

SYLLABUS AND NOTES
OF
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BY

R. L. DABNEY, D. D., LL.D.

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LECTURE LVIII.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

SYLLABUS.

1. State the Doctrines of Pelagians, Papists, Arminians and Calvinists hereon. Conf. of Faith, ch. xvii. Turretin, Loc. xv, Qu. 16. § 1-8. Witsius, bk. iii, ch. 13, § 1-11.
2. Prove the Doctrine. 1. From God's election. 2. From the Covenant of Grace. 3. From Union to Christ and participation in His merits and intercession. 4. From the indwelling and Seed of the Spirit. Turretin as above, § 9-28. Dick, Lect. 79. Ridgley, Qu. 79. Witsius, as above, 12-37.
3. Present other Scriptural proofs. Turretin, as above, Qu. 16, § 25-28. Ridgley. Qu. 79.
4. Reconcile objections; and especially those founded on Scripture-passages, as Ezek. xviii: 24; Heb. vi: 4, &c.; x. 29, 38; iii. 12. 1 Cor. ix. 27; 2 Peter, ii. 20; Rom. xiv. 15. &c. Turretin, as above, Qu. 16, § 29-end. Dick, Lect. 79. Ridgley, Qu. 79, § 4. Sampson on Hebrews. Watson's Theol. Inst. ch. 25.
5. What is the moral Tendency of the Doctrine? Witsius as above, § 39-46.

SCRIPTURE and experience concur in imputing to man, in his natural state, an obduracy and deadness of heart, which would leave the preacher of the gospel to labor in despair, were it not for his dependence on the sovereign grace of God. But when he believes firmly in the eternal covenant of grace, whereby God has promised His Son a chosen seed, not for any merit which He sees in sinners, and to call and perfect this seed by His efficacious grace, there is ground laid for cheerful exertions. The laborious Christian then looks upon his own efforts for sinners, as one of the preordained steps in this plan of mercy, upon his prayers as taught him by the Holy Ghost, and therefore surely destined to an answer; and upon the visible success of his labours, as the evidence that God, whose plans are immutable, and who always perfects what He undertakes, is working. He is joyfully hopeful concerning the final triumph of those who are born unto God by his instrumentality, because he sees an eternal purpose and unchangeable love engaged for their upholding. He can cheerfully leave them, though surrounded with the snares of the world; because he leaves the Chief Shepherd with them, who will easily raise up other instruments and provide other means for their guidance.

In this spirit the Apostle says, Phil. i: 6, that from the first day of their conversion till now, his prayers for his Philippian converts had always been offered in joy, because he was confident that the Redeemer, who had begun the blessed work in them, by their regeneration, faith, and repentance,

would continue that work of sanctification, till it was perfected at the second coming of Jesus Christ, in the resurrection of their bodies, and their complete glorification. This work was begun in them by God, not by their own free choice, independent of grace; for that choice always would have been, most freely and heartily, to choose sin. It must have been begun by God from deliberate design; for God worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. That design and purpose of mercy was not founded on anything good in them, but on God's unchangeable mercy; and therefore it would not be changed by any of their faults, but the unchanging God would carry it out to perfection.

We have here the Apostle's plain expression of his belief in the perseverance of the truly regenerate, in a state of repentance, unto the end. In attempting the discussion of this doctrine, let us exercise the spirit of humility and candor, laying aside prejudice, avoiding all abuses or perversions of God's truth, and striving to apprehend it just as He has presented it. I would at the outset guard the truth from abuse, and from opposition by defining:

That this perseverance in a state of grace is not innate and necessary, with the new-born nature, but gracious. It does not proceed from anything in the interior state of the regenerate soul, but wholly from God's purpose of mercy towards that soul. Security from fall is the attribute of none but God. Adam in Paradise was capable of apostasy. Holy angels were capable of apostasy; for many of them fell; and doubtless the angels and glorified saints in heaven owe their infallibility, not to their own strength, but to God's unchanging grace working in them. Much more would the Christian, in his imperfection, be liable to fall.

This perseverance does not imply that a man may be living in habitual and purposed sin, and yet be in a justified state, because he who is once justified cannot come into condemnation. We heartily join in everything which can be said against so odious a doctrine. It is impossible, because the living in such a state of sin proves that the man never was, and is not now, in a justified state, whatever may be his names and boasts.

