WAGING WAR FOR THE KINGDOM

1. INTRODUCTION

a. A couple of weeks back we took time to consider the sway of the enemy. At all times, the enemy is attempting to sway men's hearts and minds to agree with and act out his evil desires. When men give themselves over to Satan's influence, a course or pathway of wickedness becomes established in the earth. This pathway is identified in the Bible as "the course of this world.", "the spirit of the age" and "The sway of the enemy".

b. To resist the enemy we must turn away from the lie that draws us into living for our own comfort and personal gain. No-one will manifest the kingdom without being submitted to its value system. To do this we need to be a community of believers whose lives influence and encourage one another to live out the values of the kingdom so that we do not get influenced by the sway of the enemy.

2. THE 6 NEGATIVE INFLUENCES

a. In Matthew 5:21-48 Jesus goes on to identify the main battle ground and give us insight into the strategy of darkness and the corruption that can make the soil of our heart toxic.

b. If we think of a heart like a garden where the flowers of Kingdom (the values in the Beatitudes) are growing then we need to continually "weed the garden of our heart" by resisting the 6 negative influences (toxins/poisons) related to our natural lusts. We can think of these as weeds which can choke the growth of the flowers.

c. Jesus gave six practical areas in which we must wage war in our hearts

1 Pet. 2:11 *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.*

- **anger** (spirit of murder, Mt. 5:21-26),
- **adultery** (spirit of immorality, Mt. 5:27-30),
- **divorce** (spirit of treachery, Mal. 2:13-17 that manifests disloyalty by disregarding the sanctity of marriage and family, Mt. 5:31-32),
- **false oaths** (spirit of manipulation that seeks to establish our promotion or advantage (honour/money) without keeping our word or commitments (Mt. 5:33-37). To use "spin" to present ourselves in a false way about our commitments, whether in the past (deception) or the present (by lack of follow through),
- **demanding justice/honour** (spirit of pride or rejection in personal relationships by using our strengths to insist/enforce our personal rights, Mt. 5:38-41) and
- **retaliation** (spirit of revenge or animosity in personal relationships by refusing to walk in love, Mt. 5:42-47).

d. These six toxins destroy our garden by opening windows of poison on our heart. If these are regularly yielded to then weakness which dulls our spirit, grows into wickedness (being taken

captive to do Satan's will, 2 Tim 2:26). **We have a divine assignment to resist and overcome these adversarial elements to the budding virtues of the beatitudes.**

3. ANGER (spirit of murder, Mt. 5:21-26)

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgement.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. 23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. 26 Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

a. Jesus gave two illustrations of anger, one involving temple worship (vv.23-24) and the other legal action (vv. 25-26). Both deal with situations in which the hearer is the cause of another person's anger rather than the offended party. Why did Jesus construct the illustrations this way?

b. Perhaps He did so because we are more likely to remember situations in which we have had some grievance against another person than those in which we have simply offended another. Moreover Jesus' disciples should be as sensitive to making other people hate them as they are about hating others.

c. The offerer would present his offering at the brazen altar in the temple courtyard. It is more important to lift the load of hate from another brother's heart than to engage in a formal act of worship. Ritual worship was very important to the scribes and Pharisees, and to all the Jews, but Jesus put internal purity first, even the internal purity of another person. Reconciliation is more important than worship in that it must come first.

d. The second illustration stresses the importance of making things right quickly. Two men walking together to the court where their disagreement would receive judicial arbitration should try to settle their grievance out of court. The offender should remove the occasion for the other man's anger and hatred quickly. Otherwise the judge might make things difficult for both of them. The mention of going from judge to officer to prison pictures the red tape and complications involved in not settling out of court. Likewise God will make it difficult for haters and those who provoke hate in others if they come before Him with unresolved interpersonal disagreements. Malicious anger is evil, and God's judgment is certain. Therefore disciples must do everything they can to end inappropriate anger quickly (cf. Eph. 4:26)

e. Not only should we avoid anger, being grieved and feeling the need for retribution, but also ensure that we do not provoke anger in others. If Satan can get us to be offended and let it fester then this will begin to destroy the fruit of the beatitudes. How do we overcome this response? – Pray for the one who has offended you. What you pray for you begin to love. Pray and bless.

