

Standing Firm in the Lord

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of standing up in responsibility, standing alone when necessary, and standing in redemption, as individuals who are rooted and grounded in God.

Scripture: Exodus 36:20, Judges 7:21, 1 Kings 18:15, 1 Kings 19:10, Psalm 134:1, Matthew 7:24-25, Ephesians 6:13, Philippians 4:1, Colossians 1:23, 2 Timothy 4:7

Topics: "Standing Firm in Faith", "The Importance of Personal Faith"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the importance of standing firm in the Lord, using the imagery of the Tabernacle's boards made of acacia wood that remained standing even when stripped of their outward supports. He illustrates that each board represents individual believers who, despite being cut from their natural roots and shaped by God's hand, are upheld by the redemptive power of Christ. The sermon challenges believers to examine their personal faith and resilience, especially in times of testing, and to recognize that true stability comes from being rooted in Christ. Sparks encourages the congregation to stand firm, even when alone, and to appreciate the vital role of personal faith alongside communal support. Ultimately, he reminds them that their standing is not based on their own strength but on the glory and nature of Christ that covers them.

Transcript

"He made the boards for the tabernacle of acacia wood, standing up" (Exodus 36:20).

"Elijah said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand" (1 Kings 18:15).

"They stood every man in his place round about the camp" (Judges 7:21).

"Behold, bless ye the Lord, all His servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the house of the Lord" (Psalm 134:1).

The Tabernacle represented the totality of the people of God, the sum of them all, in their life together in Christ. It was, however, a movable erection, not fixed in any permanent way, but built and taken down again, then rebuilt and again taken to pieces, according to the journeyings of the people as determined by the will of God. Every time this dismantling process took place, there was a moment when the essential nature of the building was uncovered and found to consist of boards - boards standing up.

When the four outer coverings which masked the Tabernacle were removed, the essential structure was seen to be made up of three wooden walls with their curtains. After the curtains had been taken down, it could be seen that the rows of boards were held together by various bars which ran horizontally along the inside of the boards to join them up. In the dismantling the time came for these bars to be removed, but it is important to realize that when this was done the boards did not collapse, they remained standing. Even when their connections were removed and all outward supports taken away from the individual boards, they did not fall flat.

One by one the boards were then lifted up and prepared for the journey, until at last there was only one board left. It was not necessarily the same board on each occasion, but there was always a time when only one remained. This was now all that could be seen of the Tabernacle representation of the House of God - just one board. But it was still standing. "He made the tabernacle of boards of acacia wood, standing up." Thus, with the final uncovering and separating, it was seen that, reduced to its simple minimum, the hidden secret of God's building is boards which are always capable of standing up.

Preparation Of The Boards

Each board, of course, had its own history, just as every one of us who has a part in God's spiritual House must also have a personal history under God's hand. It was a history of severance, for at one time the tree had grown on its own roots and depended on them for its life and support. It may have been a good tree and stable enough, but when it stood by virtue of its own natural strength it had no place in God's building. Nature, however, was dealt with, dealt with severely and even ruthlessly, as the felling axe cut away the tree from its own standing and left it prostrate and helpless. Nor was this the end of the story, for the cutting process had to go on, reducing and shaping the wood until it was suitable for the sacred task for which it had been chosen.

The spiritual application of this felling and shaping process is familiar to us. We know that we can have no vital place in the purposes of God until the sharp knife of the Cross has done its work. It is essential that we should know ourselves to be cut away from our own natural resources, removed from the realm of what we are as men, and it is also essential that the Lord should be able to reduce us and re-shape us according to His own mind. We cannot do this for ourselves, but we can recognize our need and co-operate with the Lord in humble faith and patience as He works upon us. In the case of the board, it was a once-for-all operation. In our case the work of the Cross must go on all the time. Not till we get to glory shall we be able to claim that no more of this work is needed.

Reduction is, of course, the negative part of God's dealing with us, but it is all done with the positive purpose of making us fit for the work in hand. Every one of the boards was made to measure up to a certain prescribed standard; to all appearances they were all alike and all according to the divine measurements. In the spiritual outworking we must appreciate that God neither desires nor produces outward uniformity, that is not His purpose at all. For us the divine standard is an inward matter, but there is nothing haphazard about it, for the divine measure is the measure of Christ. This is the positive objective which the Father has in view in all His dealings with us, He is conforming us to His Son.

Then the boards were completely covered with gold. This, of course, had the effect of giving them a value which was altogether beyond themselves, a glory which did not belong to them by nature. This is another important feature of life in Christ, the bestowing upon us of the glories of Christ's own nature. Gold always represents the very nature of God. Christ, as the true Son of the Father, is pure gold. By His redemptive

work He has provided this gift to us of His own very life. The humble, ordinary tree could only provide a very humble and ordinary board, but the glorious gold of His beauty gives an entirely new significance and value to it. So with us. The true spiritual values of our lives are those which we receive by faith as a gift from Christ. As we stand up like the golden boards in God's house our testimony is, 'Not what I am, O Lord, but what Thou art.'

