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Next to Word of Hope Church

 **Chastising love**  
by Rev. R.A. Shackles

"Whom the Lord loves, He chastens." So are we instructed by Holy Writ. So should we (who would be assured of our inheritance as sons and daughters of faith) seek openly, eagerly, and willingly for that experience of love: The chastisement of the Lord!


As the Holy Cross teaches us, no grace, no hope, no fulfillment comes except we are given the joy — yes! the joy — of chastisement! As salvation was won for us by the suffering passion of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, so we come to rightly understand that only such experience can focus us on the wonderful miracle of unworthy lives cleansed, purified, purged, then sanctified by holy suffering, that chastising love we know as holy penance!

How often do we complain, "Why has this happened to me?" when our lives have seemed to have gone awry; as when, despite real dedication to one's job, one finds oneself unemployed for what seems to have been "no good reason!" Or how we bemoan an illness, an accident, a deprivation as coming without (We think!) any obvious justification. Why, we ask, cannot life be all beauty, pleasantness, happiness? Why must we undergo painful — whether physical, spiritual or both — experiences before we can really appreciate all the love the Lord has for us? Why cannot we just experience that love without the chastising?

Well, as light is never so glorious as when it suddenly shines in what had been blinding darkness, so the love of Christ never strikes us as powerfully as when we have struggled mightily through some painful time. When, in the midst of bewildering oppositions and struggle, we are suddenly, for having dedicated that suffering in and to Christ (which is the key that unlocks the mystery), overwhelmed with how very, very present our Blessed Lord and Loving Savior suddenly is to us!

Then it is that we fully appreciate that sacred love; how that "Sacred Head sore wounded" unites with our wondering and assures us, "I am here for you, for I have been in such sorrow for you long before." Whether or not we ever fully understand *why* chastisement is necessary, the realization of love that comes through it assures us that, whatever our chastisement, it is *always* worth it because it brings us to an overwhelming awareness that we are indeed and truly loved. In our chastisement, we identify with our Lord and it is by *that* we realize true love. It is why the Church, in ancient wisdom of God, has sent penance as a necessary means to learning true love and truly to love.

Thus, within the witness of the true Church and under the guidance of inspired servants of the suffering Christ, we should gladly and eagerly submit to such demands of penance as will thoroughly train us in chastening love! As our Lord endured *physical* chastisement for us, so too must our submission to the chastening love of penance be to accept in absolute joy the privilege of experiencing physical moments of chastisement as instruction that brings us to know we *are* loved by the Lord! Such chastising love, such penance, is, should be, one of our most revered and eagerly accepted experiences if we would truly know the love of Christ. Think about it! •

 **Covetousness, a number one problem**  
by Rev. William Randall

Madoff created havoc in financial circles with his Ponzi scheme of taking money from more recent investors to keep earlier investors satisfied. The house of cards came tumbling down with Madoff being escorted to federal prison. His crookedness is monumental, but is just the tip of the iceberg. Follow news reports, and you see that cheating, embezzling, stealing and all kinds of misappropriation of funds goes on every day. Our banking, mortgage and loan fiasco is the result of covetousness.

The last of the ten commands says clearly, "Thou shalt not covet." Is the need of definition the problem? Some people don't seem to know what is involved in coveting. Since it is an Old Testament command, a Jewish dictionary might help. The word "awa" means "to desire, lust, covet, crave, be greedy." The word "hamadi" refers to inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire. Covetousness is an excessive desire for what belongs to another. Of course, lust can lead to the use of illegal or improper means to obtain what is desired. To be honest, most acts of covetousness can not be attributed to ignorance, but rather, to the sinfulness of the human heart. It needs to be clearly understood that covetousness does not always involve a desire for wealth. Sexual desires are mentioned in the Tenth Commandment. Often a person's popularity, power or position can be coveted. Instead of stealing, personal attacks, half-truths, and outright lies are regularly employed to destroy a reputation or the effective leadership of one's foe.

