

First John Introduction, and Chapter 1 – John Karmelich

1. For those of you who are regular readers of my bible studies, you know that my favorite question to ponder is, "I'm saved, now what". This lesson backs up a little as if to ask, "How do I know for sure that I'm saved? What's the proof that I'm saved no matter what? What should I do with my life now that I'm saved? The basic question is how do I know I'm saved? That's the question that is the focus of this short 10-verse chapter and that last question is the title of this lesson.
2. Let me also start this study another way. We just finished a long set of lessons on Deuteronomy that effectively said, "Behavior matters" to the once-saved, always saved born again believer that Jesus died for every sin we'll ever commit in our lifetime. If our behavior matters, shouldn't we be sure we're saved "that way" in the first place? If we can't earn our salvation by our behavior, what's the purpose of doing good works? In other words, it's essential for the Christians to have a good understanding of what is our relationship with God the Father and God the Son so we can use our lives to make that difference for Him. That's one reason why we're studying 1st John, as well as the very short 2nd and 3rd John letters while I'm in the neighborhood.
3. Since we only have 10 verses in this chapter and it is the first lesson on this series, I'd like to start this lesson by giving a little background on the who, what, when's and why's of this letter. Then we'll get to the first chapter itself. So my new readers can realize, the chapter numbers and verse numbers we're not added until a millennium after this was written. Those references were added so we can find verses easier. Even with that said, this lesson is will only cover the first 10 verses of this letter as that is "Chapter 1". Enough of that, onto the "who, what, when's and why's":
 - a) The who is the apostle John. This is the same John who was one of the 12 disciples as well as the author of the Gospel of John. Neither the Gospel of John, nor this epistle or second or third John for that matter mention him by name, but the writing style of all these books are similar enough that the earliest church accepted all of them as being written by John as well as the fact it's the same John who's one of the 12 Apostles.
 - b) I should also add the fact that this "John" is not the same John as "John the Baptist". If you know your Gospels, John the Baptist was killed early in the middle of Jesus' ministry. We know that John the Baptist could not have written any "Post-Jesus" books since he's killed in the middle of those Gospel accounts.
 - c) The John that wrote this letter as well as the Gospel of John, wasn't just one of the twelve disciples, he was also part of an "inner circle". Every now and then in the Gospels, you'll read of Jesus calling, "James, John and Peter" to witness something. Consider of all of the apostles, in effect it was only John and Peter that went on to write "Epistles". Of the four gospel's, two were directly written by apostles (John and Matthew) while Peter was the main source of Mark's Gospel. Luke wasn't an apostle. He came along a short time later and got his information by interviewing eyewitnesses to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. My point is once you get past the four gospels, the only apostles of the original 12 that wrote epistles that appeared in the New Testament were John and Peter.
 - i) The only other point to make about these three men is that "James" is not the same James as the epistle of James. The James that was part of Jesus "inner circle" was martyred for his faith as mentioned in Acts 12:2. Realizing that James was John's brother, so John himself was a witness to that act of heroism. The epistle of James is written by Jesus' half-brother who became a believer in Jesus after He rose from the dead. My point is to realize who John was and what he witnessed not only as one of the 12 disciples, but also during those early "rough years" in the life of the church as they had to deal with persecution as Christians.
 - ii) Since we know the "who", let's next focus on the when.

- d) The "when" is not stated in the letter. For that matter, John doesn't state his name or even whom this letter is written to. We can tell by the style of the epistle it's meant for anyone who believes Jesus is God. So given a lack of any dates given in the letter, or clues as to the dates, how do we know when it was written? What we do have is historical records of church leaders from the Second Century who'd personally studied under or knew of John. They're the source as to approximately when this was written. What we do know is that John left Jerusalem soon before it's destruction in 70AD. John remembered how Jesus predicted Jerusalem would be destroyed and probably left town for his own safety. Those church leaders from the second century reported that John moved to Ephesus, which was a major port city in what is today Turkey, not far from Greece. What is speculated is that John wrote this epistle sometime late in his life while John was a "church elder" based out of the city of Ephesus.
