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"Stand, Withstand, Having Done All, Stand"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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I have had it persistently coming to me of late, beloved of God, that the Lord wanted a little word said to you some time concerning steadfastness, and I believe that this is the time when that should be mentioned.

Those of you who in a general way are familiar with the Word of the Lord, only need to have the word mentioned and there will immediately rush into your minds many a passage and you will at once feel how full the Lord's Word is of that emphasis, of that note. The more you open your heart to it the more you are impressed with the Holy Spirit's desire and effort to keep before the people of God the need for steadfastness.

We shall have to bring this very large and extensive matter down to a mere fragment at this time, but we trust that the fragment will be a mighty atom that will accomplish the Lord's purpose in us. I must just say however a word or two about the emphasis in general in the New Testament upon this, that in all his letters the apostle Paul has something to say about it, and it is always with regard to our position in Christ, our standing, our calling, our vocation in Christ, and in that connection again and again he urges to steadfastness. You will remember that his letter to the Romans introduces us into our position in Christ. We may say that that letter is the gateway into Christ. We are brought into our sphere in Christ, our centre in Him, planted together with Him; and having come into our position through faith in all the work of the Lord Jesus in His cross, then there opens

out from the other various letters the many-sided need for standing fast, to be steadfast in that position in Christ. So that we are urged to stand fast in the Lord, to be steadfast in Christ.

In the Corinthian letter, (taking the letters now as we have them) you remember his great word in relation to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, thereby His mighty victory over death, the swallowing up of death in victory, and the effort of some to dispute the resurrection, to cut that ground from under the feet of the saints, to rob them of that hope in Christ, to destroy for them the foundations of their confidence which are down deep in the fact that God raised Christ from the dead and in so doing constituted Him the Firstborn from among the dead. The apostle cries at the end of his great argument in that connection, and his reassuring word to the saints concerning God's mighty power in Christ: "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord". Steadfastness in labour and in confidence upon the ground that God gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Now that is something to think about.

Why should we go on working? What is the assurance that our labours are not in vain? God raised Christ from the dead and made Him the firstfruits. Resurrection victory underlies all faithful labours of the Lord's servants and as truly as God raised Him from the dead, so their labours shall not die. Labouring in the Lord is labouring in a Risen Lord and in a Lord who in His own person holds the victory over death. And the best answer to contrary arguments is: "Wherefore... always abounding in the work". Do something, do not sit down and miserably contemplate a doubtful situation, but get on with the business because Jesus lives. That is the Corinthian emphasis.

When you pass to the Galatian emphasis the word is: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Looking from that passage at the close of Galatians 5, you will call to mind those great statements of the apostle: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me". "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world"; and his repeated emphasis upon the place of the cross in his life is over against this thing which was seeking to bring saints back into bondage: the law.

Let me remind you that the cross of the Lord Jesus has emancipated us fully and wholly from every kind of legalism so that we can do exactly as we like. No one has a right to say to us: "You must not do this, or you must not do that; you must not go here or go there"; we can do exactly as we like, but if the cross of the Lord Jesus is placed in you there will be a kind of life that will make it altogether unnecessary for anyone to say "you must not do that". To be brought back into Christian bondage, so that we are all the time living under the fear of the sword, is a contradiction of the cross. The cross ought to be for us victory from all that kind of thing simply because it has set up in us a new principle of living beyond the realm, above the plain where all these things are necessary - "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not". Stand fast in that and do not let anybody impose upon you a system of 'shalts' and 'shalt nots', but stand in the victory of Calvary which is the principle Christ stood for. If you leave the ground of the cross you will come under bondage and condemnation.

