

“Is Love All We Need?”

**Matthew 1:18-25** <sup>18</sup> This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" {Is. 7:14} -- which means, "God with us." <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

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Well, it's Christmas time and a lot of radio stations are playing a lot of John Lennon/Beatles peace, love, and harmony songs. So, there's no need to be afraid. (For those of you who are really astute, I just slipped a little Bob Geldorf's Christmas song in on you.) So, to keep pace with the radio, how about we sing a John Lennon song, "All You Need Is Love".

Love, love, love; Love, love, love; Love, love, love.

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.

There's nothing you can make that can't be made. No one you can save that can't be saved

Nothing you can do but you can learn how to be you in time. It's easy.

All you need is love. All you need is love. All you need is love, love. Love is all you need.

Love, love, love; Love, love, love; Love, love, love.

All you need is love. All you need is love. All you need is love, love. Love is all you need.

There's nothing you can know that isn't known. Nothing you can see that isn't shown.

No where you can be that isn't where you're meant to be. It's easy.

All you need is love. All you need is love. All you need is love, love. Love is all you need.

You may not be aware of the history behind this song. The BBC asked the Beatles to write a song with a simple message understandable by just about anyone for the purpose of being the UK's contribution to a program called *Our World*. *Our World* was the very first live, international, satellite television production. It was broadcast on June 25, 1967 to 26 countries reaching an estimated 400 million viewers. Performers from 19 nations participated. *Our World* was an effort to bring unity to the people of this planet at a grassroots level at the height of the Vietnam War. Today, the video performance of "All You Need Is Love" is about the only thing remembered of the *Our World* production. Oddly enough, the task proved to be a source of contention between John Lennon and Paul McCartney as McCartney was also laboring to write something as well. Apparently, they worked out their differences because although Lennon was the sole author, he attributed it to them both.

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“All You Need Is Love” was a protest against the Vietnam War. Its message is that there’s nothing new in this world that anybody is going to achieve, what’s in front of us is all we can know and see. So, just learn to enjoy it, figure out who you, and where you’re at is where you’re at. It’s easy. All we need for the task is love. But, what did John Lennon mean by “Love”?

Lennon was a very interesting person. Notably, he was an atheist and an activist. He seems to have spent his life searching for something. That search led him to do a lot of drugs which he later spoke strongly against, to India where he learned to meditate, and finally to Yoko Ono who had some kind inexplicable hold on him and family. Yoko eventually had to kick John out because he was having a very difficult time coming to grips with the fact that he wasn’t as renowned as he used be in Beatle days. He had an album do poorly and so he got depressed and started drinking heavily. She sent him away to live with Mary Pang and 18 months later after he got sober and his thinking cleared, Yoko took him back in and then they had a son, Sean. Lennon retired from music and seems to have found an even keel being a houseparent. Because of his music fame and substance abuse he had a very estranged relationship with his son Julian by his first wife. Lennon explained his retirement from music in 1975 as because he realized that in his personal life particularly with his first son that he had blown it and wanted to do right with the second one. He wanted to do right by his family where things really mattered. We will never know if John Lennon ever found what he was looking for (That’s a U2 quip.). He didn’t get the chance to write and publish any songs about life since sort of coming together as a dad. Unfortunately, to the shock of the whole world myself included, he was murdered in front of his NYC apartment on December 8, 1980.

If I were to sum up John Lennon I would say he was an iconoclastic activist who was very good at coming up with slogans. I really don’t think he himself got the words to “All You Need Is Love” until Yoko Ono made him do the Prodigal Son thing and then took him back in and they began a family. I use the image of the Parable of the Prodigal Son because it is a good illustration of God’s love. If God has to he will send us out to fall to pieces and make life so unbearable that it wakes us up and we return home to surprisingly find unconditional acceptance. What Yoko Ono did to and for John in kicking him out and then taking him back in my mind gave John Lennon, the iconoclast activist and atheist a taste of the love of God.

Back to the song, and I’m probably going to loose a few friends over this, but I truly do wonder what John Lennon meant by saying all we need is love. How did he define love? If you looked at his life in 1967 when he wrote this song you could honestly say that to him love was just a feeling, particularly a romantic feeling as well as a feeling of friendship. The ancient Greeks had four words to define love while we use one word. They had: eros, to describe romantic love; philia to describe the love between friends; storge to define family love; and agape for the self-emptying, self-sacrificing love that on the mouths of Christians defines the type of love who, not just which, but who God is. It is un-self-interested, unconditional love; the type of love that gets involved in the real life

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situations of others for their sake not your own. It is always sacrificial. It is love in action not love in a feeling.

In 1967, I think I can say with a reasonable sense of surety the only types of love that John Lennon knew anything about was eros, romantic love, and philia, the love of friendship (storge, family love, is something I think he didn't really understand until Yoko took him back and Sean was born). Therefore, when he wrote “All You Need Is Love” I think I can say with reasonable certainty that his definition of love was some sort of weak mix between lover's love and the love of friends.

If I were further to tear to shreds what Lennon was saying in “All You Need Is Love” I would say that eros, romantic love can't lead me to fully enjoy life, figure out who I am, nor make me feel as if I am where I am supposed to be. In the biological scheme of things romantic love lasts long enough to make a baby and in the emotional scheme of things romantic love is fickle flip flopping between joy and pain because it is more or less an addiction. Even Lennon would agree, though reluctantly, that romantic love is not the love that will bring world peace. By his on again of again friendship with Paul McCartney and the rest of the Beatles, a friendship that too often became defined by the contractual agreements they had as “The Beatles”, even Lennon would say that philia, brotherly love, can not solve the world's problems. In the late 70's Lennon caught a strong whiff of family, but can the love of husband and wife, parents and children, and siblings save the awful mess that humanity is in? My answer to that is that storge, family love, is typically cacoonish.

In the Bible the other three loves must be founded upon agape love for them to come anything close to what they were meant to be. Storge, family love is not really love unless family members strive to be and do what's best for the others. Parents have to give up self-interest to parent their children so that they learn how not to be selfish. We come into this world saying “It's all about me.” I'm a parent of a child who has no trouble communicating he has a need and that need must be met now. So, I know for a fact that we are born with an instinctual selfishness that parents must correct even if it means our children don't want to be our friends. Brotherly love, philia, the love between friends has to be open, honest, unconditional, and not contractual if it is going to be any kind of friendship at all. Eros, romantic love, is not love if it is not based on commitment, on a covenant, the covenant of marriage. Casual sexual relationships are a dehumanizing contract that simply says “I will let you please yourself with my body if you do the same.” Moreover, we never see the harm of sex in a committed relationship until the next committed relationship regretting not having discovered certain things with this person whom we apparently love more or simply settling for something less because we loved the last one more.

When Lennon wrote “All You Need Is love” I think he was singing about a feeling towards others based in eros and philia. As far as agape love, well, even though they were both atheists Yoko Ono modeled to John Lennon the love God has shown his creation in Jesus Christ who gave himself for us and suffered death because humanity just cannot recognize the love of God even when it looks just like one of us. Jesus did God's will not his own. I don't think Lennon

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knew what it was to do the will of another until having been accepted back by Yoko and they had a son. Until then, he had just done his thing.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Humanity had to welcome him as a son, a brother, and a friend. In loving him as such we discover what love founded in agape truly is. I like to imagine that maybe if Lennon had lived a few more years he would have written a song not asking us to be dreamers who rather detachedly imagine a world where there's no authority of any kind in which we live for today in peace sharing the world, but rather asking us to imagine the immeasurably deep and abiding love of God who loves us unconditionally. Yes, all we need is love, but it's the love of God. Amen.