 - e) For those who like specific dates, I've read anywhere from 80AD to 95AD. Realize that in the time of Jesus three year ministry, John was probably an older teenager. John lived the longest of all the disciples. The point being that John is now an old man and is reflecting on what he's learned over his own life as a disciple and apostle for Jesus, as John has now faithfully served Jesus for a long time despite persecution faced by Christians.
 - f) One has to realize to be a Christian in the Roman world usually meant being an outcast of one's society. In the book of Acts, Chapter 19, Paul visited Ephesus probably a decade or two before John settled there. One of the main sources of income for that city was to sell idols made of silver to honor "Diana" the local goddess of that city. My point is for John to preach Christianity in that place is to encourage others to turn from one of the sources of income for the residences of that place. Therefore, John wrote to encourage Christians to still seek the truth about Jesus despite how most people lived there at that time.
4. Now that I've beaten the "when" question to death, let me focus on my favorite question: Why? Why did John write this letter? Why now, after living a long life as a Christian did John believe it was necessary to write this epistle and how did it get accepted as an "official" part of the bible?
- a) First let's focus on why John wrote it. As opposed to Paul's letters that read like a lawyer making an argument for his view, John writes more in "circular thoughts" explaining to us how we are blessed for following Jesus and to realize what a privilege it is to be a disciple of Jesus in the first place. The letter is very positive and we don't read any criticism of any disciples or particular churches. In short the letter is designed to encourage us in our faith in Jesus despite whatever it is we're currently dealing with in our lives.
 - b) Let me also address the issue of "public acceptance" of this letter. Because the Romans did persecute the church on and off for the first few centuries, there was no official bible until a particular Roman Caesar accepted Christianity in the fourth century and at that time did make it the official religion of the empire. While we still to this day have writings of some of the early church leaders of the 2nd and 3rd Century, those leaders distinguished their own writings from the writings of the apostles and referred to the books that became our bible as "Scripture". While some books were debated whether or not they belonged in the cannon of the New Testament, John's first and second letter were quickly accepted. My point is to realize that essentially since 1st John was written, it has been accepted as being "Scripture" by the early church and studied as such.
 - c) In summary, John was an "old man" when he wrote this, near the end of his life well over a half-century since the time of Jesus resurrection. He probably wrote it from Ephesus as he was the head of the church over the "Asia Minor" area (again, think modern Turkey as it is called today), of the church. The question I pondered is why now? Why did he wait until so many years after the time of Jesus to compose this letter? While there's no direct answer given in this book, what I suspect is John's main interest was in seeing Christians carry out Jesus command to love one another and put other's interest ahead of their own. Therefore, he wrote this when he did to encourage us to show that love to each other.

5. At this point, it may be best to start on the text itself, and the answer may be more obvious as to what was John's intent as he wrote this epistle and more importantly what is it God wants us to learn from studying this book. Therefore, onto Verse 1:
6. Verse 1: That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.
 - a) Let's start with the phrase "from the beginning". My question is the beginning of what? The beginning of Jesus' ministry? The beginning of John's ministry? The beginning of when the world began? The answer is to look at what else he wrote, the Gospel according to John. That book started with, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1, NIV). My point is both beginnings (this epistle as well as John's Gospel) are both making the point that Jesus is God that He always did exist and always will exist as God. That's the "beginning" in focus here.
 - b) That leads to the classic question, "How and why did God become man?" My best answer is that it's the best way for God to communicate with us. Let me use an illustration I gave back when I taught the Gospel of John: Imagine if you saw an anthill and a bunch of ants crawling in and out of that anthill. Then you saw a big bulldozer approaching it and that machine is about to wipe out that anthill. How could you warn the ants of that danger? If you jumped up and down next to the anthill, you'd only scare the ants. However if you became an ant and could talk to them, you could warn them of the danger to come. That in effect is what Jesus did, become a man, so He could warn us of the dangers that sin is doing to our lives and how we can eternally saved from the danger of sin.
 - i) The next question is how is it possible for God to become man in the first place? If you've read my studies for a while I usually state the question of how God can do anything bores me. That's because I figure if God is God, He'll do what He wants when He wants. If God wanted to "separate Himself" to become a man, I figure if God is God, He's capable of doing that. So you know the word "Trinity" is not in the bible anywhere. That term "Trinity" is not a problem, it's a solution to the issue of how can God "separate Himself" so He could become a man and still be God at the same time. As I also love to state there are hints of the trinity going all the way back to the book of Genesis as for example, the verse that reads, "Let us make man in our image" (Genesis 1:6, NIV) implies a united plural God with the word "us".
