

**“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways! I love thee to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach...”** Those are the beginning lines of a famous love poem, Sonnet 43, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. As powerfully as that sonnet speaks about love, Browning realizes the limitations of our love. At the end of her poem she says, **“I love thee with the breath, smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose, I shall love thee better *after* death.”**

Our love, human love, is a wonderful gift. But it is also fleeting and ethereal. Love certainly defies definition. Words expressing what love is always fall far short of the actual feeling of true love.

God tells us about love today in Romans 8. However, he’s not talking about feelings. God’s love is not an emotion. It’s an act and an undeserved gift, and it is expressed to you, me, and the whole world through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul reminds us today that **“God Is Always Loving You.”**

(1) *With a love that gives victory*, (2) *With a love that is permanent.*

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Nobody likes being a loser. A woman from Kentucky was here at church one fall day and commented that she never saw anything so sad as the people of Wisconsin the day after a Packers loss. Everyone was in the dumps.

Are we losers? Well, we certainly have days when we feel like we’re being beaten badly. There are days when we really understand that we are members of the Church Militant and not yet of the Church Triumphant. The consequences of sin (in us and around us) aggravate and confound us all the time. As we age, we get up in the morning and do a survey: *“Well, what part of my body is working or not working today?”* The phone rings and we ask, *“Well, who will I be adding to my prayer list?”*

In spite of the trials, we are not losers. Paul was writing to Christians in Rome who faced financial, family, and health issues just like us -- and even worse. In fact, he talks about ***“trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and sword!”*** But he doesn’t talk about these trials as if they were something out of the ordinary. No, he assumes they are part of our life on earth! He even quotes Psalm 44: ***“We’re considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”*** In the Christian church in Rome, people weren’t showing up for worship not because they were lazy, gone fishin’, grocery shopping, or glued to the TV, but because they were being imprisoned or put to death for their faith! The devil was doing everything he could to make their lives miserable! And in the eyes of the world, those “Jesus people” were just a bunch of losers!

Paul guarantees them, however, that they were not losers! As he wrote to his friends in Corinth, ***“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed”*** (2 Cor 4:8-9). And here he says it even more strongly: ***“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors!”*** The word ***“conqueror”*** literally means to be a winner -- victorious. What he actually says is that believers are **super-winners**: ***“more than conquerors!”*** -- the next level up: world/universal champions!

How could Paul dare to make this claim when life was so rough? Let me add the rest of Paul’s sentence: ***“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors.....through him who loved us!”*** We are winners ***“through him who loved us”***:

+*Through him who loved me* to live perfectly in my place and give me credit for it.

+*Through him who loved me* to pour out his blood like a slaughtered lamb to pay for my gross sins.

+*Through him who loved me* to rise from the grave to prove that not even death can master Jesus and his family members.

Through our beautiful Savior Jesus, we can never be losers and are always winners because God acted on our behalf. God did it because he loves you.

In other words, God's love is permanent. He won't write a love letter in pencil with an eraser. His love letter, the Gospel, is written in permanent ink. We don't have to pull the petals off the daisy saying, "*He loves me. He loves me not.*" There is no fickle, earthly love in God. "***For I am convinced,***" Paul says, "***that neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***"

God is *always* loving you. It's a continuing action. But what about when a stroke devastates my health? What about when heart disease or cancer or... takes a loved one's life? Let's remember: God doesn't love me less today when I'm sick and hurting than yesterday when I wasn't sick and hurting. Christians don't measure God's love by earthly circumstances, but by the forgiveness of sins freely given to us through Jesus and the imperishable treasures of heaven that will be ours forever.

Look at Paul. His *outward* circumstances got much *worse* when he became a Christian. Read his letters and be amazed at what he endured! Why did he endure it? Because Paul knew that what Jesus offered and gave him was something much, much greater. "***Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all***" (2 Cor. 4:17); and, "***I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us***" (Rom. 8:18).

Someone once compared the love of Christ to the sun. The sun is always shining, 24/7. There are days when we see the sun shining in a bright, blue sky. And there are also times when we can't see it: cloudy days, or during a total eclipse (Aug. 21), and at night. But that doesn't mean the sun isn't there.

The love of Jesus is always shining on you, regardless of life's circumstances. There are days when there are no clouds in your life and everything seems just right. And there are cloudy, stormy days when nothing seems to go right, and you'd like to just crawl back into bed and pull the covers over your head.

But nothing can change the truth that 2,000 years ago Jesus, out of love for you, died on a cross to free you from sin and eternal death. The same act of love that saved people then is shining on us now. And nothing, no demon, no physical trial, no earthly circumstance, will be able to "***separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***" Super-glue love!

**Our** love for God, of course, *is* fickle. One day we're all pumped up for God, and the next day we'd rather not even think about him and we stubbornly buck against what he tells us in his Word. But God doesn't hold that against us. He held that against Jesus. In love, Jesus died for our sins of lovelessness and selfishness.

There was a farmer who had a weather vane on top of his barn with an arrow that indicated the direction the wind was blowing. On the arrow were inscribed the words, "***God is love.***" Someone asked him, "*What do you mean by that? Do you mean that God's love is constantly changing like that vane changes directions in the wind?*" The farmer said, "*No, not at all. Just the opposite. It means that whatever way the wind is blowing, God is love.*"

Whatever way the wind is blowing in your life, God is always loving you. Nothing in all creation, except our own obstinate neglect of his Word, can sever us from that love. As we leave today, we'll all go our separate directions. But while we scatter, God's love accompanies each one of us until we gather again next week in his house as super-conquerors to hear again about his unending love in Christ.

**"How do I love thee? Let me count the ways!"** When it comes to God, get out your calculator. We won't be done counting the ways until we see him in heaven!

Amen.