Our doctrine does not teach that many will not be finally lost, who are connected with the visible Church outwardly, and whom the Scriptures may call believers in a certain sense, because they have a temporary or historical faith, like that of Simon Magus. But those who have once had in them the true principle of spiritual life, never lose it.

Nor do we teach that all Christians have equal spiritual vitality at all times; but they may fall into partial errors of doctrine, coldness and sin, which may for a time wholly interrupt their comfort in religion, and overcloud their evidence of a gracious state. Yet is the root of the matter there.

It is simply this: that "They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, and effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor

finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.”

As I have taken the definition of the doctrine from the Confession of Faith, I cannot do better than to take my method of discussion from the same source. Under each head many Scriptures will come in, more naturally and easily, so that the support they give to the doctrine will be more manifest, and more clearly understood.

Before proceeding, however, the competing opinions should be stated. Pelagians, Papists, and Arminians teach, in common, that the truly regenerate believer may totally and finally fall away, and be lost. Some Wesleyans, in view of Heb. vi. 6, teach that apostasy from a true state of grace is possible, but that the reconversion of the man thus fallen never occurs. The premise by which this denial of the saints’ perseverance is dictated, is their favourite definition of free agency, as involving necessarily the contingency of the will. They are consistent with their false philosophy; for the will of the saint who certainly perseveres is obviously not in a contingent state. Hence, in their view, his gracious acts would not be free nor responsible. Some of the Reformed have modified the doctrine to this extent. They suppose that an elect man may totally fall away; but that God’s purpose of grace towards him is always effectuated by his reconversion, before he dies. Thus, they would suppose that at the time of David’s shocking crimes, faith and spiritual life had utterly died in him. But God’s faithful purpose called him back to true repentance in due time. The motive of this statement is pious; they think it safer to teach thus, than to say that there was even a spark of true life in David’s soul while he was acting so criminally; because the latter view may tempt men living in gross sin to flatter themselves with a false hope. Yet their view, however well-intended, is not scriptural, and is obnoxious to a part of the arguments we shall use. It is inconsistent with that vitality of the seed of godliness asserted in the gospel.

1. This is proved by the immutability of the decree of election. When anyone is born again of the Holy Ghost and justified in Christ, it is because God had formed, from eternity, the unchangeable purpose to save that soul. The work of grace in it is the mere carrying out of that unchangeable purpose. As the plan is unchangeable, so must be its execution, when that execution is in the hands of the Almighty. How can argument be more direct? Heb. vi. 17, 18. God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, &c. See also Matt, xxiv. 24; 2 Tim. ii. 19; Rom. viii. 29; viii. 33, &c.

And even though this unchangeable election were conditional, and made in foresight of the believer’s faith and obedience, yet if it has any certainty, it must imply that the believer shall certainly be kept from finally falling away. If it even rose no higher than simple foreknowledge, yet a

foreknowledge which means anything, must be certain. If God does not certainly know whether a given event shall take place or not, then He does not foreknow it at all. But if He certainly knows that it shall occur, the occurrence of that event must be without failure, otherwise God's foreknowledge would be false! So that unless we impiously strip God of His foreknowledge, (to say nothing of His having an all-wise, almighty, and immutable plan), we must suppose that the perseverance in a gracious state, of all those whom He foresees will be finally saved, is so far necessary that they cannot finally fall away.

