



NG Study Guide: 1Jn. 2.15-23 “Prioritize God” [3.25.18]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: Two of the great dangers to a relationship with God are love for the material world and false teaching. An earnest desire to stop loving the material world, and to yield to sound doctrine reveals a genuine love for God. So far in this letter, we’ve discovered two tests to see if we are in relationship with God: obedience and spiritual growth [1Jn. 2:1-14]. Here, the tests are: love for God and not the world, and yielding to sound doctrine and rejecting false teaching.

1. Love God not the world [15-17]

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

We are told, *do not love the world* [15]. John is not referring to the creation, planet, or nature. The Greek term *kosmos* refers to the world system in the sense of things of the material world apart from God. The Greek could be translated, *stop loving* the world. Our passion for things is proportional to our intimacy with God. If we keep loving the world the love of the Father is not in us [15]. It is a sober thought to contemplate, because John has declared that we either love God or the world, but we can’t love both. Similarly, Jesus warned during the Sermon on the Mount, “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God & money” [Matt 6:24]. There is a subtle danger when your savings, income, possessions, and experiences with this world become the primary source for your desire for satisfaction and security. We might even be unaware of the extent of our love of the world. Suffice it to say, most of us live more comfortably than the great majority of people on this planet, and much of our desire for an increased standard of living has at its roots a love for this world.

The things of the world are temporal, but relationship with God is eternal. All that is in the world will pass away, and thus it cannot provide lasting contentment [16-17]. The world's temptations are three-fold. First, the *lust of the flesh* [16] relates to sensual body appetites as primary pleasure. This would include food and drink, sex, and physical experiences that are all worthy of an enviable social media feed. Second, the *lust of the eyes* [16] which relates to things or possessions as a primary source of pleasure. This could include your home, vehicle, wardrobe, furnishings, electronics and stuff. Third, the *pride of life* [16] which concerns ambition for self-glory, self-display, achievement, or the desire to impress people. All of these temptations are of the world, and tend to separate us from God. In the Garden of Eden, the temptation(s) appeal to the three areas described by John, "Eve saw that the tree was good for food (lust of the flesh), pleasant to the eyes (lust of the eyes), and desirable to make one wise" (pride of life) [Gen. 3:6]. Similarly, when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, each temptation corresponds to the same worldly areas [Matt. 4].

When our desire for these things of the world exceed our passion for God there is a danger that we may not truly be in relationship with God. John reminds us that the things of the world are passing away [17], and accordingly we shouldn't love a world that we can't keep and we will be separated from. On the other hand, *he who does the will of God abides forever* [17]. The promise of eternal abundant life with God that flows from yielding to Him should motivate us to shift our affections from this world to God. The problem is not us being in the world, but too much of the world in us. We tend to want to look for a rule that will tell us how much is too much or enough, and yet the Bible does not give us such a rule. Ascetics tried to gain spirituality through extreme self-denial, and discovered that doesn't satisfy. On the other hand, the pursuit of pleasure in this world won't satisfy. For example, prior to the Greek conquest of Israel the Babylonians and Persians had conquered. The Greeks posed a unique threat, because their influence was to import Greek culture, values, and lifestyle. Up until the time of the Greeks, Jews tended to live simply and were focused on the life which is to come. After the Greek conquest, Jews became more focused on decorating homes, furnishings, and wardrobe. The trend was subtle, because the Bible doesn't forbid nice clothes, homes and furnishings. Nevertheless, the impact was noticeable. This development produced an increased love for this world and a corresponding apathy towards God. As the trend continued, the Pharisees began as a movement to return to God and separate from the worldliness prevalent in Jewish culture.

Jesus gave us an example of how to navigate this challenge. He enjoyed certain pleasures as gifts from God such as feasts, but His grip on this world was very light [Matt. 8:20]. Most of us, likely love this world more than we should, and it would be wise to look at our standard of living and look at our standard of giving to advance God's kingdom as it may reveal our love for God relative to our love for this world. Jesus exhorted us, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" [Matt.6:19-21]. Also, remember Paul's sober warning, "For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" [1Tim. 6:10]. Finally, there is the sad testimony of Demas: Paul initially sends a greeting from Demas and describes him as a fellow-laborer [Philemon 1:24]. It is the idea that they played in the same league. In a subsequent letter, Paul simply refers to him by name with no accolade [Col. 4:14]. In Paul's last letter, he writes, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world ..." [2Tim. 4:10]. This is not how any of us want to be remembered. So, it is time to make sure that we love God and stop loving the world.

