

Romans 5:1-11 The Shedding Abroad of God's Love

...*the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts* – Rom. 5:5

I was happy to see this past week that one of our men (Ben Meng) sent out an email with a quote from my favorite book. Hugh Martin in *The Abiding Presence* makes the case that the Holy Spirit is the author of all spiritual reality. Let me read just a little from that quote: *Would you have a real religion? – a religion, not of airy shadows and mere thoughts; not of pious dreams and sacred theories; not of cold creeds and abstract speculative reasonings; but a religion, real, in which your soul shall rest as on a solid rock; ...It is He (the Holy Spirit) that redeems your religion from all unreality.*

A key text for verifying Hugh Martin's statement could certainly be found in the words of our text this morning – Rom. 5:5 *And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.* Here is spiritual reality being ministered to our hearts by the Holy Ghost and it's the reality of God's love that is shed abroad in our hearts.

The statement is given to us as a reason or an argument for why our hope does not make us ashamed. It is in the context of tribulations that this argument is made. Notice what Paul writes in v. 3 – *and not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience, hope.* Tribulation serves a purpose – a sanctified purpose in our lives. It leads us through a process that in the end produces hope. Hope is that aspect of faith that looks ahead with anticipation to a new heaven and a new earth. Hope is what leads us to anticipate ultimate victory over the sins that so easily beset us. Hope is what leads us to anticipate being declared righteous before God's throne – *That I may be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith* (Phil. 3:9) – that's our hope. Hope is what enables us to anticipate heaven and everlasting life.

When tribulation or distress or persecution (8:35) becomes the harsh reality in your life then you are tempted to become ashamed of your hope. We find an example of this in the 73rd Psalm. The Psalmist is envious of the wicked. They seem to have life easy while the Psalmist complains in vv. 13,14 *Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.* Life is easy for the wicked but hard for the Christian – that's the Psalmist's complaint. Here is a man that is tempted to become ashamed of his hope.

But the thing, according to Paul, that keeps the Christian from becoming ashamed of his hope, even at times when he's tempted to become ashamed of it, is the love of God being shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. When the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts then we can boldly proclaim what Paul writes later Rom. 8:33 *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he*

that condemmeth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Such is the proclamation of one who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart. What this means, then, is that we need the love of God shed abroad in our hearts. We need it at all times, to be sure, but we especially need it when we find ourselves in the midst of tribulations and distresses. And God intends for us to have it. And when we have this experience then the love of Christ becomes more than an airy shadow or a mere thought, or a pious dream or a sacred theory.

The Lord's Table serves the purpose of bringing us into that rich experience of God's love. And so this is what I want you to think on this morning in preparation for the Lord's Table.

The Shedding Abroad of God's Love in Our Hearts

I. The Meaning of This Experience

What does it mean to have the love of God shed abroad in your heart? The phrase *shed abroad* means literally *poured out*. Another English translation reads this way: *the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us* (NAS). Poured out within our hearts – there's the description.

Now when I see and consider the phrase *poured out* the scene that immediately comes to my mind is the Day of Pentecost. On that occasion there was a mighty pouring out of the Spirit of God. You know the story. Peter preached with power – men and women were brought under conviction of sin – and then there was a closing in with Christ. You talk about the Spirit ministering reality to hearts – the Day of Pentecost was a day of reality in which men knew that Christ was Lord and that Christ was the Savior of sinners.

Now, with that concept in view – a pouring out of God's Spirit – you can come back to our text in Romans 5:5 and see that this shedding abroad of the love of Christ is like a Pentecostal experience but on a more personal and individual level. Here is your own personalized Day of Pentecost, as it were, in which the love of Christ by the Spirit of God is poured out within your heart. And it doesn't take a widespread and outstanding visible manifestation of the Spirit of God to produce such a thing. Here is something that can happen in the privacy of your personal devotions. Here is something that can happen to you right where you sit here in church. Indeed here is something we should seek and pray for and expect when we gather around the Lord's table – this pouring out from within our hearts of the love of God.

