



Nuggets From **STANDING STRONG THROUGH THE STORM**

Nugget #1: **WHO IS OUR ENEMY?**

He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

1 John 3:8

China's house church leaders, representing more than ten million members, met a few years ago for a conference to discuss the main problems facing their churches. They ranked their top three problems, and came up with strategies to solve them.

At the top of the list was *gossip*. Leader after leader told stories of how their ministries had been compromised by this subtle sin. Problem two was *materialism* and problem three was *heresy*. One house church leader from Henan Province shared the following experience.

"I went into an area to lead Bible studies for coworkers and they wouldn't let me into the house where we were to hold the seminar. I asked them through the closed door what the problem was, but they wouldn't tell me. They just told me to go away. It was winter and I went a little ways outside the town, knowing I must start a fire to sleep beside or I would freeze to death. I wondered what on earth could have made those brothers and sisters turn me away on such a cold night without a word of explanation.

"But a brother took pity on me and brought me secretly to his home. I eventually pried the truth out of him. The leaders in the area had received an anonymous letter denouncing me as a 'lover of many women.' Try as hard as I might, I could not get them to listen to me or let me see the letter.

"Later in another part of the country, I learned the letter had been sent by a brother I had disciplined for moral laxity, and he had sent it out of spite.

"I went to him and he repented. He sent another letter, but because the first one was unsigned, they didn't believe him. Both of us offered to go there, but we weren't welcomed. The testimony of the church was ruined. I still have to explain myself wherever I go. It's a victory for the devil.

"I went with the offending brother out to the countryside and told him to pluck a chicken. We walked along while he did; the wind blew the feathers far over the fields. When he was finished, he asked, 'What now?' I told him, 'Pick up every feather, and put it back on the chicken.' He said, 'That's impossible.' I replied, 'You are right. It is impossible, just as the damage your words have done cannot be repaired.' "

The house church leaders pledged to be more loving, and to hold more face-to-face meetings with each other to minimize the sin of gossip.

The Apostle Paul warns us repeatedly in his New Testament writings that we are in a spiritual battle. And our weapons are therefore spiritual weapons. In any warfare, the key to winning is knowing the enemy as well as the tactics he uses and choosing appropriate weapons to defend yourself from him.

Peter also writes about this in his letter to those of the early church who were experiencing persecution. He concludes in his first letter chapter five verses eight and nine:

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Peter's final warning and message is that we must live in a state of vigilance and awareness. We should never let our guard down because we have an enemy who is out to destroy us. So he says: Be self-controlled and alert.

This is a repeated concept in Peter's first letter. In Chapter 1 verses 10-12, he talks about how the prophets predicted by the Spirit that our salvation through Christ would involve his suffering and only then his glorification. He then concludes in verse 13, Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled. And the reason is so we can live holy lives as God has called us to live (verses 14-15).

In Chapter 4 verse 7, Peter uses the expression a second time. Here he indicates that the end of the world is near: Therefore, be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Obviously, things will be so chaotic when the end comes, that unless we are alert and self-controlled we will not even know how to pray effectively.

Now for the third and final time, Peter uses the expression again. But this time in an even more somber note because we have an enemy—Satan, who though posing as an angel of light, is really a roaring, devouring lion.

The word "Satan," in both Hebrew and Greek, means adversary—one who is an enemy; one who opposes another. In his desire to be like God, he sought to usurp the position that can only belong to the one true God.

In a most effective way, C. S. Lewis tries to bring this point across in his renowned book *The Screwtape Letters*. It would please Satan if we only consider him to be an evil influence underlying human nature or recognize him to be nothing more than ancient people's ignorant explanation for wickedness surrounding them.

On the other hand, Satan has also deceived those who acknowledge him into believing he is God's equal, God's opposite. He cannot be God's counterpart because he himself was created by God. Satan as a fallen angel can be understood better as the opposite of Michael the Archangel. He is not omnipresent and has only limited power.

At the same time, we should not identify "the enemy" as one particular government or person or other religion. While we are to pray for protection from wicked and evil men who do not have faith (1 Thessalonians 3:2), we also must be aware that wicked and evil men are not our greatest enemy. They are merely human pawns of the supreme enemy, Satan, himself. We thus recognize there is a power beyond human institutions that fights against God and His plans for the world through His church (Ephesians 6:12).

The Bible speaks often about our enemy Satan. Seven books in the Old Testament and every writer in the New Testament refer to him. Of the 29 references in the New Testament, Jesus is speaking in 25 of them. We need to know for sure what the Bible teaches about this enemy whom the Bible calls "*a sinner from the beginning*" (1 John 3:8). Paul wrote that we should not let Satan take advantage of us by being ignorant of his devices (2 Corinthians 2:11).

And now Peter tells us that because of him, we need to be self-controlled and alert! This is the first step of spiritual warfare.

