

How Do I Love Thee

by Dennis Lange



In 1850, Sonnets from the Portuguese by Elizabeth Barret Browning was published. Sonnet 43 is the one that is best known.

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.

I love thee to the depth and breadth and height

*My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.*

*I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.*

I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;

I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.

I love thee with the passion put to use

In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose

With my lost saints!---I love thee with the breath,

Smiles, tears, of all my life!---and, if God choose,

I shall but love thee better after death.

And now abide faith, hope, and love, these three, and the greatest of these is love (I Cor.13:13).

The love of which Paul wrote isn't the romantic love that Elizabeth had for her husband Robert Browning, also a famous poet. It's agape, the wonderful love of God that is unconditional. It is the love that we are to have for Him in return. "We love because He first loved us" (I John 4:19). It is the love that we are to have for our brethren. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (I John 4:11). It is the love that we are to have for our neighbor. "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt.19:19). It is the love that we are to have even for our enemies. "...love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." (Luke 6:27,28).

If all that isn't enough to persuade us of the importance of love, Paul's words at the beginning of I Cor.13 should catch our attention. He wrote, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing" (v.1-3).

Because of that overwhelming importance, we will here sometimes write of God and count the ways we love Him. More importantly, we will reflect on counting the ways He loves us.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). May we daily meditate upon the love of God at the cross that we might love him in return.