 - c) My point after a half page of discussion is simply that the term "Beginning" refers to the beginning of God's existence, which in effect had no beginning. What John is getting at in this verse is that God Himself appeared in the form of a man, and John himself held that man, touched him, heard him speak live and knows that Jesus always existed as God, but became human for our sakes.
 - i) Although John may not have realized it when he wrote this letter, but soon after it was written, there was a popular false teaching called "Gnosticism". There was no united Gnostic belief, or bible or church. It was a popular false view of Jesus that existed for a few hundred years after the time of John. The essential idea of this view is that Jesus was not "truly" human, but God embellishing a human form and he returned to being God before the crucifixion. The main point of their beliefs is that what we do "in the flesh" is irrelevant as it's only the Spirit that matters. That view is not as popular today, the point is whether John realized it or not, here in the opening verse, John is combating the false view that Jesus wasn't really fully human by stating effectively, "I touched Him, I felt Him, I heard Him speak and I was with Him daily for three years, so don't tell me God wasn't really human back at that time when I was with Him those three years." To say it another way, John is saying, I didn't imagine Jesus was there. He was flesh and bones as much as He was filled with God's spirit and I was there to witness both aspects of His life.

- d) OK John, that may be interesting if I was dealing with some cult. However, you and I are both Christians who truly believe Jesus was fully God and well as fully human. So tell me why should I care about this? The answer requires us to return to the original question of this lesson of "how do I know I am saved?" One way we know is we accept that the same John who wrote the Gospel of John is also the same John who wrote this epistle and more importantly is the same John who saw, touched, heard and felt Jesus as human. The point is we can be sure of our salvation because there is a tremendous amount of evidence that John is who he claimed to be and Jesus is who He claimed to be.
- i) To put all of this another way, we do believe by faith that Jesus is God, but it's not "blind faith", it is faith based on the evidence we have of the early writings of those who lived with Jesus and saw what He accomplished.
 - ii) Think about all of this even another way: Do you think the New Testament would have been written and copied over and over again, if the original disciples weren't absolutely convinced that Jesus was fully human as well as fully God and did rise from the dead? Yes we live by faith that all of this is true, but that faith is based on the evidence we have of historical writings that existed from that time.
 - iii) That leads to the question of how do we know what we have is what was actually written? In other words, how do we know the bible is accurate? If I wrote a book and I asked 100 people to hand copy it, would there be mistakes? Of course. If we compare all 100 copies, we can usually figure out the original copy, as the mistakes would not be the same from one copy to the other. That's how we have the books today. Are there a few places where scholars are not positive about which version is the original? Yes there are, but none of those discrepancies affect any of views we hold as Christians. In other words, none of those discrepancies affect the view that Jesus was human, He did live and breath, He did rise from the dead, etc.
 - iv) For what it's worth, we literally have a "mile high" pile of ancient manuscripts that were copies of parts of the New Testament that were hand copied for us for many a century before the printing press was invented. If you compare that to say, how much evidence we have that Julius Caesar ever existed or say Alexander the Great, what we have of ancient evidence of Jesus existence is far greater than every other well-known famous ancient historical figure.
- e) You may think at this point I've wandered too far from Verse 1, but in actually I haven't. John wrote this verse to prove to us that he was there and he saw Jesus in his human form and realized Jesus was both the eternal God and fully man. I went through this process of explaining how we don't have blind faith, so we can know we can trust this book as being part of the bible and what John wrote as being true. All of that leads me to the last part of Verse 1 that says, "this we proclaim concerning the Word of life". My point being is John's explaining who Jesus is and was so that John can explain to us what the "Word of Life" is (a title of Jesus) and what that means. OK, what does it mean? That's what the rest of the letter is going to tell us.
- i) The point is God came in the form of a human so He can tell us not only how we can have eternal life, but how we're to live our lives as Christians. I suppose one reason John waited so long to write this letter is that he'd lived out a full life as a believer in Jesus and wanted to share before his death how it is possible for any person to live as John did as a disciple of Jesus. The purpose of this book is so we can learn how Jesus wants us to live for Him. That in effect is what John is going to teach us through this book.
