

NG Study Guide: 2Jn. 1:1-6 “Practice Truth” [6.24.18]

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:

The existence of a moral God creates a moral responsibility to God and others. The essence of that responsibility is to love God supremely and to love others as we love ourselves [Mt. 22:37-39]. The idea is so simple, but so deeply profound, and truly revolutionary. Our lives, the lives of our loved ones, and our communities will be transformed for good if we practice this truth.

As in his first letter (1John), John is warning against false doctrine that obscures the truth about God, and is an obstacle to knowing God’s love and life. Five times we see the term “truth” in the first four verses. And forty-four times John refers to truth in his Gospel and letters. Today you can discover the truth about God.

“The Elder, To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, 2 because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever. 3 Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. 4 I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father. 5 And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. 6 This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.”

A. The truth about God is revealed through Jesus’ words, works, and gospel [1-3]:

1. God’s truth is known by Jesus’ followers:

John refers to himself as *the Elder* [1]. This is likely a reference to John’s age as he was in his nineties, and was the last of the apostles, rather than a title or office. The *elect lady* [1] is likely a reference to the Church universal (the Bride of Christ), or a particular local church such as Ephesus, rather than a particular woman. *Her children* [1] is likely a reference to believers or the church assembly. It is good for you to reflect and realize your identity is as God’s child if you are a follower of Jesus. John affirms his genuine love for them, *whom I love in truth* [1], and also affirms the love of other followers of Jesus, *not only I, but also all those who have known the truth* [1]. John’s love for believers, and our love for one another flows the response to God’s truth [1Jn. 1:3]. Jesus’ followers know the truth [1], and the truth abides in them [2].

2. God’s truth remains forever:

John declares that God's truth *will be with us forever* [2]. The truth about God shall remain forever. God's truth will always be relevant and essential regardless of changes in the culture.

3. God's truth reveals His grace and mercy:

Jesus' followers are encouraged that grace, mercy, and peace will be with them from God the Father and Son, *Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love* [3]. Grace is undeserved favor. Grace is the sense of getting something good that you don't deserve. Mercy is kindness to the guilty, pardon and forgiveness. Mercy is essentially not getting something bad that you do deserve.

All of humanity rebels against God. Whether we are consciously aware of the rebellion, and whether we intend to rebel are not the issues. I recently picked-up my phone while driving to quickly check directions. I didn't mean to violate the law, and didn't even know that what I did violated the vehicle code. Nevertheless, the officer gave me a ticket, because that is what justice required. I didn't get mercy, nor did I get grace. My ignorance, and my motives weren't at issue. In our actions and attitudes, we don't do what God has called us to do, and we do what we are not supposed to. And because God is not only all-loving, but also completely holy and just, we deserve His judgment for our rebellion.

Our offenses against an all-holy God are what the Bible calls sin. We cannot enter God's presence until the penalty for sin is paid, and the offense is removed from our record before God. Unfortunately, so-called good works cannot offset the offense against God.

The gospel reveals God's true grace, mercy, justice and love. In God's love and mercy, Jesus came and became the perfect sacrifice for our sin. God's justice is met through Christ's payment of our penalty. Through faith in Christ, we receive forgiveness, spiritual life, and restoration with God because of what Jesus has done. It is a gracious gift from God.

4. God's truth results in peace [3]

Peace [3] with God, and the experience of the peace of God, flow from responding to the truth and yielding your life to Christ. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" [Rom. 5:1]. True peace relates to contentment, wholeness, and satisfaction and are available as you receive and respond to God's truth.

B. The truth about God is revealed through love for God and others [4-6]:

1. Those who receive God's truth obey Him [4]

John rejoiced greatly that there were people in the church whose lives were characterized by the truth of God [4]. There is no greater joy for God, parents, pastors, and the church than to know that people are living God's truth [3Jn. 4]. Conversely, no greater sadness than knowing some are not living the truth. Three times we see the term "walk" which refers to a way of living. How you live will be impacted by what you truly believe. Four times we see the word "commandment" which reminds us that living God's truth is not merely a suggestion to improve your life, but if you want to experience life with God in this life and the life to come, you need to yield to Jesus. Jesus told His disciples, "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments" [Jn. 14:15]. Your life reveals what you believe about God.

2. Those who have receive God's truth love others [5]

John is pleading with his audience [5]. John has a passionate burden for people and a shepherd's heart. After decades of following Jesus, John recognized the urgency of not merely knowing truth about God, but the necessity of living truth. John reminds us that the *commandment to love one another is not new, but that which was heard from the beginning* [5]. Throughout John's gospel, he records Jesus' instructions about the truth that those who have life with Him will obey Him and love

others, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” [Jn. 13:35]. Similarly, in John’s first letter we discovered, “And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also” [1 Jn. 4:21]. Jesus’ followers have a true love for one another, because they are truly family in Christ.

3. Those who live God’s truth reveal God’s love [6]

John makes the connection between love and obeying God, “*this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment that as you have heard from the beginning you should walk in it*” [6]. Five times in this passage we see the Greek word *agape* which we translate love. Agape love is more than feelings, sentiment, lust or a vague emotion, but is an act of the will or a choice. *Truth* love for others is committed, sacrificial, unconditional, characterized by giving, and seeks what is best for others. Most importantly it is displayed to others as we obey God’s commands. We cannot truly love others without aligning with God’s commands. Obeying God’s commands is the most loving act we can display to others.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. What are some examples of cultural values that are in conflict with God’s truth? Consider some of the ways that the culture describes love and how God describes love.

Q2. What are some ways that God’s commandments (truth) are relevant to you?

Q3. How has God’s truth provided peace in your life?

Q4. How has your experience in a Neighborhood Group helped you to love God and neighbors better?

“Digging Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. Consider this concept, “Obeying God’s commands is the most loving act we can display to others.” Do you agree or disagree, and why?

2. Do you agree or disagree with the idea that our lives, the lives of our loved ones, and our communities would be transformed for good if we loved God supremely and loved others as we love ourselves? Why?

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:

Spend some time this week in a local park. Play with your kids, take your dog for a walk, or simply walk in the park. The local park is a great place to get to know your neighbors.

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.