

## Walk In Love, As Christ Also Has Loved Us!

An insurance agent filed a claim on behalf of one of his clients that operates a dude ranch. He had been having trouble with coyotes and had rigged up an ingenious cage trap to catch the animals, after which he would shoot them. This time he decided to try something different, and instead of shooting the coyote, he tied a stick of dynamite to its neck and lit the fuse, opening the cage door at the same time. The coyote ran under the insured's pickup truck. The claim is for the truck which is a total loss. Our first response would be that the insured got what he deserved for his cruelty to this poor innocent coyote. Our second response might be to acknowledge that often when we give in to anger, cruelty, and bitterness, it is we ourselves whom we destroy. St. Paul writes, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice: And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. Be followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us."

One of the most easily documented facts of human existence is the destructive power of negative emotions. Hatred, hostility, and bitterness are expensive indulgences. Historians tell us that World War I left the nation of Germany in shambles. Consequently, the people of Germany were bitter toward the entire world. That anger eventually led to World War II. After the second war, a stone statue was erected on the Polish frontier. The statue was of a woman brooding in determination facing the Polish nation. Underneath that woman were these words inscribed: "Never forget, Germans, of what blind hatred has robbed you." Then below were listed the towns which once belonged to Germany but now belong to Poland. Negative emotions take their toll. Psychiatrists at Duke University have concluded that persons who have continuing feelings of hostility towards others have an increased risk of illness and early death. They base this finding on three studies of more than 2,000 people who were given the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, a standard test of mental attitudes, in the 1950s. A follow-up found that those who scored high on questions measuring hostility were more likely to have died in the last 30 years than those who scored lower. People who scored in the top fifth for hostility had four times the death rate of people who scored in the bottom fifth. Dr. John C. Barefoot, who headed one study, told a meeting of the American Psychosomatic Society that it's not known why this happens or if people can change their behavior, but "It's not going to hurt people to adopt a more positive and optimistic view of others."

Negative emotions are not only destructive, but they are degrading to the human spirit. A reply that came to the credit department of a jewelry store from an irate customer who was angry over a mistake in billing. He wrote: "You have made me so think, I can't mad straight!" Sometimes when we lose control we do and say ridiculous things. There is an old Arabian Proverb, "Anger is a wind that blows out the lamp of the mind." When "bitterness, wrath, anger, and evil speaking" get hold of us, we are not only less than the angels, but we are also less than animals. Who among us has not seen a normally intelligent, responsible human being act like an absolute idiot when out of control with hostility? Negative emotions are destructive and degrading and they also destroy our Christian witness. So how do we deal with these powerful, negative emotions? The Apostle Paul says that we should, "Be imitators of God and walk in love, as Christ hath also loved us." There is the ultimate secret. We can walk in love because we are loved. We are important persons in God's eyes because of what Christ has done on our behalf. We can be new people. We can be bigger people, bigger than our negative emotions by walking in the footsteps of One far greater than we. "Be imitators of God and walk in love, as Christ hath also loved us." If we truly want to live a life of peace and joy, we will make it our daily goal to fulfill Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." When we follow God and imitate Christ, we can't help but to be kinder to others, more tenderhearted, forgiving of one another, just as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us!