Now when we look a little further into this shedding abroad of the love of God by the Spirit of God you can perceive both an objective element to it as well as a subjective element to it. From an objective perspective you could say that the Spirit of God informs our minds through the Word of God about the glorious manifestation of Christ's love for

us. So we read the words that immediately follow our text in vv. 6-8: *For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

We are here informed not only of Christ's love but of the great contrast between us and Christ which serves to magnify his love all the more. Notice the description – it was when we were without strength. We are the ones who are ungodly. We are the ones who are sinners. And in spite of our dead hearts toward God and our rebellion against God he nevertheless responded with a display of love that is unlike any other display of love conceivable to men.

A sinner among sinners may on rare occasions give his life for another that he deems to be a good and a righteous man but Christ gave his life for us when we were sinners when there was nothing about us or within us that could commend us to God. So we have this objective perspective on the love of God. We are informed of God's love. We must know the love of God beginning in our minds.

We should note here also that the elements we partake of in the communion feast serve to inform or remind us of Christ's condescending love. He loved us enough to become one of us. He took to himself a true body and a reasonable soul. The bread reminds us of that. And he loved us enough to give that body to be broken. He loved us enough to pour out his life for us in the shedding of his blood. These elements of the communion table are so simple and yet profound in the things that they bring to our remembrance.

These are the objective elements to the love of God. The word of God and the communion table inform and remind us of God's love. But don't you know and don't you have to sadly lament it and confess it that too often the reminder of God's love does little or nothing for you. You may yawn your way through a communion service and be no more impacted by it but to be annoyed that it seems to prolong the worship service and add to the strain of your flesh.

If all we had was the objective reminder of God's love we would come to the communion table and leave the communion table being for the most part unaffected. We would, of course, be well grounded in our creed but not so well grounded in our hearts. We need, therefore, the subjective element of God's love which takes place when the Spirit of God pours out within our hearts the reality of this love.

We find a vivid example of what I'm trying to convey, now, in the life of Sara Edwards, the wife of that famous preacher and theologian of the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards, it seems, encouraged his wife to record some of her experiences of Christ for the edification of others. And from her accounts we read things like this:

The presence of God was so near and so real, that I seemed scarcely conscious of anything else. God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, seemed as distinct persons, both

manifesting their inconceivable loveliness, and mildness, and gentleness, and their great and immutable love to me.

While I was uttering the words (of one of Isaac Watts' hymns) my mind was so deeply impressed with the love of Christ, and a sense of his immediate presence, that I could with difficulty refrain from rising from my seat, and leaping for joy.

Have you ever felt yourself so filled with the love of Christ that you could hardly refrain from jumping for joy? I believe this kind of experience is exactly what the Psalmist has in mind when he says in the 23rd Psalm v. 5 *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.* What is the running over of our cups but the shedding abroad in our hearts of the love of God.

Christ's love, you see, is suppose to reach our hearts. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. We need for the word of God and for the elements of the communion table to inform our minds but then we need the Spirit of the Lord to bring these things to our hearts. So we see, then, something of the meaning of the shedding abroad of the love of God. The importance of this issue becomes even more magnified when you consider:

II. The Impact of This Experience

We've seen the meaning of the experience, let's think for a moment on the impact of the experience. A very important impact is revealed in the text itself. You remember that I said in my introduction that our text is given to us in the form of a reason or an argument. *Hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*

The impact, then, that the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts has on us is that it makes us bold in Christ. We are unashamed of Christ. Though the world holds him in contempt and may despise those who follow him, we, nevertheless, are unashamed of him. Our attitude becomes one that says to the world – throw at me what you will. It matters not to me whether or not I have your acceptance because I know I'm accepted of God. I know that God loves me. And so I don't need or covet the world's applause or the world's approval. I'm not seeking the world's prestige. The world's prestige cannot begin to compare with Christ's acceptance.

So we are impacted this way by the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts. One of the reasons we can be undaunted by the tribulations of the world is because our hearts are at peace through God's love. Look at 5:1 *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

You've heard me say it a number of times – it is the understanding of our justification that enables us to have peace. The thing that keeps the sinner from having the peace of God reach his heart is his knowledge that sin invites judgment because sin brings guilt. A man cannot be at peace when his conscience plagues him with guilt.

But when the believer understands that God's justice is satisfied because of Christ's death then his conscience can be at peace. And his conscience can be at peace even in the

midst of life's storms. The man who is plagued by guilt will be forever wondering if the storms of life represent God's judgment to his soul. The man, on the other hand, who knows the provision of God's love and who knows that in that loving provision Christ has satisfied justice by his life and his atoning death – that man will see his trials, or life's storms as providential dealings that are designed to advance his sanctification rather than to judge him for his sin.