 - ii) All right, I've now written two full pages just on verse 1. At this rate, it's going to be a long lesson even though it's only a ten-verse chapter. The good news is I'm going to speed it up a little as we get through the rest of this chapter.

7. Verse 2: The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.⁴ We write this to make our joy complete.
- a) To begin, let me give my personal view of the difference between joy and happiness:
 - i) When I think of happiness, I think of our circumstances. If you just received good news about something, you are happy for that moment.
 - ii) Joy is an internal feeling of peace no matter what the circumstances. It's to realize that no matter what we're dealing with in life, we can have peace with God as well as be eternally secure because we don't have to earn our salvation with Him.
 - iii) To have joy in our relationship with God starts with accepting the idea that God is perfect by definition. It would make sense that if God's perfect, He can't tolerate any sin whatsoever. If God expects perfection, how can we ever be good enough for God to begin with? That's why we need to accept the concept of God Himself paying the complete price for us, as we can never be good enough for Him.
 - iv) I know I'm preaching to the choir here, but it's important to get the basics down of how we can have eternal joy despite our circumstances before we can discuss the rest of these verses.
 - v) Stop and consider that when Jesus told the disciples about having joy in their lives the disciples never asked, "How do we do that?" The original disciples got the fact that being with Jesus and putting Him as being in charge of their lives brought the joy to their lives despite the problems that we all have to face in our lives.
 - b) All of that leads me back to these verses. In Verse 1, John essentially said, "We disciples have seen God as He became fully human. We touched Him, heard Him speak, was with Him for three years." With that said, the next point is essentially the joy that we had with Jesus is the same joy that any Christian can experience by trusting Him to guide our lives for His glory. That's the underlying point of the relationship being described here.
 - c) That leads to the next key word in these verses: Fellowship. When most Christians think of "Fellowship", we either think of the dining room of our churches or a church pot-luck type of event. We associate it with having a meal with other members of our church. To grasp what John is saying here about the concept of "fellowship", one has to think bigger than say a meal with other Christians. Fellowship is essentially about having an intimate relationship with someone. Many of us have spouses or friends that we share aspects of our lives with. That's close to the idea of "fellowship". Think of it as becoming "one" with someone. It's about getting so close to a person that one is willing to share all the aspects of our lives with them.
 - d) That leads to describe the type of relationship God wants with each of us. Yes of course it is about doing His will, as that is how we have the type of joy anyone of us would want in our lives. At the same time, God wants us to share with Him, what we're dealing with in our lives. If we're struggling with a problem at this moment, God wants us to let Him be in that charge of that issue. If we're going to work, school or an event, God wants to be in on that event. It doesn't mean we have to focus on God "24/7", but we should be aware of His presence in all the decisions we make in our life. To rephrase a classic expression, the saying of "What would Jesus do", never worked for me. What I like better is "What would Jesus want me to do in this situation" is how God wants us to live at any moment.
 - i) That's the type of "fellowship" God wants with us. It's not that He's going to speak to us whenever we want Him too. It's about realizing He's in charge of our lives. It's about realizing He wants to guide our lives for His glory. Can we mess up? Of course we can and do all the time. God doesn't expect perfection from us, but He does expect us to try our best to live, as He desires we live. That's "fellowship".

- e) What I'm getting at is the same way we work to keep our relationships healthy with those we care about, so we need to work to keep our relationships healthy with God. Consider why God bothered to create the world in the first place. If God's perfect by definition, He would not need anything. However, if God is full of love by definition, He would want a "thing" (i.e., people) to express that love upon. That's why God created us, so He can have a close relationship with everyone who freely chooses to let Him be in charge of our lives. That's why God Himself had to pay the price for sins so we wouldn't have to worry about any effort to try to please Him to "earn our way" into heaven.
- i) I have to be careful here. Of course we want to please God in the sense that we as Christians believe He's in charge of our lives. We avoid sin not to earn points with God, but because it's the best way to live out our lives. We also avoid sin if we do desire to please the one who created us in the first place.
