

All We Need is Love  
1 John 4:7-21  
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I made a speedy trip up to North Carolina to see mom and the Carolina kids this week. As I was driving home yesterday I heard an interview on the radio with Ryan Leaf. Anybody remember the star quarterback from Montana who starred for the Washington State Cougars and was a Heisman finalist and 1<sup>st</sup> round draft pick? But things did not go well for him in the NFL, so at 26 he retired. Having been focused entirely on himself, and now feeling like a failure, he began to take Vicodin to numb not physical but emotional pain. He became addicted to drugs, and his life spiraled downward. Life was so miserable, he wanted to kill himself. He ended up in prison for stealing to support this addiction. But in prison, a fellow inmate invited him to teach other inmates to improve their reading skills. For the first time in Ryan Leaf's life, he was thinking about others more than himself. He was serving others and this made his life meaningful. Loving others turned Ryan Leaf's life around, and he is happier now than he has ever been before – much more content than when he was striving for success of self alone.

The Beatles were right. *All you need is love. All you need is love. All you need is love, love. Love is all you need.* God IS love. You cannot have God without love, or love without God. Jesus Christ shows us what it means to be completely at one with God. At one ment – AKA atonement is love. By Christ's Spirit living in us, we are secured by love and empowered to love.

### **1 John 4:7-21**

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup> God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

<sup>11</sup> Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. <sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup> God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. <sup>16</sup> So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. <sup>17</sup> Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup> The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. (NRSV)

Verse 12 says, <sup>12</sup> *No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.* By perfected, we don't mean flawless, but completed, reaching its full purpose and goal.

John is saying: God starts it all. Being loved enables us to love not just by offering an inspiring example, but because love frees us from the things that would otherwise block us from loving, including guilt and fear. This is why, whenever the author speaks of the commandment to love one another, he nearly always brings it back to God first loving us. That love is enabling, the more we let it reach us and set us free. (William Loader, [textweek.com](http://textweek.com))

"We never get beyond God's love for us in Christ and how that is lived out in love for one another. We are always drawn back to that central, and centering, claim. We know God's love, first and foremost, in the Son; and we know God's love because we have witnessed it in love for one another. This text may serve as a reminder that we never grow beyond our need to hear again the gospel of God's love in Christ." (Brian Peterson, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org))

Much of the anger and hatred that we see in the world around us erupts because people are living like Ryan Leaf did for so many years – only thinking about their own success or failure, about their own wealth and power and pleasure – never putting another’s needs ahead of one’s own. The gospel of God's love for us in the Son sets us free from such self-centered and fearful pursuits. “The opposite of love is not hate but fear,” William Sloane Coffin once said, as he preached on this passage. If God is exclusively understood as the God of power, or demand, or even justice, then we approach God with fear — both in this life and in the life to come.

But if understood first as the God of love, perfect love, then we approach God with confidence. God's love is perfect and our love is perfected because we trust in God's love. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). (David Bartlett, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org))

In every human relationship, even the most loving relationships, there is an element of fear. We fear abandonment. We fear rejection. We fear possessiveness. We fear intimacy. We fear failure. We fear sacrifice. We fear being known. Love is threatening because it requires so much of us – both the one who loves and the one who is loved. “Loving can cost a lot but not loving always costs more, and those who fear to love often find that want of love is an emptiness that robs the joy from life.” (Merle Shan)

Perfect love casts out fear, for fear has to do with punishment. Do you remember the film, *Kings Speech*? It is the story of King George of England, Queen Elizabeth’s father, who had terrible speech impediment. What the character Lionel Logue understood about stammerers which proved so helpful to King George the 6<sup>th</sup> is that stammering is rooted in fear more than in the mechanics of speech. Lionel gave him the love of friendship, and through that was able to do what no expert could do: help him overcome the fear of making his voice heard. This act of love changed the course of history, as do all acts of true love.

Theologian Paul Tillich said "The first duty of love is to listen." To Tillich's duty of love to listen, I would add that the flip-side of listening is asking good questions. Keep the conversation alive by a deeper engagement of the other – not by mouthing off about yourself. St. Augustine said, "God loves each of us as if there were only one of us. To invite others to share their stories, and then to really listen with attentiveness, asking meaningful questions is an act of love.

It is no small matter that these fifteen verses have 27 references to *agape*, the Greek word for love. *Agape* is love because of what it *does*, not because of how it *feels*. God so "loved" (*agape*) that He gave His Son. It did not feel good to God to do that, but it was the loving thing to do. Christ so loved (*agape*) that he gave his life. *Agape* love is not simply an impulse generated from feelings. Rather, *agape* love is an exercise of the will, a deliberate choice. This is why God can command us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44; Exod. 23:1-5). He is not commanding us to "have a good feeling" for our enemies, but to act in a loving way toward them. C. S. Lewis once said, "Christian Love, either towards God or towards [humanity], is an affair of the will.

We will never understand the fullness of love unless we start with God. And when we start with God we start with the understanding that God is love, not that God loves, but that God IS love. God loves "might stand alongside other statements, such as 'God creates,' 'God rules,' 'God judges'; that is to say, it means that love is one of God's activities. But to say 'God is love' implies that all God's activity is loving activity. When God creates, God creates in love; when God rules, God rules in love; when God judges, God judges in love. All that God does is the expression of God's nature, which is — to love. The theological consequences of this principle are far-reaching." (CH Dodd)

Mother Teresa said "If you judge people, you have no time to love them." She said, "We can do no great things; only small things with great love." "Love until it hurts. Real love is always painful and hurts: then it is real and pure."

Martin Luther King, Jr., who knew he could not talk about the love of God without being willing to love those who mistreated him said, "Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it."

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"Following Christ has nothing to do with success as the world sees success. It has to do with love." (Madeleine L'Engle.) "When one has once fully entered the realm of love, the world - no matter how imperfect - becomes rich and beautiful, it consists solely of opportunities for love." (Soren Kierkegaard)

Oh, what a world we might have if fear were overtaken by love, if all who claim to love God began to prove it by their fearless love of other people – to love bravely as Jesus loves, to give generously as he gave. We cannot do it on our own, but God can do it through us. Jesus, Jesu, fill us with your love.