“The perseverance of believers follows from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father,” which was the ground of their being chosen unto salvation. The Scriptures make it plain that the reason why God ever determined to save any man was not His seeing in him anything good, attractive or extenuating, but something without, known to His wisdom, which was to God a good and wise reason to bestow His eternal love on that particular sinner. Rom. ix. 11 and 16. This sovereign and unmerited love is the cause of the believer's effectual calling. Jer. xxxi. 3; Rom. viii. 30. Now, as the cause is unchangeable, the effect will be unchangeable. That effect is, the constant communication of grace to the believer in whom God hath begun a good work. God was not induced to bestow His renewing grace in the first instance, by anything which He saw, meritorious or attractive, in the repenting sinner; and therefore the subsequent absence of everything good in him would be no new motive to God for withdrawing His grace. When He first bestowed that grace, He knew that the sinner on whom He bestowed it was totally depraved, and wholly and only hateful in himself to the divine holiness; and therefore no new instance of ingratitude or unfaithfulness, of which the sinner may become guilty after his conversion, can be any provocation to God, to change His mind, and wholly withdraw His sustaining grace. God knew all this ingratitude before. He will chastise it, by temporarily withdrawing His Holy Ghost, or His providential mercies; but if He had not intended from the first to bear with it, and to forgive it in Christ, He would not have called the sinner by His grace at first. In a word, the causes for which God determined to bestow His electing love on the sinner are wholly in God, and not at all in the believer; and hence, nothing in the believer's heart or conduct can finally change that purpose of love. Is. liv. 10; Rom. xi. 29. Compare carefully Rom. v. 8-10; viii. 32, with whole scope of Rom. viii. 28–end. This illustrious passage is but an argument for our proposition: “What shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

This doctrine depends “upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ.” As all Christians agree, the sole ground of the acceptance of believers is the justifying righteousness of Jesus Christ. The objects of God's eternal love were “chosen in Christ, before the foundation of the

world,” “accepted in the beloved,” and made the recipients of saving blessings, on account of what Christ does in their stead. Now, this ground of justification, this atonement for sin, this motive for the bestowal of divine love, is perfect. Christ’s atonement surmounts the demerit of all possible sin or ingratitude. His righteousness is a complete price to purchase the sinner’s pardon and acceptance. See Heb. ix. 12; x. 12 and 14; John v. 24. See with what splendid assurance and boldness Paul argues from this ground. Rom. viii. 33 and 34. Can one who has been fully justified in Christ, whose sins have been all blotted out, irrespective of their heinousness, by the perfect and efficacious price paid by Jesus Christ, become again unjustified, and fall under condemnation without a dishonour done to Christ’s righteousness?

So likewise the prevalent and perpetual intercession of Christ, founded on the perfect merit of His work, ensures the salvation of all for whom He has once undertaken. We are assured that the Father heareth Him always, when He speaks as the Mediator of His people. John xi. 42; Heb. vii. 25. Now, after He has uttered for His believing people—for all who should believe Him through the gospel of His apostles—such prayers as those of John xvii. 20, &c., 24, must not the answer of this request, or, in other words, the certain final redemption of all who ever shared His intercession, be as sure as the truth of God? But if any man is ever justified, that man has shared the intercession of Christ; for it was only through this that He was first accepted.

The perseverance of the saints proceeds “from the abiding of the Spirit, and of the seed of God within them.” Every Christian, at the hour he believes, is so united to Christ, that he partakes of His indwelling Spirit. This union is a permanent one. The moving cause for instituting it, God’s free and eternal love, is a permanent and unchangeable cause. The indwelling of the Spirit promised to believers is a permanent and abiding gift. 1 John ii. 27.

His regenerating operations are spoken of as a “seal,” and an “earnest” of our redemption. Eph. i. 13, 14; 2 Cor. i. 22. The use of a seal is to ratify a covenant, and make the fulfilment of it certain to both parties. An “earnest” (*ἀρράβων*) is a small portion of the thing covenanted, given in advance, as a pledge of the certain intention to bestow the whole, at the promised time. Thus, he who promised to give a sum of money for some possession, at some appointed future day, gave a small sum in advance, when the covenant was formed, as a pledge for the rest. So the renewing of the Holy Ghost is, to every believer who has enjoyed it, a seal, impressing the image of Christ on the wax of his softened heart, closing and certifying the engagement of God’s love, to redeem the soul. It is the earnest, or advance, made to the soul, to engage God to the final bestowal of complete

holiness and glory. Unless the final perseverance of believers is certain, it could be no pledge nor seal. The inference is as simple and as strong as words can express, that he who has once enjoyed this seal and earnest is thereby certified that God will continue to give the Holy Ghost until the end.