- f) Again, I'm well aware I'm "preaching to the choir" here, as most of us realize all of this. In order to understand the "fellowship" (close personal relationship) that God desires of each of us, it was essential that I explained what I meant by "fellowship" with God as that's the key point of these verses. Just as we cultivate (desire to grow) relationships with people that we care about around us, so God wants us to cultivate our relationship with Him by spending time with Him, through prayer, through His word and through time as we do honor Him both individually and with other believers. In summary, we spend time in a relationship with God not to "earn points" with Him, but because it's the best way to live out our lives and to have that sense of internal joy no matter what the circumstances we are dealing with at any one time.
- i) I have to admit that as a husband and a parent, there is little that brings me more joy than seeing those I love be happy and joyful as well. There are also a few close friends in my life and I truly enjoy seeing them joyful as well. If we're willing to have joy based on doing God's will for our lives, I find that joy also spreads with those we care about around us. Am I perfect? Hardly. Do I make the effort to have joy in my life? Of course, as that type of joy sustains me no matter what else I have to deal with at any given moment.
- g) After writing a lot about joy and fellowship with God and others, now look back at what John wrote in Verse 4: "We write this to make our joy complete". Remember that John is now an "old man" who has lived roughly 50-60 years since the time Jesus was resurrected. He is asking those who are reading this letter to make his (John's) joy complete by having the same type of close relationship with God and fellow believers that John himself has in his life. Recall that John has seen his brother, a fellow disciple killed for believing in Jesus. John was probably aware of the other disciples were killed for their belief and knows well that to believe in Jesus means being an outcast of that society. Yet despite all of that, John is asking to make his joy complete by joining him in that close relationship with God and with fellow believers.
- i) So if John has dealt with that much sorrow, how can he have joy? Again, return to the idea of separating "happiness from joy". Was John most likely angry when he learned his own brother was killed for believing in Jesus? Of course. We have to remember that "happiness" is circumstances, and joy is the internal peace we can have that we know we're saved as long as we believe in Jesus.
- ii) I've stated to my friends for years that I don't fear death, but I fear pain. I'm sure that if I was tortured for being a disciple of Jesus, I'd confess to just about anything to avoid the torture except denying Jesus is God, as I'm positive my eternal destiny is dependant upon that belief. My point is simply that it is fine for a Christian to feel sad or angry at a circumstance. However, having that eternal sense of joy is what God of us despite our circumstances. So why does John want us to have joy? So we can all enjoy God's peace no matter what we're dealing with at this time.

8. Verse 5: This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.
- a) We now move to a new topic about God and light. Before I go any further, it is essential to understand what the bible means by "light". To understand, we need to recall a few of the verses from Genesis Chapter 1. In Verse 3 of that chapter, God said "let there be light". That was part of the first day of creation. It's not until Verse 14 of Chapter 1 that we read of God creating the sun, moon and stars on the fourth day of creation. My point is simply that whatever God meant by "light" in Verse 3 of Genesis 1, is different from the lights He created in Chapter 1, Verses 14-18. All I want you to grasp at this point is the word "light" means more than say the sun or a lamp giving off it's light.
 - b) The word "light" as used in Genesis 1:3, is essentially the same concept that John is trying to get across here in "1st John". The concept of "light" refers both the knowledge of God's existence and the purity (perfection) of God. Back in Genesis 1:3, the writer was getting to a point of trying to describe the fact that God Himself was in the process of creating life in the world and that life was God made and God inspired.
 - c) What John is trying to get across in these verses is the realization that a perfect God exists who has no "darkness" as in faults, evil or impurity. One reason why we need Jesus for the complete payment of our sins is due to the perfect nature of God. No human is good enough for God as we are all sinful which is why God Himself must pay the utterly full price for our sins. As to children who die or those who die with no knowledge of Jesus, I trust in a fair God who will judge all people fairly.
 - d) Again, I know I'm slipping back into my "preaching to the choir" mode here, but in order to grasp the idea of God as perfect in terms of knowledge, sinless and unable to learn, we need to remind ourselves of His "light" (perfection). The reason John's bring up that issue here is because the goal of Christians is to "walk in that light". Let me explain:
 - i) If all that matters in life is we get saved and "that's that", well then we should set up the "electric chair" in church so people can get saved and then die. The purpose of being saved in the sense of trusting in Jesus' death as our full payment for every sin we'll ever commit or ever will commit is so we can then use our lives to make a difference for God in the world around us. That's when we experience the joy of knowing no matter what happens to us, we are saved. That's why John's telling us in this letter that he himself has talked to, touched and spoke to God as He became human so God in His perfection (light) can teach us how to have joy at all times.