As to the Thessalonians; chronologically of course this stands at the commencement of the letters. You will find in both the letters the apostle speaks of being steadfast, and here the Thessalonians had come out from the world, had turned to God from idols: "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even

Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." Enduring a great conflict of persecution, and suffering the loss of their goods, but taking it joyfully; and the apostle was encouraging them to stand fast though it would cost, though the course they had adopted, the attitude they had taken up to Christ was costly, costing them everything, he urges with great encouragement that they do not yield the ground, that they stand fast in the Lord. If you need the Galatian exhortation, go to it and see what it has to say to you. If you need the Thessalonian, you will find the application suits you. The Corinthians may be touching you in the matter of the Lord's service and discouragement in the work of the Lord; you have the basis of confidence.

With Colossians the point of order changes again and here in this letter four times at least the apostle urges to steadfastness: "Rooted and built up in Him". The aspect of Colossians is not as Ephesians, from the heavens downward, it is from the earth upward, "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God". And the emphasis here is that Christ is our fulness. It is the inheritance here that is in view. Christ the land, Christ the inheritance; and steadfastness is needed in going on to the full inheritance, to the apprehension of the value of Christ, seeking the things which are above where Christ is. And it is only as we steadfastly go on shall we come to the fulness that God has summed up in Christ for us.

There is no more magnificent ground of inspiration in the whole Bible than Colossians 1, where Christ is set forth in all the fulness of God from eternity, a matchless presentation of the Lord Jesus, in all things having the pre-eminence in the eternal design and intention of God, and then we are called into that fulness; called into the fulness of Christ, and the apostle urges again and again that we must go on to the fulness. Steadfastness in going on to God's full purpose.

The letter to the Hebrews brings that in with a great illustration from that race in the wilderness, that that generation entered not in because of unbelief, and because their hearts constantly turned back to Egypt. They were seeking the things which were below rather than the things which were above, and they entered not in, came short, fell in the wilderness. The apostle says: "Let us lay aside... go on... fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." Colossians and Hebrews are very similar in their emphasis with their own particular differences, but the emphasis is very much alike, that we should not fail of all that God has purposed in Christ for us; steadfastness in going on to God's end.

The letter to Timothy is again an urge to go on in relation to the deposit. Paul speaks of himself as one with whom there had been entrusted a deposit: "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"; "I have carried the deposit right through the enemy's waylayings, upsets, and now I am going to deposit the trust in the Lord's presence; now Timothy, you go through."

In Ezra's day when the gold and silver were weighed out and trusted to the Lord's servants to carry it back to Jerusalem and Ezra knew there were liars-in-wait, he was ashamed to ask the king for a bodyguard because he had testified: "The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him", and at length they weighed the gold and silver in the sanctuary, they brought the deposit to the end. Paul is saying that in spiritual effect, saying to Timothy: "Do not allow yourself to be hindered; go right through to the end."

I want to lay my main emphasis this morning upon the Ephesian urge in this connection, taking it up in the sixth chapter where the word occurs several times: "Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the

strength of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to *stand* against the wiles of the devil." "Wherefore take up the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to *withstand* in the evil day, and having done all, to *stand*". "*Stand* therefore..." Four times is this note struck in that brief portion, and it is necessary and helpful to recognise the occasion of this repeated exhortation and urge with regard to standing.

In this letter the saints have had revealed to them their highest position. In the beginning they have been brought through death identification with Christ, resurrection identification with Christ, ascension union with Christ, to the heavenly position in Christ: "Raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus". And there, it is revealed to them that the testimony has its highest and most supreme significance. The testimony is not among men and unto men, but the testimony reaches out and affects, touches, and has a meaning in relation to principalities and powers and the world rulers of this darkness and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies. The testimony is God has raised Jesus from the dead "and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." The Lord Jesus occupies a place of absolute supremacy over all forces - celestial, diabolical and human. The Church eternally was designed as a vessel for that testimony.