It is a most low and unworthy estimate of the wisdom of the Holy Ghost and of His work in the heart, to suppose that He will begin the work now, and presently desert it; that the vital spark of heavenly birth is an *ignis fatuus*, burning for a short season, and then expiring in utter darkness; that the spiritual life communicated in the new birth, is a sort of spasmodic or galvanic vitality, giving the outward appearance of life in the dead soul, and then dying. Not such is the seed of God within us. John v. 24. “Verily, verily I say unto you: He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life.” John iii. 15; vi. 54. The principle then implanted, is a never-dying principle. In every believer an eternal spiritual life is begun. If all did not persevere in holiness, there would be some in whom there was a true spiritual life, but not everlasting. The promise would not be true. See also 1 John iii. 9; 1 Pet. i. 23.

Our doctrine follows, also, “from the nature of the Covenant of Grace.” God did, from eternity, make with His Son a gracious covenant, engaging, in return for the Son’s humiliation, to give Him the souls of all who were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, “that they should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” This covenant is an everlasting one. Jer. xxxii. 40. It is an unchangeable covenant. Ps. lxxxix. 34, (spoken of the second David). The sole condition of the covenant is Christ’s work for His chosen people. Heb. x. 14. Now, the administration of such a covenant most plainly requires that there shall be no uncertainty in its results. If one of those, whose sins Christ bore, ever fell into final condemnation, the contract would be proved temporary, changeable and false. To derive the full force of this argument, we must again distinguish between the Covenant of Grace and the Covenant of Redemption. We argue from the latter. The Son (not believers) is the “party of the second part.” Because he is omnipotent, holy and faithful, the compact cannot fail. Again, in this covenant, the only procuring condition is one that has been already fulfilled, Christ’s work and sacrifice. Hence the contract is closed and irrevocable. Hence it must ensure the redemption of its beneficiaries.

On the eternal certainty of this covenant is founded the faithfulness of the gospel offer, pledging God to every sinner who believes and repents, that he shall through Christ receive saving grace; and among those gracious influences thus pledged with eternal truth to the believer, from the moment he truly believes, is persevering grace. Jer. xxxii. 40; (proved to be the gospel pledge by Heb. viii. 10); Is. liv. 10; Hos. ii. 19 and 20; 1 Thess. v. 23,

24; John x. 27; 1 Pet. i. 5; Rom. viii. end. These are a few from the multitude of promises, assuring us of our final safety from every possible influence, when once they are truly in Christ.

I am well aware that the force of these and all similar passages has been met, by asserting that in all gospel promises there is a condition implied, viz. That they shall be fulfilled, provided the believer does not backslide, on his part, from his gospel privileges. But is this all which these seemingly precious words mean? Then they mean nothing. To him who knows his own heart, what is that promise of security worth, which offers him no certainty to secure him against his own weakness? All “his sufficiency is of God.” See also Rom. vii. 21. If his enjoyment of the promised grace is suspended upon his own perseverance in cleaving to it, then his apostasy is not a thing possible, or probable, but certain. There is no hope in the gospel. And when such a condition is thrust into such a promise as that of John x. 27: “None shall pluck them out of My hand,” provided they do not choose to let themselves be plucked away; are we to suppose that Christ did not know that common Bible truth, that the only way any spiritual danger can assail any soul successfully, is by persuasion. that unless the adversary can get the consent of the believer’s free will, he cannot harm him? Was it not thus that Adam was ruined? Is there any other way by which a soul can be plucked away from God? Surely Jesus knew this; and if this supposed condition is to be understood, then this precious promise would be but a worthless and pompous truism. “Your souls shall never be destroyed, unless in a given way,” and that way, the only and the common way, in which souls are ever destroyed. “You shall never fall, as long as you stand up.”

But to thoroughly close the whole argument, we have only to remark, that the promise in Jer. xxxii. 40, which is most absolutely proved by Heb. viii. 10, &c., to be the gospel covenant, most expressly engages God to preserve believers from this very thing—their own backsliding. Not only does He engage that He will not depart from them, but “He will put His fear in their hearts, so that they shall not depart from Him.”

