the future of what will happen, but God does. We pray it through so God can work in the lives of those we care about. It's about us giving God a chance to work through us so He can make a difference.
- ii) It's amazing to consider with all of our modern technology, we still can't build a machine that's both self-replicating and self healing. One reason we accept that God exists is that people and animals can self replicate and be healed of sickness over time. No machine can do both of those functions. I mention that as when we pray for someone to get better, whether we realize or not, we are asking God to do what He's already done, which is create us with the ability to heal over time.
- iii) OK then, what about the opposite? What if we pray for someone to get better and they don't recover? Then we accept that it wasn't God's will for that person to live any longer in this world. I've always argued that if this life is all that there is, this is a very unfair place to live as many horrible tragedies happen. It's only if there is a God and there is a next life that life as we know it could possibly be "fair" to all.
- iv) So how is it fair for a nice person to go to hell because they denied Jesus? That is because we've effectively called God a liar when we deny Jesus is God. Again, I don't want to be in their shoes when that day of judgment comes. What about all people who die without that knowledge? I trust in a fair God that will judge all of us fairly based on what we do know about Him.
- v) The reason I'm lecturing all of us on judgment and prayer is to realize that God is hearing all our prayers, even the one's where we don't like the results. That's the point John is making in these verses as well. The point is all our prayers do get answered, it's just that the answer is God's will, not our will. The key to getting a prayer answered the way we like is to accept His will about every situation as we realize that God's will for our life is what we should always desire especially when we don't like what is happening in any given situation.
- vi) The corollary to that line is in the Book of James 4:2-3. His point is similar to what John is saying, sometimes we don't get God's results because we don't ask for His help. My point is "bad results" can also be a lack of prayer in a given situation.

- g) OK, I've been lecturing all of us for two pages now on how prayer gets answers and what is the damage of a lack of prayer getting answered the way we want our lives to go. To sum all of this up, the Christians get all our prayers answered, but the only "yes" answers are the one's that are His will for that moment. I know I'm stating the obvious here, but it does help us to see the eternal perspective especially when we feel like God's not giving us the answers that we want to our prayers. When we go through tough times, it's about realizing He's still there guiding us, but we're going through His will, even if we don't get why we have to go through whatever it is we're dealing with at that time. Believe it or not that little lecture leads me perfectly into the next few verses:
8. Verse 16: If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that.¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.
- a) I'll be the first to admit, Verse 16 is both confusing and hard to understand. That verse is saying if a brother (fellow believer) commits a sin not leading to death, we should pray about it to give him (or her) life. Then John says this only refers to sins that do not lead to death. What does all that mean?
- i) First, we have to grasp the idea that we're talking about believers only. It refers to people who have eternal life no matter what they do. Also recall that John said in this same letter in earlier chapters that believer's no longer sin. What he meant by that is if we are Christians, we can't sin without the Holy Spirit convicting us that whatever we did, is sin. We can't stand it and desire to turn from it. A way to tell a true Christian from a fake is the Christian can't stand to keep on sinning the way he or she has and is convicted it is sin and wants to change. As one of my teachers taught me, "Christians can't get away with anything as the guilt drives us back to God over what we've done."
- b) With that statement made, let me tell you what John wants us to pray about and not pray about: If we see someone who we know is a fellow believer committing some sort of sin, notice the verse doesn't say, "Get in his or her face, chew them out and tell them to go get their act together". Instead we're to pray for them to repent. As to a confrontation, we do get a model of how to do that in Matthew 18. John's point here is we've got something a lot better than a confrontation and that's the power of prayer. John says we should stop, pray for them to repent of that sin. It's a matter of thinking, "Is God big enough that He can deal with this situation all by Himself? Of course that's true which is why it's a waste of time to "chew them out" let alone not make a difference. The point is if they're a true believer, the Holy Spirit will convict them of what they did wrong and He'll lead him or her back on the right path without us "getting in their face" about it.
- c) Now for the strange part. John writes that there is a sin leading to death, and we should not pray about that. OK, what is that and how can we tell? Since the only unforgivable sin is a lifelong denial that Jesus is God, we can assume John's talking about people who deny Jesus is God and refuse to repent about it. So does that mean we don't pray for any person who doesn't believe in Jesus? If that were the case, no one would be saved. John is talking about believers in these verses. If someone's walked away from their faith, it's up to God to convict them of that. If we can tell they've refused to change then that's the concept John's referring to here.
- d) If John's talking about believers, shouldn't we pray for them anyway? If they're believers then the issue isn't spiritual death, but physical death. Let me explain: In Acts Chapter 5 there's a story of a couple named Ananias and Sapphira. The short version is they lied to the church about something and died for that sin. For all we know they're saved, but the issue is "sin infecting the church". My point is God can allow a believer to die in order to not let the sin spread within the body of Christ. That's John's issue here.