 - ii) Let me explain all of this "light" another way. Just last night I met with my "men's bible study group". One of the men in this group lost his job and is struggling as he is trying to figure out what to do to support his family. Another one is going through a possible divorce and is not sure what to do. My job is not to fix all of their problems or my problems for that matter, but to remind all of them of the joy we can have despite whatever it is we have to deal with at this moment of life. We don't learn about God to fix every problem we have in life. We study about God so we can remind ourselves of the joy we have as we trust in His "light" to guide us as we make a difference for Him.
 - iii) The "shorter version" is that John wants all people who believe in Jesus to have the same type of joy that he has as we walk in God's "light" and realize that no matter what happens to us in this life, it's only temporary compared to eternity, and what is even better is God wants to guide us through this life and help us deal with our issues of the moment so He can be glorified through what happens in our life.
 - iv) The "even shorter version" is I can't solve people's problems, but God can.

- e) All of that realization what God's "light" is and we can walk in that light leads us all the way to Verse 6. The point here is if we claim to be Christians but "walk in darkness" then at that moment, we're not experiencing the "light" that God wants us to have. Let me give a few examples of what I mean by "walking in darkness":
- i) If we think, I've got this problem and there is nothing God can do to get me out of it, we walk in darkness.
 - ii) If we think I know some happy people who don't believe Jesus died for their sins, so why should I worry about my eternal destiny and just try to be a good person? If you think that you don't need God at that moment, you're walking in darkness.
 - iii) If we think I don't need God to help me right now, we walk in darkness.
 - iv) If we think, "I want to prove my worth to God based on how I lived my life", then we are walking in darkness.
 - v) The purpose for us of realizing God is "light" in the sense that He is perfect, knows all things and has no "dark aspect" whatsoever, is that His desire is for us to live as He desires. It's that "His laws matter" even if we believe we're eternally saved due to our trust that Jesus died for all our past, present and future sins. Think about it this way, if we know we're forgiven, why do we avoid, say stealing and murder? It's not to "earn points with God" or avoid prison, but because that's the way God wants us to live as a witness for Him.
- f) What I'm getting at here is living the Christian life is all about trusting that God is guiding our lives for His glory. It's about trusting that as we do the "footwork" we trust that this "perfect God" who knows all things and wants the best for our lives here and now, wants us to have joy knowing that God's working out our situation for His glory.
- i) Let me give another "extreme" example. A few years back, I attended the funeral of someone who died a painful and slow death due to cancer. Despite all the pain she went through, she had joy in her heart and expressed that joy to others around her until the end. Was she perfect? Of course not. Did she complain at times? Yes she did. However, despite what she had to deal with, she knew God was helping her through that whole situation and her death was an inspiration to all that knew her as she dealt with that situation with dignity knowing that God was her "light source" to help her through the pain of that situation.
 - ii) My point for you and me is if God can give someone comfort through something as horrible to deal with as a slow, and painful death, that same God can and does want to give us joy through whatever we have to deal with in our lives. To live in "darkness" is to not trust in God's guidance through that situation. To believe that we "die and that's it" makes such horrible deaths a true tragedy. To realize there's more to life than this one gives us joy no matter the situation as we trust and walk in "His light" through whatever we're facing at this moment.
- g) I just reread Verses 5-7 to make sure I haven't wandered from the point John's saying to us here in these verses. That point is if we're trusting in a perfect God to guide our lives, and we have joy from living "with that light to guide us" then as Verse 7 states, we can have "fellowship" with one another because Jesus' blood cleanses us from all sins.
- h) Earlier in this lesson I discussed "fellowship". It's more than for example, eating a meal with other Christians. It's about realizing there are others besides us who do experience the joy of God as He guides all of our lives. We can "fellowship" with people we barely know or can hardly communicate with as we realize each of us are saved by what Jesus did for us. I admit there are times I'm much more comfortable being in the presence of people I barely know, who I do know are believers than I am with say, family members who I know don't believe Jesus died for all of their sins. We "fellowship" (drawn to each other) by our trust in Jesus as we "walk in His light" through our lives.