Other arguments exist, from independent assertions of Scriptures. It used to be common with the Calvinistic divines to advance the joy of the angels over repenting sinners, as a proof of their perseverance. The idea was, that if their state in grace were mutable, these wise and grand creatures would not have attached so much importance to it. To me this reasoning always appeared inconclusive. We have seen good Christians sometimes rejoicing very sincerely over what turned out to be a spurious conversion, because they supposed it to be genuine. Now, it does not appear that the angels are always infallible in their judgments of appearances, any more than we: although far wiser. Besides, if some true converts did fall from grace, the angels would still know that those who finally reach heaven must

be sought among the sinners who experience conversion on earth. A much more conclusive argument may be drawn from those passages, which explain the apostasy of seeming converts, in consistency with the perseverance of true saints. One of these is found in 2 Pet. ii. 22. Here the apostate professor is an unclean animal, only outwardly cleansed; a "sow that was washed;" its nature is not turned into a lamb; and this is the explanation of its return to the mire. A still stronger one is 1 John ii. 19. Here the departure of apostates is explained by the fact, that their union to Christ and His people never was real; because had it been real they "no doubt would have continued with us;" and their apostasy was permissively designed by God to "manifest" the fact that they never had been true believers.

Another proof presents itself in the parable of the sower. Matt. xiii. 6 and 21. The stony-ground-hearer withers, because he "hath no root in himself." Still, another maybe found in 2 Tim. ii. 19. There the Apostle, referring to such temporary professors as Hymenaeus and Philetus, explains that their apostasy implied no uncertainty as to the constitution of the body of Christ's redeemed. because God knew all the time who were truly His; and the foundation of His purpose concerning their salvation stood immovable amidst all the changes and apostasies which startle blind men.

With reference to all objections founded on the cases of Solomon, David, Peter, Judas and such like, I reply briefly, that the explanation is either that of John's first Epistle ii. 19, that they never had true grace to lose, or else, the history contains proof that their apostasy was neither total nor final, though grievous. In Peter's case, Christ says, Luke xxii: 32, that "Satan desired to sift him like wheat, but He prayed for him that his faith should not fail." Peter's faith, therefore, did not fail, though his duty did. So the prayer of David, Ps. li. 11, 12, shows that he was a true saint before and after his sin. That the principle of true grace can exist, and can be for a time so foully obscured, as in David's case, is indeed a startling and alarming truth. Yet does not the experience of society, and of our own hearts substantiate the view?

Here let us return to notice the view of those who deem it safer to say, that David's grace was all extinct when he committed these crimes, lest the opposite doctrine should encourage carnal security. We have seen that several of our scriptural proofs refute the idea of a complete extinction and subsequent restoration of spiritual life. It is inconsistent with the permanency of that principle, and with the nature of the Spirit's indwelling, seal, and earnest. But the licentious result feared is effectually warded off by a proper knowledge of the Scriptures. The true believer's hope of personal acceptance is always obscured, just in proportion to the extent of his backslidings. Hence, if he listens to the Scriptures, he cannot both indulge his backslidings and a carnal security. For he is expressly told in the Bible, that

there is a counterfeit faith and repentance; and that the fruits of consistent holiness are the only criterion by which the professor himself, or anybody else, except the Omniscient one, can know an apparent faith to be genuine. Hence to the backslider, the hypothesis that his previous graces, however plausible, were spurious and counterfeit is always more reasonable than the other hypothesis, that true faith could go so far astray. And if when sinning grievously, He could be capable of making David's case an argument of carnal security in sin, this would complete the proof of his deadness. David's case is an encouragement to the backslider to return, provided he has David's deep contrition. See Ps. xxxii, and li.

Your commentaries and other text books will give you those detailed explanations which you need, of the texts advanced by Arminians against our doctrine. I may say that the two *loca palmaria* on which they rely chiefly are Heb. vi: 4-6, and Ezek. xviii. 24-29. The solution of these meets all the rest.

Of the first we may briefly remark, that it does not appear the spiritual endowments there described of the apostate, amount to a true state of grace. A detailed criticism and comparison of the traits "being enlightened," &c., will show that according to the usage of the Scriptures, they describe, not a regenerate state, but one of deep conviction and concern, great privilege, with perhaps charisms of tongues or healings. The exemplars are to be found in such men as Balaam, Simon Magus, and Demas. And this is most consistent with the Apostle's scope. The terms here, if meant to describe ordinary saving conversion, would at least be most singular and unusual. They are evidently vague, and intentionally so, because God does not care to enable us to decide exactly how near we may go to the impassable line of grieving His Spirit, and yet be forgiven.

