

“All You Need Is Love”

One of the Beatles’ biggest hits was not a song from any album. It was a non-album single written for *Our World*, the first live multinational multi-satellite television production.¹ I am sure that you all know the song. Join in as you recognize it.

There’s nothing you can do that can’t be done
nothing you can sing that can’t be sung
nothing you can say, but you can learn how to play the game
It’s easy.
All you need is love
All you need is love
All you need is love, love.
Love is all you need.

Given the four scripture readings that we heard today, you might think that the Beatles had been inspired by them. All the readings speak about the importance of love. They may not be explicitly about love, but every one of them speaks about a particular kind of love. As I spoke about earlier this summer, this is not romantic love, familial love, friendship, or playful love, but what is called *agape* love.² *Agape* love is defined as unconditional, selfless, and universal love for humanity. This is the love that God has for us, and we in turn are to have for each other. It is the love that we are to have for our neighbor, and Jesus would say we are even to have for our enemies. *Agape* love does not require that we like the person or people that we love. It only requires that we desire the best for them.

Of course, that gets us into another sort of semantic issue. What is the best for another person? Often it is not what they think is the best. For example, a terrorist might think that what is best for him is to kill the person he believes to be his oppressor. In *agape* love, the best for that person is for them to overcome their hatred and find a way to make peace between themselves and the other. Perhaps a hacker would think the best for herself is to succeed in breaking into a computer system and stealing information. When *agape* would say that the best is for her to find a way to use her talents to create sophisticated protections that safeguard our private information. I could go on and on, but you get the idea. What I may think is the best for me is not always the case.

God’s call to Ezekiel and the people of Israel is a good example of *agape*. God first tells Ezekiel that he is called to warn the wicked of the error of their ways. Specifically, God says, “If I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked ones, you shall

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_You_Need_Is_Love, accessed September 4, 2026.

² The eight kinds of love in ancient Greek philosophy are: eros, philia, storge, agape, ludus, pragma, philautia, mania

surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand." God is not requiring Ezekiel to make the wicked turn from their wickedness, but to warn them. Otherwise, their deaths are on him.

Then God gets very specific. It is not just any wicked people who must repent but the House of Israel. Ezekiel's warning to the Israelites has been, "Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?" God tells Ezekiel he should now tell them that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; rather, God wants the wicked to repent so that they might live. The word *agape*, or love, is not mentioned, but this is the very definition of wanting the best for another person even if they currently live in iniquity.

The psalm also comes at *agape* from a different angle and without using the term. This is what I am calling personal *agape*: when an individual feels the need to turn back to the Lord because they have erred.³ They beg for God to help them be transformed into one who follows God's law. The psalmist uses the words "teach me," "Give me understanding," "Make me," and "Incline my heart." With each plea, the writer asks for God's divine guidance to mend his ways. The writer ends with a final anguished cry, "Behold, I long for your commandments;/in your righteousness preserve my life. Here, as if in response to the words from Ezekiel, the psalmist pleads for instruction and forgiveness because of the death that they have earned through their wickedness.

In Paul's Letter to the Romans, we get an outright paean to love. His words would make a good song if set to music. "Owe no one anything, except to love one another." Is there anything more honest and true? When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment is, he answered that we should love God. He added that we should also love our neighbor. Paul says the same thing here. He is once again calling the Christ followers in Rome to love, *agape* love. Paul distills all the commandments into one, just as Jesus did. "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law."

Jesus is not speaking to the House of Israel, or a group of believers in Rome. He is speaking to his disciples. First, he commands them to find ways within the faith community to reproach and bring back someone who has erred. He wants it first to be a one-on-one encounter. If that does not work to get two or three others involved, and so it escalates until the entire community is involved. Then he gives them a great responsibility. He says that whatever they bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever is loosed on earth will be loosed in heaven. The Church, through the millennia, has put that into practice via the Rite of Reconciliation or, more commonly, Confession.

³ I am treating *Agape* and *Philautia* as to sides of the same coin.

If we confess our sins to another, especially one who is ordained in service to God, and an action of contrition is made, the sin is forgiven and thus loosed in heaven. However, the opposite is also true. If the sin is not confessed to a person in God's service, it continues to bind the sinner both on earth and in heaven. Many Christians do not like this practice. They feel their confession to God is sufficient. However, we also know that as long as we keep our sins secret, we also live in shame. The common phrase is, "if they only knew who I truly am, they would not like me." Confessing to another person is unburdening. It can relieve us of the secret and the shame that goes with it. In the secular world, we do it with a best friend or a therapist. That may be good enough. But confessing our failures to someone who can guide us in our return to God is a loosing that Jesus says occurs both in heaven and on earth.

This love is the *agape* love of self that Paul spoke of in Romans. Paul reminds us that we are to love our neighbor as yourself. But if we do not have love for ourselves, how can we love our neighbor? If we carry the burden of shame and the regret of failure, how can we love each other? The burdens we carry not only weigh us down, but they also limit how we are able to care for those we encounter each day. By the way, love for self does not mean conceit or pridefulness. It means caring for ourselves and being kind to ourselves. It also means that when others hurt us to realize that it says more about who they are than who we are.

In short, the scriptures today affirm for us the commandment from Leviticus⁴ that Jesus lifted up in the Gospels, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Care for one another. Show love for one another, even those who hurt you and despise you. Because what John Lennon wrote really is true: "All you need is love. Love is all you need."

⁴ Leviticus 19:18.