9. With that realization that we can have joy no matter what, the last issue to deal with here in this chapter is "sin" and believers. That's covered in the last three verses of this chapter: Verse 8: If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.
- a) The point John's trying to make in Verse 8 is simply if we think we're sinless now that we are saved, we're lying to ourselves and lying to God. I'm not talking about Jesus as He paid the price for our sins, but the thought of, "Well, I didn't sin today, so I must be ok in God's eyes as to the best of my memory, I didn't mess up today". Being a Christian is not about thinking we're better than anyone else. It's the realization we're helpless as people because we know we're not perfect and capable of sin at any given moment.
 - b) I've heard many times the expression, "Christianity is just a crutch". My response is if you need to go to a hospital as you are in pain, isn't that hospital a "crutch"? Of course that is silly, but that's the point. Yes Christianity is a crutch. In fact it's a "whole hospital". We as Christians realize we depend upon Jesus not only to forgive us of our sins, but to guide us as we go through life so we can have joy no matter what the circumstances.
 - c) Our job as Christians is not to fix everyone else's problems. As I was correctly taught now many years ago, "Do you think God's big enough to handle this situation?" Our mission as Christians is to be a good witness for Him as we show by putting the needs of others as a priority over our own needs. That type of selfless love draws nonbelievers closer to God as others want to experience that type of joy that comes through our giving of ourselves. That's how Christianity has and continues to grow despite persecution and the difficulties of life, is by the love we show to others as we draw upon His power to express that love.
 - d) Are there loving people in the world who are not Christians? Of course. What God offers us is His power to deal with situations that we can only do "so much" by willpower alone.
 - e) That leads me to Verse 9. This is a famous bible verse that many Christians memorize. It essentially teaches that anytime we sin, we can confess it and then not worry about it any more as we are forgiven of that sin. That's the principal behind Verse 9.
 - i) Verse 9 leads to a few theological problems to consider. If we've been forgiven of all our sins when we first accept Jesus as the complete payment of our sins, why is it necessary to confess our sins when we become aware of them? Is it a matter of we can't get into heaven unless we've confessed every sin we've ever committed at that time? If that was the case, we're all in big trouble as I'm positive there are sins we're all not aware of that we've failed to confess.
 - ii) The reason we confess sin is not to be "more forgiven". We confess sin to remind ourselves that in effect, "God was right and we were wrong" in that situation. It's to remind ourselves of what is the right thing (God's commandments) to do when that situation arises again. It's to realize God gives us the power to overcome any sin we have to deal with at any time.
 - iii) Let me give another tough example: Suppose we are addicted to a drug that is an impossible habit to break based on willpower. Am I against getting medical help in such situations? Of course not. Am I saying, all we have to do is confess it as bad, and then our addiction goes away? Of course not. Once in a rare while I will hear of a person instantly cured of such an addiction, but in most cases, it is a slow and painful process of bringing that addiction to an end, as it has to be "crucified" from our body. All I'm saying is that it is through His power we can deal with any problem that doesn't glorify God by living as He desires we live.
 - iv) That leads me back to the issue of why do we confess sin? Again it's not to earn our salvation as that was taken care of at the cross. It's to realize in that situation we were wrong and God was right so to live as He desires, we turn from that sin.

- f) I know of situations where people have "abused" Verse 9. I've met Christians who think, "It's ok for me to sin this once. After all I can just "1st John 1:9" it later and confess it as sin so I can go ahead and sin this one time as God understands I'm not perfect. The problem with that type of thinking is we're not living to please God if we think it's ok to sin in that situation as we can confess it later. Again, it gets us back to the concept of God as "light" as in being perfect. A perfect God can tolerate no sin whatsoever.