With reference to the passage from Ezekiel, it could only be claimed by Arminians, in virtue of great inattention to the prophet's object in the passage. Ezekiel's mission was to call Israel (especially the people in captivity in Mesopotamia) to repentance. He points to their calamities and the destruction of the larger part of their nation, as proof of their great guilt. They attempt to evade his charge, by pleading that "their teeth were set on edge, because their fathers had eaten sour grapes." God answers, in the early part of the chapter, that this explanation of their calamities is untenable; because (while much of His providence over men does visit the father's sins upon sinful children) the guilt of sinful fathers is never, in His theocracy, and according to the covenant of Horeb, visited on righteous children. He then goes farther, and reminds them that not only did He always restore prosperity, in the theocracy, as soon, as an obedient generation succeeded a rebellious one; but even more, as soon as a rebellious man truly repented, he was forgiven; just as when a righteous man apostatizes, he is punished. It would

appear, therefore, that the thing of which the prophet is speaking is not a state of grace at all; but the outward, formal, and civic decency of a citizen of the theocracy; and that the punishments into which such a man fell on lapsing into rebellion, were temporal calamities. But farther, the whole passage is hypothetical. It merely supposes a pair of cases. If the transgressor repents, he shall be forgiven. Does the prophet mean to teach that any do savingly repent, in whom God does not purpose to work repentance? Let ch. xxxvi: 26, 27, and xxxvii: 1-10, answer. So, does He mean to teach that any actually fall into rebellion, who share the grace of God? Let ch. xxxvi: 27, &c., again answer.

There is one general element of objection in all these texts; that when God warns the righteous, the believer, &c., against the dangers of apostasy; or when He stimulates him to zeal in holy living by the thought of those dangers, God thereby clearly implies that believers may apostatise. The answer is: Naturally speaking, so he may. The certainty that he will not, arises, not from the strength of a regenerated heart, but from God's secret, unchangeable purpose concerning the believer; which purpose He executes towards, and in him, by moral means consistent with the creature's free agency. Among these appropriate motives are these very warnings of dangers and wholesome fears about apostasy. Therefore, God's application of these motives to the regenerate free agent, proves not at all that it is God's secret purpose to let him apostatise. They are a part of that plan by which God intends to ensure that he shall not. Compare carefully Acts xxvii. 22, 23, 24, 25, with 31.

In conclusion, we believe that all the supposed licentious results of the doctrine of perseverance result from misapprehension; and that its true tendencies are eminently encouraging and sanctifying. (a.) How can the intelligent Bible Christian be encouraged to sin, by a doctrine which assures him of a perseverance in holiness, if he is a true believer? (b.) So far as a rational self-love is a proper motive for a sanctified mind, this doctrine leaves it in full force; because when the Arminian would be led by a backsliding, to fear he had fallen from grace, the Calvinist would be led, just as much, to fear he never had had any grace; a fear much more wholesome and searching than the erring Arminian's. For this alarmed Calvinist would see, that, while he had been flattering himself he was advancing heavenward, he was, in fact, all the time in the high road to hell; and so now, if he would not be damned, he must make a new beginning, and lay better foundations than his old ones (not like the alarmed Arminian, merely set about repairing the same old ones), (c.) Certainty of success, condition on honest efforts, is the very best stimulus to active exertion. Witness the skilful general encouraging his army, (d.) Last: Such a gift of redemption as the Calvinist represents is far nobler and more gracious, and hence elicits more

love and gratitude, which are the noblest motives, the strongest and best.

Just so far as the Calvinist is enabled scripturally to hope that he is now born again, he is, to that extent, entitled to hope that his triumph is sure; that death and hell are disarmed, and that his heaven is awaiting his efforts. To him who knows the weakness of the human heart, and the power of our spiritual enemies, the Arminian's adoption, beset by the constant liability to fall, would bring little consolation indeed. It is love and confidence, not selfish fear, which most effectually stimulates Christian effort. Let the student see how St. Paul puts this in 1 Cor. xv. 58.