2. Love the truth about God not a lie [18-23]

¹⁸ Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. ²¹ I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. ²² Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

Some people believe that it makes no difference what you believe, just as long as you are sincere. Nevertheless, a relationship with God is not dependent on mere sincerity, but yielding to the truth about God.

Jesus is the truth and reveals the truth about God [Jn. 14:6, 18:37-38].

The *last hour* [2x v.18] refers to the time between the First and Second Coming of Christ. It is a time where the truth about God has been clearly revealed through Jesus. The *Antichrist* [18] is a yet future world leader who is deceptive and evil, empowered by Satan, who arrives on the world scene and is revealed during the Great Tribulation [2 Th.2:3, Rev. 13:1, Mk.13:14]. The prefix “anti” means opposed to or against. Many *antichrists had already come* when John wrote in about 90 A.D. [18]. They were false teachers that preceded the Antichrist’s deception. False teachers and cults have an element of truth, but their deviation from the truth exposes they are not from God, but counterfeits [19].

John reveals three ways that you can keep from being deceived by false teachers [20-23].

The Holy Spirit test [20], *you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things*. When you yield to Christ as Lord and Savior you are born-again and receive the Holy Spirit [Jn. 3:1-21]. The anointing of the Holy Spirit allows you to discern spiritual truth, or know all necessary truth about Jesus. Jesus told His disciples. “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” [Jn. 16:13]. People who have not received God’s Spirit, or are insensitive to God’s Spirit, lack the capacity to comprehend spiritual truth like a radio without an antenna.

The Word of God test [21], the Bible reveals the truth about God. All claims of truth about God can be tested against the Word. If the teaching deviates from the Bible than it is a lie [21]. You need to learn the Bible so that you can test teaching by the Word of God. Not surprisingly, false teachers are unlikely to identify themselves as heretics, but will claim to be the true teachers of truth. They will use Bible verses, often out of context, to support their heresy (false teaching). This was and is the ploy of Satan as seen in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness [Mt. 4].

The Jesus test [22-23]. You can test the truth of any teaching or belief system by what it declares about Jesus. Any belief system that denies Jesus as the Messiah (i.e. The Christ) misrepresents truth and is thus false or a lie [22]. Similarly, any theology that denies that Jesus is God come in the flesh [22, 1 Jn. 4:2, Jn. 1:1,14] misrepresents truth and is thus false and not of God [22]. To deny Jesus is to deny God [22-23, Matt. 10:32-34, Jn.12:44-45, 14:6-9]. False doctrine is an obstacle to Christ, His gospel, the love of God, and the truth about God. Applying this test to several faiths reveals that they are false religions. Mormons deny the unique divinity of Jesus, and claim He is the spirit brother of Satan. Similarly, Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that Jesus is a created being - Michael the archangel. Muslims reduce Jesus to a prophet of God and deny His deity. Finally, Religious Science, and Unitarians deny Christ’s unique divinity.

The good news is that you can yield to Jesus and know that you have a relationship with God, *he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also* [23]. Through your relationship with Jesus, you will grow in your love for God and His truth.

Study Guide Qs

Q1 What are some of the problems that you’ve experienced or observed related to loving the world?

Q2 How might life in a consumer-focused culture make it more difficult to realize how much we love this world?

Q3 Jesus, John and Paul all provide sober warnings about the dangers of loving the world, because it is an obstacle to loving God. How would you like to apply this lesson to your life?

Q4 How have you experienced testing claims about God to see if they were true or false?

“Digging Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. Consider Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness [Matt. 4]. How do the temptations relate to the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life? How did Jesus respond to the temptations? What lessons can you learn from Jesus’ temptation and how to overcome the love of the world?

2. Do a search on www.gotquestions.org about any belief system(s) besides biblical Christianity. What are some of the differences in what they believe, especially regarding Jesus, and what does that tell you about whether the belief system is true or false?

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?

2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?

3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

This is the last week before Resurrection Sunday. Be intentional to grab some invitations to your local church’s Easter Service(s). Pray, and ask God to direct you to whom to invite, especially neighbors where you live, work, study, and play.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

1. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
2. **Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
3. **The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
4. **Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. **What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.