- e) Reread these verses for a moment and look at them in the context of not talking about the loss of one's salvation, but about the loss of one's physical life due to sin. They will make much more sense if you see them in that light. Since we're discussing believers, the issue can't be eternal life, but life on this earth. That's why when John says don't pray about a person who's turned from God and no longer believes in Jesus paying the full price for all of their sins, we should pray for them as John doesn't want someone like that to be a part of one's church group. Think of it this way: Do you want someone attending your church who goes around denying the fundamentals of Christianity? Of course not, which is why John says we shouldn't pray for them.
- f) So are you saying we should pray for God to strike dead believers who've turned from a faith in God? Again, return to Acts Chapter 5. Peter didn't pray for their death. All that Peter did in that story is point out their sin and God struck them dead. Am I saying that if we sin enough God can strike us dead? God can do what He wants when He wants and if a person is "hanging out" with believers but living in open sin, God has the power to take such a person "out of the ballgame" for the sake of the rest of the church. That's what John means when he wrote Verse 17 that says here, "All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death." When John wrote "sin not leading to death", I'm pretty convinced he's referring to physical death and not eternal death. John's point is all sin is wrong as is stated in the first part of Verse 17. However most sins won't get us struck dead by God on the spot as most of us know. However, I don't want to test God on that matter. To realize that God's got the power to take us "out of the ballgame" at any time is a good motivation to stay a strong believer and turn from sin.
- g) To sum all this up, to state the obvious first, realize that all sin is bad. We can't fix people, but we can pray for them. If we see a believer change their view of Jesus paying for their sins we shouldn't let that person be a part of our church until they repent. That's what he meant by "don't pray for that". We may pray they change, but at the same time we should not let them back in our group of believers until they repent. The scary part is to realize if we continue to live in unrepentant sin, God's got the power to make us pay for that sin by ending our lives on earth so we don't "infect" other believers. That thought alone should scare us enough to keep us on the straight and narrow.
 - i) Suppose we think, I believe Jesus is God and all that, but I still struggle with a sin and I have for years. As long as we're human, we're going to be tempted by sin as its part of our human nature. If sin wasn't tempting, we wouldn't be human. God laid out this motivation of "He can take us out of the ballgame at any time" so we do say something like, "I know that's tempting, but not today, as I love God more than I love that particular sin at this moment. If we do fall into that trap, realize that God still loves us and gives us the power to turn from that particular sin. Of course if one needs professional help, I never hesitate to recommend it.
- h) OK, now that I've scared all of us half to death, let's move on to a more positive thought:
 - 9. Verse 18: We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him
 - a) Keep in mind that John's talking to believers, not unbelievers. Since John's thinking about those who believe in God yet are struggling with a particular sin, John's reminding us of the "big picture" here in Verse 18: The key point is the believer is safe with God in that the "evil one" (yes Satan) cannot eternally harm him or her. Remember what is Satan's goal in dealing with believers: To make us ineffective witnesses for Jesus. Yes we can sin enough where we're "taken out of the ballgame" which again would be a goal of Satan, but he also realizes he can't touch our eternal salvation. The point for you and me is we can't sin to a point where we lose our salvation (unless of course we deny Jesus as fully God and fully human). As long as we believe that, we can't sin enough to lose our salvation, although we can be a bad witness for Jesus, which is always the danger for any believer.

- b) In the Gospel of John, Chapter 11, that chapter is nicknamed the "good hands" chapter as it describes believers as being in God the Father's hands and Jesus own hands at the same time. I don't picture God the Father as having literal hands. The point is we can't lose our salvation if we're trusting in Jesus and that's John's point in the that chapter of his gospel as well as his point in this verse. We may mess up as to be a bad witness for Jesus, but it's not possible for a believer to mess up so bad one loses their salvation. That's the point in this verse as well. Can we still be tempted? All the time. Can we still sin? Of course. We have to see this section as focusing on believers. The point is God protects us from taking away our eternal salvation and that's what John's getting at here.
 - c) Let me ask a different question: Why would Satan want to take away our salvation? What does he gain by doing that? The answer is longer life. There are only a fixed number of people in heaven. Nobody knows that number except God the Father. What Satan wants to do is delay that final believer from being saved as that's a wrap for him when it occurs, so he's doing all he can to delay that number from occurring. That's another reason why John's telling us about our eternal security despite whatever sin we can be facing.
10. Verse 19: We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.²⁰ We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true--even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.
- a) I admit it's a scary thought to realize that all people are either under the control of God or under the control of Satan. That doesn't mean every nonbeliever goes around doing acts of evil. It means all people are either saved or not saved and there is no middle ground. The point of these verses is that God's given us understanding that we realize all of this is true. That we've "overcome" the world (the ultimate victory that I described as I started this lesson) by believing Jesus is, and always will be both fully God and human. Because we do accept that as truth, we've moved from the "bad group to the good group".
 - b) John is finishing this letter by returning to the truth of the Gospel message. The key point again of this whole epistle is we can know for sure we're saved no matter what happens if we accept that fact about Jesus is true, which is the point I've beaten over all our heads all through these five chapters in this epistle. Yes temptation is real, and yes demonic forces exist that want us to be ineffective witnesses for Jesus, but the power God gave us is much greater than whatever forces are working to stop us from being a good witness. That's the truth of the Gospel message which is the key point of these last few verses.
11. Verse 21: Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.
- a) I admit this is a strange way to end the book. No John's not talking as an example, having little statues of Buddha in our house although that is an example of an idol. What John is saying is anything that turns us away from the true God is an "idol" whether we realize it or not. We get this final warning about "idols" in the sense that anything and everything that turns us away from seeing God as the center of our life is harmful. So are you saying for example, I can't go to a movie or a ballgame or even go out shopping? Of course not. I am saying God wants to be a part of every aspect of our lives. I'm not saying we have to think about God 24/7, but we as Christians should pray that God be a part of every aspect of our lives so that we do use our lives for His glory. Speaking of praying, let's get at it:
12. Father, thank you that we "know that we know" we're saved no matter what. Thank You that we can go through our lives here with the assurance of our salvation no matter what we do with our lives. Help us to use our lives for Your glory. Be a part of all aspects of our lives and lead us as to use our lives as You desire to make a difference from You. Guide us in the decisions we have to make so that all aspects of our lives will glorify You. Lead us down the path You desire we take even if its hard for us to accept that path. Guide us for Your glory, we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.
13. Oh, there's no bibliography yet, as I'll place that after I finish 2nd and 3rd John coming up.