It is the Christian, who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart that can say what Paul says in v. 3 *and not only so, but we glory in tribulations also*. We glory, or we literally boast in them because we see God's grace in them, rather than God's judgment. They serve a purpose, a sanctified purpose of working patience which leads to experience which in turn leads to a sure hope in Christ which will never lead us to feel ashamed.

You begin to see, I trust, the impact of the love of God being shed abroad in your heart. It makes you bold – bold to the point that you are unashamed. And it brings you peace – a peace that from the world's perspective passes understanding. Let me add one more thing by way of impact that Paul adds in v. 11 – *And not only so*, Paul says in v. 11. This marks the second time that Paul uses that phrase *and not only so*. He used it back in v. 3 – *And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also*. It's as if Paul keeps adding to our blessings. We are justified by faith and have peace with God – v. 1; We have access into this grace wherein we stand v. 2. But that's not all. That's what he means when he says *and not only so*. And then he goes on: *and not only so but we glory in tribulations also*.

And as if this wasn't enough we come then to v. 11 where we have another *not only so*. Paul is not yet through counting the blessings. And so he adds this next one *and not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement*. We joy, or rejoice, or exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Charles Hodge makes an insightful comment here which shows the present aspect of this joy. '*We shall not only be ultimately saved, but we now glory in God.*' *The benefits of redemption are not all future. It is not only deliverance from future wrath, but the joy and glory of the present favour and love of God, that we owe to Jesus Christ.*

Do you see, then, the impact of having the love of God shed abroad in your heart? As the Spirit of God ministers to your soul the reality of God's love you are then led to higher, deeper, and broader experiences of that love. You could tie into this truth the petition that we've already noted in the 119th Psalm where it says in v. 32 *I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart*. God's love through Christ goes so far beyond the capacity of our hearts that we desire the capacity of our hearts to be enlarged that we may know and experience in even greater and fuller measure this love which passes all understanding.

So we see the meaning of the experience – both the objective and subjective elements of it working together in our hearts. We see the impact of the experience which certainly conveys to us its importance. Would you think with me finally on:

III. The Means to the Experience

How can we know the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts? The focus needs to be on our faith. There is an emphasis on faith in this section of Romans 5. We are justified by faith. We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand (v. 2). Hope, we've already seen, is that forward looking anticipation of faith.

So the question to be pondered is really quite simple – do you have faith in Christ? Did he really die for the ungodly? Has God truly commended his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us? Are these things true or are they cunningly devised fables that serve as a crutch that we try to use to prop ourselves up when life gets hard?

I love the emphasis that Paul places on the absolute historical truth of Christ's death and resurrection in 1Cor. 15. *For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures* (vv. 3,4). So he cites the scriptures for proof of Christ's death and burial and resurrection and then he cites the numerous firsthand accounts of Christ's resurrection. And in vv. 13,14 he sets forth the importance of Christ being historically true – *But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.*

And so again the question is quite simple – do you have faith in Christ? Did he really die for the ungodly and rise again? And will you by faith take your stand in the grace of God? There is one more aspect to faith that is addressed in v. 11. Notice what it says – *And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.* Here is that personal appropriation that springs from faith. Have you received the atonement?

Now the blessing of the Lord's table is that it provides us the opportunity to say to God and to Christ – I believe. I love the refrain of the hymn that says *I do believe, I will believe, that Jesus died for me, that on the cross he shed his blood, from sin to set me free.* Let these elements serve as history lesson reminders this morning to remind you that Christ really did become a man and really did shed his blood for your salvation.

There's a sense in which you receive the atonement anew and afresh around the table of the Lord. And in the exercise of faith that will be present, I trust, in your partaking of these elements, you can and you should know the love of God being shed abroad in your hearts. These elements, after all, convey the message to us that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

And as the love of God is shed abroad in your heart you will gain an enabling power to love God and to love others. Husbands will love their wives better when the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts. Wives will lovingly submit to their husbands when the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts. Parents will love their children and children will obey their parents when the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts. May Spirit of God, then, minister this experience to our souls as we utilize this means of grace this morning.