4. ADULTERY (spirit of immorality, Mt. 5:27-30)

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown

into hell. [30] And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

a. Jesus proceeded to clarify God's intended meaning in the seventh commandment (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18). The rabbis in Jesus' day tended to look at adultery as wrong because it involved stealing another man's wife. They viewed it as an **external act**. Jesus, on the other hand, saw it as wrong because it made the lustful individual impure morally, **an internal condition**. The Greek word gyn can mean either wife or woman.

b. Certainly the spirit of the command would prohibit lusting after any woman, not just a married woman. Fantasized immorality is just as sinful to God as physical immorality. The fact that fornication that takes place in the brain has fewer bad consequences than fornication that takes place on a bed does not mitigate this truth. It is not about the outcome but the state of the heart.

c. As before (vv. 23-26), two illustrations aid our understanding. The eye is the member of the body initially responsible for luring us into an immoral thought or deed (cf. Num. 15:39; Prov. 21:4; Ezek. 6:9; 18:12; 20:8). The right eye is the best eye, the common metaphorical use of the "right" anything. A literal interpretation of this verse would have Jesus crippling every member of the human race. Should not one pluck out his left eye as well? Furthermore disposing of the eye would not remove the real cause of the offense, a lustful heart. Clearly this is a hyperbolic statement designed to make a point by overstatement. Jesus' point was that His disciples must deal radically with sin. We must **avoid temptation** at all costs.

"Imagination is a God-given gift; but if it is fed dirt by the eye, it will be dirty. All sin, not least sexual sin, begins with the imagination. Therefore what feeds the imagination is of maximum importance in the pursuit of kingdom righteousness (compare Phil 4:8). Not everyone reacts the same way to all objects. But if (vv. 28-29) your eye is causing you to sin, gouge it out; or at very least, don't look. . .!" Carson

d. We are told Satan is the prince of the air. In our day huge amounts of communication comes through the air – TV, internet. What do we allow our eyes to dwell on? Our eyes are the gateway of the soul. Do we fix our eyes on God (to see him is the cry of our hearts) or on the works of Satan. We cannot look on both. Research tells us that we only remember 10% of what we hear but if we see and do then we retain. What are we seeing and doing – our eyes and our hands? If we are allowing anything we see or do to lead us into sin then we must deal with it radically – GET RID OF IT!!!!!!

5. DIVORCE (spirit of treachery, Mt. 5:31-32)

[31] "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' [32] But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

a. Matthew 19 is a parallel passage to Matthew 5 on divorce, and here Jesus refers back to the Genesis account as a starting point for understanding God's view of divorce.

Matt 19:3-9 *Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female', and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the*

beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

b. So Jesus confirms marriage as being a covenant for life, ordained by God from the outset of creation. It is important to note that Jesus did not say that "what God has joined together man cannot separate" (i.e. that there is some kind of eternal covenant of marriage in God's eyes that somehow remains in place, even if a couple have separated and divorced.) What He is saying is that it is God's intention that a married couple do not separate, not that it can never happen.

c. In Israel a man divorced his wife simply by giving her a written statement indicating that he divorced her (cf. Deut. 24:1-4). It was a domestic matter, not something that went through the courts, and it was quite common. In most cases a divorced woman would remarry another husband often for her own security. Jesus said that divorcing a woman virtually amounted to causing her to commit adultery since she would normally remarry. Likewise any man who married a divorced woman committed adultery with her because in God's eyes she was still married to her first husband. Jesus' explanation would have helped his hearers realize the ramifications of a decision that many of them viewed as insignificant, namely, divorcing one's wife. Women did not have the right to divorce their husbands in ancient Israel.

d. We could also add the exception clause in the last part of verse 32 since that seems to have been Jesus' intention (cf. Mark 10:12). He probably did not repeat it because He did not want to stress the exceptional case but to focus on the seriousness of the husband's decision to divorce his wife.

e. In our day divorce is taken as lightly as it was then. Jesus makes it clear that a commitment made is expected to be kept. To marry with the thought that if it does not work out we can walk away is treachery. Similarly if we are not willing to make the commitment in the first place then it is adultery.

f. However, it is important to develop a balanced, biblical attitude towards divorce, recognising on the one hand all those things that God hates about divorce, while accepting that in this sinful world there are situations in which (as God himself demonstrated) it may be necessary to obtain a divorce. If someone divorces their partner on unbiblical grounds, it is sin, but it is not the unpardonable sin!! Divorce, even when proper, is always occasioned by someone's sin and it always results in misery and hurt. This is why God hates it. But forgiveness, healing and restoration is available to every divorced person, whatever the reason or cause.

g. Unlike marriage, which was instituted by God, divorce is a human institution. Jesus makes this clear when he said "it was not this way from the beginning." (Matt 19:8)

6. SUMMARY

a. Next time we will look at the three other toxins that can impact on our lives and how we should view ourselves in the light of these temptations. In Christ there is no condemnation and we will find ourselves being swayed by the ways of this world and weeds will begin to invade our garden. However, if we turn and repent we have a loving God who delights in us and as the master gardener he will tear up the weeds and our garden will show no sign of their invasion.

b. He is the gardener who wants to bring forth the beauty of the Kingdom in each one of us! We will consider this in more detail next time.