- i) Let me give a tough example: Suppose one was living in "Nazi Germany" before the time of World War II. If one was hiding Jewish people in one's house so that they won't be killed, is it acceptable to lie to the authorities about who's living in one's house at that time? To use a more recent example, I have a friend who is a missionary to countries where Christianity is illegal. Is it ok to lie in order to get in that country? As he puts it, "It's ok to fudge on one's passport, but not lie". On his next trip he wanted to bring along our pastor. It would be against God's desire for a pastor to lie about his profession. However, this missionary could "fudge" as to say that he is going to teach English to people or say build a new playground in an area of suffering. That's being a witness for Jesus without describing it as such.
 - ii) As Peter stated in Acts, "We have to obey God rather than men". (See Acts 5:29.) My point is there are times when doing the right thing may mean taking the risk of being thrown in jail for not doing what the local authorities want. Yes we may suffer in this lifetime for that act, but we're still doing God's will.
 - iii) What does all of that have to do with confession of sin? God call us of us to live by His rules, and that applies to saved believers in Jesus as well. We don't obey all of the 10 Commandments to earn our salvation or prove our worth to God. We obey them, as that's how God wants us to live as His believers. That's why I gave a few examples of times where it may be acceptable to lie or "fudge the truth" as for us to do God's will in a tough situation. We may suffer in this lifetime for such actions but the important thing is to be obedient to what God calls us to do in this lifetime.
- g) So let me get back to the issue of why do we confess sin anyway? A great prayer I heard on this was something like, "Dear God, I know I'm eternally forgiven for all my sins, but I do confess what I know I did was wrong not to earn my salvation but because I know that the best way for me to live as by the rules (10 Commandments) that You desire I follow in order to be a good witness for You. Therefore I turn from this sin I'm dealing with at this moment as I realize again how You want me to live is what's best for my life." Again we are not "more saved" by that confession, but at that moment, it gets our focus back on God as we realize "He was right and I was wrong". (Based on what John MacArthur taught.)
- i) One of the greatest differences between devout Jewish and Christians versus non-believers is essentially, when we disagree with the bible, we realize we must be wrong and God's view on that situation is right. A nonbeliever in the God of the bible would think, "If I disagree with the bible, I'm right and the bible's wrong on that situation." (Based on a quote from Dennis Prager.)
 - ii) Of course most of the decisions we make in life are not exactly like situations as described in the bible. Those laws are our guidelines for the decisions we make. I'm convinced that God's telling us we're free to live as we desire as long as we're living within the frame work of His laws for our lives.
- h) You may think that all of this wanders away from the text, but notice Verse 10 again, and how it applies to this exact thought. It reads, "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. That just means if we claim as Christians we no longer sin or act perfectly, we've effectively "wasted Jesus time" of dying for our sins as we believe it wasn't necessary. It's the basic idea that if someone says Jesus died for our sins and we say, "what sins? I haven't sinned", then we're calling God a liar when He tells us we're not perfect and we need His sin payment for the sins we commit.

10. OK, that's a wrap for Chapter 1. The main point John's trying to get across here in these verses is that we can trust in Jesus sin payment as full payment for our sins and we can draw close to God to have a close relationship with Him because of that sin payment. All of that leads me back to my lesson title of "how do I know I'm saved?" The answer is to accept the idea that if God exists, He must be perfect by definition. If He's perfect, then we would have to be perfectly forgiven so we can spend eternity with Him. The writer of this book has at this time lived out a full life with the knowledge that Jesus is God, that he (John) touched him, heard him speak and had a full life of a close personal relationship with Him and wants us to enjoy that same type of relationship that John Himself has with God the father.
 - a) Let me explain this concept another way: Suppose a child asks us over and over again, how do we know for sure we're saved? Assuming that child is old enough to read, I'd recommend showing him 1st John, as this book is an assurance of one's salvation as we grow to realize exactly who Jesus is, what He's done for us and what He desires of us, a close personal relationship with Him and with other believers. If one grasps that, then one gets why John wrote this letter near the end of his life. Yes there is more to this little letter, which is why we have four more chapters to go. With that said, I'll close in prayer and hopefully you'll join me as we go through the rest of this short book.
11. Heavenly Father, thank You that You've taken the trouble to pay the complete price for our sins and taught us how we can be assured of our eternal salvation. Help us to experience joy in our lives no matter the circumstances of the moment as we continue to draw closer to you through prayer and time in Your word. May we be a good witness for You as we share Your love with others around us so more of us can experience the joy of time with You. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.