Mention should be made of the uniform height of the boards, which was ten cubits. It seems that in the Scriptures the number Ten speaks of responsibility under test. We remember that the young Daniel, when first he stood up in the Lord's Name, asked for a test of ten days to prove the practical value of his abstemious life. In the New Testament we have the Ten Virgins, the Ten Pounds and the ten days of tribulation for the faithful church at Smyrna. So the phrase 'standing up' has also this sense of those who can bear responsibility and stand the test of time. This is the kind of material which God uses for His building.

God's Call To Us

The challenge of this symbolism is very simple but it is also very searching. It means that I must face the question as to what would happen in my case if all coverings and all supports were stripped away, if I were suddenly bereft of even the God-given aids to strength and unity, and I were left quite alone. I would be a solitary board. Yes, but would I still be standing up? This would be the ultimate test.

We are all being tested - there can be no question of that. God's people are passing through all sorts of strange and painful experiences, and the indications are that these will increase rather than otherwise. What does it all mean? It means that our own personal life with God is being exposed to every kind of test, and that if we are to be worthy elements in His building we are expected always to be found standing up, even if we seem to stand alone.

It is not enough to have been cut down and shaped correctly as a board. It is not even enough to be gold-covered and radiant with His glory. It is essential that we remain standing. Satan's work is to shake us, to bring about our collapse, to confront the Lord with the sorry spectacle of prostrate boards, lying down in the face of wicked wiles and threats. Even an Elijah, able so boldly to declare that he was a man who stood before the Lord, was at one point so disheartened and discouraged, so stumbled by God's strange dealings with him, that he was found lying down under the juniper tree. He who had stood so boldly for so long, had now collapsed. And why? Largely because he looked round at the rest of the people who were all lying down in unbelief and fear. There were none who would rally to his support. He seems to have given way to self-pity, for he complained to the Lord, "I, even I only, am left" (1 Kings 19:10). This was not in fact true. It is seldom true that God's servants are as alone as they seem. But even if it had been true that was no reason why Elijah should lie down with the rest of them. And there is no reason why we should allow our difficulties and apparent lack of support from others to make us collapse. His House is made up of those who know how to stand - if necessary to stand alone.

It is quite true that in the normal experience of the Tabernacle boards they were all joined together by the supporting crossbars. These bars gave solidity and strength to the structure, and it is generally thought that they typify the spiritual facts which bind God's children together in their life of faith. We need these divinely given helps, and we do well to make full use of them as we are able. Nevertheless, although it is essential that we learn to stand together, it must equally be true that in the Lord we can stand alone. Fellowship life is a divine provision, and it is almost impossible to exaggerate its importance in our spiritual

life.

We need one another, and the Lord needs that we recognize and maintain the unity which He has provided. But every spiritual blessing carries with it a corresponding spiritual peril, and it is a great peril of fellowship that we may misuse it and lean on one another instead of standing in the Lord. There is no substitute for a personal life with the Lord.

The truth is that fellowship life is only strong when the individual components are themselves rooted and grounded in God. It would not be difficult to find in both Old and New Testament examples of those who made a great contribution to the corporate life of God's people just because they could stand alone. Israel was saved because at the critical moment Gideon and his men stood firmly in their places, undaunted by the great odds against them. The spiritual life of God's people was maintained by the faithful few who in the night watches stood before the Lord in the intercessory work of the sanctuary. What importance is attached to this simple fact that the individual boards contribute so much to the whole because they have been made to stand!

Standing In Redemption

A further look at the Tabernacle boards will show us that although they have been cut off from their previous natural roots, they are not rootless - far from it. The boards would not have stood up for long if they had just been balanced, especially as they would have been balanced in sand. No, they were not taken from their natural roots to be left in a precarious and unstable condition but were each given two sockets of solid silver. Silver reminds us of redemption, and none of us can ever stand in the purposes of God unless we are firmly upheld by the redeeming power of Christ. The boards were shaped in such a way that each of them had its own means of penetrating into the sockets, and so, as it were, appropriating their strength. Each board had its own sockets. There was not a long bar of silver with holes for each board but a separate block for each of the two "hands" or tenons of the board. Here, then, was the secret of the stability of each board, it had its own solid foundation and it had an individual rooting in that foundation.

Redemption means that we do not belong to ourselves, we are purchased ones. Let the hands of our faith reach down well into this glorious truth and let us know for ourselves the reality of being bought by God for Himself, and we shall find stability even in the midst of the desert sand. Let a group of Christians stand in the good of this same glorious truth and at the same time stand together, and God will have a dwelling place among them.

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