Coveting reveals the affections of the heart. A biggee is the love of money. "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (I Timothy 6:10). Covetous people are lovers of themselves. Some are deceptive and have hearts trained in skillful methods of unjustly exploiting people and accomplishing lustful goals. "With eyes full of adultery

they never stop sinning, they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed" (II Peter 2:14). Coveting is common among those who are too lazy to work for the things they desire. If they are unable to gain what they want through legal or illegal means, they will sit back in criticism of those who are more successful than themselves.

Jesus said, "You can not serve God and mammon," which is anything you value that takes the place of God. In other words, we are admonished not to worship money.

God in His holiness hates covetousness, therefore, in the statement of His moral law, God instructed Moses to write, "Thou shalt not covet." The Ten Commandments were not intended to be a curse to us, but rather, to be a blessing. Rejecting covetousness on our part creates an attitude of contentment and compassion toward others. In these days of economic confusion, the Ten Commandments need to be in our minds, especially the command to turn from covetousness. We need to read the Gospels and see that Jesus called on us to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. •

 **Hippity hop**  
by Al Schneider

At this time of year, my thoughts often reflect on a departed friend, an Air Force Chaplain. I can still see the lanky Lutheran making his rounds on the base in Japan where I spent considerable time with him. "C'mon, Al," he would say, and then my short legs would get a workout as I joined him in a half trot to a place of need known only to him. He was remarkable in his own way.

I remember Earl fussing during the Easter season because he had this thing about the Easter bunny. It seems the rabbit has no place in Lutheran theology. Having to participate in, or actually sponsor a children's Easter egg hunt was particularly offensive to him. At such times, I tried to assuage him. "It's just one of those things you have to do." He would force a smile, one that was painful to deliver and even moreso to observe. I felt for him.

Easter, like most religious holidays, hasn't fared well in American society. When I was growing up, ladies' hats were the thing. Easter Sunday set the scene for the "Battle of the Bonnets." Nearly every church service had its front pew "style show" featuring a display of hats ranging from the gaudy to the sublime. Of course, no one came to church for the express purpose of showing off their coiffures. But there they were.

In later years, when hats were no longer in vogue, a new dress or "outfit" for Easter became the norm. Well, we already knew what the Easter message was about, but what we all needed to know was what Mrs. Jones was going to wear. Oh, my. I wonder where she found that!

Too hard on the ladies? Maybe so. In truth, men often encouraged our ladies to look their best on these occasions, each man thinking of his as the grandest lady. And chances are, we would sport something new, as well. Some folks would get up early to attend the Sunrise Service. There are fewer clothing distractions with outdoor services. But there was that pervasive anxiety during the early service such as, when do we eat? We already knew all we needed to about the resurrection.

We allow so many worldly things to creep into our religion. Christmas, for instance, offers an on-going conflict between Jesus and Santa Claus. Add a few reindeer and a couple of chipmunks to the mix, and it's no contest.

There's an old Isaac Watts hymn that some of us vaguely remember. I wonder whether we could bring ourselves to sing it again, perhaps during the Easter season.

"Alas! And did my Savior bleed?  
And did my Sovereign die?  
Would He devote that sacred head  
For such a worm as I?"

Makes you forget all about rabbits and new dresses, doesn't it? Earl would have liked that.

Then, maybe after we sing that, we could ring out with  
"Up from the grave He arose,  
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes."  
And then maybe someone could say, "Amen." •

**A serious question**  
by Reverend Robert Shackles

We seem to be in a new age of what some call our "edifice complex," which is to say building bigger and fancier structures for a church that does not always know why, or where she is going. From a huge cathedral under construction for nearly a century, to another quite modernistic one costing just under \$200,000,000, to "mega-churches" seating nearly as many as most college football stadiums, they confront us from every direction these days.

The implication would *seem* to be that this represents a powerful growth in faith. Yet we are repeatedly reminded that the Church is an institution in crisis, a question of what it is she really actually believes. It does seem clear to many of us that *societal* impact, not spiritual growth, is what "runs" the church; that as we see too many empty — or nearly empty — church buildings in this "edifice complex" day, an important question is raised: What is the good of grand and magnificent architecture if the Spirit has gone out of man? •