The Church, the Body of Christ is the vessel in which is planted livingly the fact that God raised Christ from the dead. There is the power of His resurrection there, the fact that God delivered Him, that He is at His own right hand; the fact that He is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. That has to be placed within this vessel as a living reality in the power of the Holy Spirit. Unto that the apostle cries in this Ephesian letter: "Be filled with the Spirit, for this testimony's sake." That testimony registers itself upon the whole hierarchy of evil which is set against the Lord Jesus and therefore the Church is met by that hierarchy in the heavenlies and the testimony is at stake amongst principalities and powers. In order to destroy that testimony the vessel must be destroyed, and that does not mean just broken up. The enemy knows quite well that the mere scattering of saints does not achieve his end, but the breaking up or destroying of that vessel and pulling that vessel out of its position, out of the heavenlies; and unto that every wile and cunning device and subtle subterfuge will be put into operation, to get you out of your spiritual position in Christ above, from your ascendancy spiritually in Christ.

The Lord help us to get rid of our mere mentality in this phraseology and think of ourselves as geographically expected to be somewhere on this earth. It is spiritual and moral ascendancy in Christ over the forces of evil that is here in view. And so by any means, more often than not so cleverly wrapped up by the enemy as to some quite ordinary things, things that might come along in everyday life, things for which there could be a perfectly natural explanation, wrapped up so cleverly just to draw you out, pull you out, put you out of your spiritual position in Christ. You find that provocation, annoyance, a little subtlety of the enemy has just got you out of position and you know inside you are out of position, you know that you have lost ground, lost your throne fellowship. Something has happened and you have come down somewhere, and you are weakened, you are at a loss, you have no power and the only thing is to get back and recover that lost position. Because of the wiles of the enemy, which are all concentrated in getting you out of position, there is this fourfold emphasis; stand, withstand, having done all stand, stand therefore - the necessity for standing on your ground, keeping your ground, holding your ground and judging everything from this point of view: "Is this thing calculated to pull me down spiritually? If so, I will have nothing of it, it is a wile of the devil."

Then, of course, you can understand and explain what this whole panoply or armour of God means. You cannot understand it, though you may have pictures and say lots of things about it, you cannot understand the value until you have seen what the enemy is after. Provided you have accepted your union with Him in His death, burial, resurrection, and His other-worldly life, cut off from the world by the cross - and speaking of the world now as a spiritual, moral thing - provided you have come that way and taken your position in Christ in the heavenlies, you see you are in a place in Christ of authority, ascendancy, victory and dominion. Then the enemy is centring every device to pull you out of your position, then you are able to understand the meaning of the whole armour of God.

The helmet of salvation; you will need your mind well safeguarded because the enemy is always attacking the mind as a means of pulling you out of spiritual position; accusation, condemnation, suggestions of some kind to the mind. You understand the meaning of this provision when you see what the enemy is after and that the Lord has provided against a certain kind of work of the enemy. The shield of faith; well, the inflamed darts of the enemy are to strike into our heart a doubt, a question, unbelief, hesitation, to in some way get in between the known will of God and the obedience to that will of God, because disobedience is practical unbelief. Faith and obedience always go together and you can never put them asunder, but if the enemy can get in between what you know is the will of God and your doing it, that is putting unbelief into practice and it is an inflamed dart. The shield of faith is against that because that will pull you clean out of your heavenly position at once and paralyse and destroy you. *Stand*. That is the Lord's emphasis. It is easy for us to say it here, but we get away alone in the conflict and the Lord only knows how difficult it is because of the wiles of the devil. Not only the intense pressure, but the wiles of the devil make it difficult to stand without a doubt, without a question, to stand and obey implicitly in the dark without an explanation, amidst every kind of activity that the enemy brings against us to pull us out of our position.

So the Lord would say with fresh emphasis to us that so much hangs for the testimony upon our just standing. We have said here recently that very often the greatest victory is bound up with being able to stand. We think so often along the line of a sweeping conquest and wiping the field of the enemy, and very often the greatest victory is standing; simply stand there unmoved. The enemy would carry us away, but if we remain unmoved, he breaks his hammers upon the anvil of the mighty inenergising of the Spirit of God when we stand. So Ephesians begins with: "strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man", and closes with: "be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might", and it is all because of the vast range of this testimony unto principalities and powers, and it can only be maintained as we maintain by faith our position in the Lord. "So stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved."