

Love One Another

Jonathan K. Dodson | 1 John 3:11-18 | May 1, 2022

It's remarkable how much our society is into love. Many songs are written about love: unrequited, broken, satisfying love. But often they focus our experience of love not our gift of love. Our passage says *love one another*. So before we begin, take a second to shift your attention from your experience of love to your gift of love, from how people may have failed to love you *to how you can love others*. How can we mature in loving one another? Let's consider: *Self-denying Love, Self-centered Love, Source of Love*.

Jesus: Self-denying Love

Why is love for others essential to Christianity? Because it's part of its central message: **For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another**. What message is John referring to? Well throughout this passage John uses phrases that allude to Jesus' teaching during his last supper with the disciples, a meal where John rested his head upon Jesus hearing him say, **This is my commandment, that you *love one another* as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends** (Jn 15:12-13). The gospel message—Jesus laying his life down for us—is not only the basis for personal salvation but a pattern for our interaction. The message they heard

that night, and from the beginning of Jesus's ministry, was *love one another as I have loved you*. How have we been loved? What pattern did Christ give us? Echoing Jesus again John writes: *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers*. The pattern is *laying down our lives* for one another. To lay down means to deny what is most important, our life. **It is hard to live a self-denying life in a consumer world.** I recently went to a car wash and was told to vacuum my car while they fixed something in the car wash. So I drove over to the vacuums, opened the doors, and right before I started another employee came over and told me, You can't vacuum until you wash the car. I said but that employee told me to vacuum. He said go back to the car wash. But she told me I could vacuum. He said, you need to go back. And then I blurted out, *But I'm the customer and I'm here now, and she told me I can vacuum the car!* I huffily drove back and repented all the way through the carwash. Consumers are ruled by self; Christians are ruled by Christ. I was impatient, unkind, angry. I did not deny myself. Instead, I identified as consumer. But Christians lay down their rights; consumers insist on their rights. So I walked over to the employee and said, I want to apologize to you. I was impatient with you, and I am sorry. A smile broke across his face as he stuck out his hand; we shook, and he said That's okay. I was just trying to do my job and, beaming, he shook my hand again. We must

renounce a consumer identity if we are to love one another. If we fail to love others in obedience, we can always love them in repentance.

A self-denying life in a consumer world is a neon sign that points to Jesus. **It is also hard love live a self-denying life when we reduce love to a feeling.** It's easy to be in love with love. The starry-eyed lovers who have no idea the challenges marriage will bring. We often think *real* love should be easy, effortless, but often it's hard. Why? Because love is *more* than a feeling. It even compels *disobedience* to feelings. Consider Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane before his arrest: **Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.** He *felt* like not going to the cross, so intensely he asked to be spared *three times*. He *felt* like escaping suffering, death, and judgment, but chose to disobey his feelings. He did not *ignore* his feelings; he voiced them boldly, repeatedly, but he was not ruled by feelings. They did not have the final say. In the end, love won because Jesus disobeyed feeling and obeyed his Father. What might this look like for you? I do not *feel* like serving those in need, but I will disobey my feelings *to serve as I have been served*. I do not *feel* like forgiving you because you hurt me, but I will disobey my feelings *to forgive as I've been forgiven*. I do not *feel* like going to church, but I will disobey my feelings *to prize Christ over convenience*. Self-denying love pulls us together like a drawstring, service, forgiveness, worship, to love as we have been loved.

Cain: Self-centered Love

If Jesus provides the positive example of love, Cain is a negative example of love: *We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother*. Now, murder is clearly the antithesis of love, but fratricide isn't something you reach overnight. How did Cain come to the point of killing his brother? He saw that *his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous*. But how did he know anything about his brother's deeds? He must have watching him, examining what Abel gave, his best firstborn of his flock, and then reflected on his own lackluster gift. Cain *compared* himself to Abel: Abel gave more. Abel always does what's right. God had regard for Abel but not for my gift. Murder was conceived in comparison. Comparison kills. I think of a couple I was counseling when asked what their point of conflict was the husband said of his wife, *I have buyer's remorse*. He was comparing his wife to other women. He approached marriage as a consumer not a servant, and comparison killed their marriage. But what does Jesus do? *Jesus doesn't compare to kill; he is killed to love*. He sees through redeeming love not buyer's remorse, when he could justify the remorse. The church is often a mess. I think of the person who compares their current community to an old community. If only people knew me like my old community. My old community asked me the right questions. They were there for me. Comparison kills community, but love creates

community. Moves towards people. Jesus didn't wait for the world to love him; he took the initiative to love and serve us. He is the pattern of love. He gave his time, his energy, his feelings, *his life* to create a new community and said: *Love one another as I have loved you*. Jesus is the emblem of self-denying love; Cain the mascot of self-absorbed hate. Cain is "of the evil one," but you, you are children of God. *Don't be a Cain; be a Christian, a neon light shining like Christ as you lay down your life for one another*. But John warns us. Don't be surprised if the world hates you. Why? You're insisting on a deep, otherworldly self-denying love that displaces humanity from the center of the universe. The world insists on a superficial, self-centered love with humanity as the sun around which we orbit. *But that is a world that cannot last*.

Source of Love

Jesus shows us self-denying love, which brings life. Cain shows us self-centered love, which results in death. But what source of love will keep us going? We need what philosopher Simon May describes as love, "ontological rootedness." A love so weighty it grounds you, anchors you, frees you to put others first. It's to develop a new nature through which love can flow. And to get that John says, we *have to pass out of death into life*. No one has lived to tell the tale of passing out of death into life. The closest thing we can compare it to

is suffering, where we experience a kind of death: loss of loved one, divorce, illness, despair. In that hardship our ego is shattered and we realize we weren't as self-sufficient or strong as we thought we were. And each time I embrace that lesson, I become more content with weakness. I realize ministry ambition (attendance, church plants, books sold) isn't something to organize my life around. That I need, we need, something bigger, greater, purer to orbit. See when we are displaced from the center of our sufferings, I emerge not bitter, angry, or even healed but *different, changed*. That's what John is talking about when he says we pass out of death into life, he's referring to *a decisive change*, an ontological re-rooting. Becoming a new creation, with everything rooted in Christ, passing out of death with him and into his life with his love flowing through us. So we emerge a new self orbiting around the greater, purer, lovelier, stronger *Jesus Christ*. But we have to make choices every day to orbit around him, to participate in the death to life reality. That's why the pass out verb means to pass out and to continue to pass out of death. It's not perfection overnight but perseverance over a lifetime. So, maturing love for one another, the people beside you and in your City Group, is an indication that you are what you claim to be—Christian, new creation. So, let's deny ourselves, disobey our feelings, and deliberately, love one another as those who orbit around Jesus.