

Manuscript Sermon on Philippians 3:13–14¹

This *may* be the first sermon that Charles Wesley ever preached. There is no surviving evidence of him preaching prior to his departure for Georgia on October 14, 1735. John Wesley described the initial daily pattern of the four friends setting out on this voyage—noting that from 9:00 am to noon his brother CW “writ sermons,” while John studied German, Charles Delamotte studied Greek, and Benjamin Ingham instructed the children on board.²

The sermon is known from a longhand manuscript by CW, that Sarah Wesley Jr. found among her father’s papers and delivered to Joseph Benson for publication in the 1816 collection of *Sermons by the Late Rev. Charles Wesley*.³ The manuscript survives at the Methodist Archive and Research Centre (MA 1977/597/1). On its cover CW wrote the Scripture reference and beginning of the text. A later hand has added “MS Sermon by C Wesley / Oct. 21, 1735 / Copied Apr. 22, 1816.” There is also the annotation, “Ex[amine?]d, W. P.”⁴

Kenneth Newport includes a transcription of the surviving manuscript in his *Sermons of Charles Wesley*,⁵ which shows all instances of CW’s ~~strikeouts~~, etc. The transcription which follows was prepared independently (with a few silent corrections of Newport), focussing on the final text after CW’s revisions, and indicating the page transitions (in **red** font) of the original manuscript.

¹This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the assistance of Aileen F. Maddox. Last updated: Sept. 27, 2024.

²JW, *Journal*, Oct. 21, 1735, *Works*, 18:138.

³Sermon XI, in *Sermons by the Late Rev. Charles Wesley, A.M. Student of Christ Church, Oxford. With a Memoir of the Author by the Editor* (London: Thomas Blanshard, et al., 1816), 186–206.

⁴The identity of this person apparently assisting in the 1816 publication is unknown.

⁵Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 95–106.

[p. 1]

Oct. 21, 1735¹
On board the Simmonds. Σ. Θ.²

Phil. 3:13–14

“Brethren I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do[:] forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

[1.] It is observed that the several inspired writers of Holy Scripture who have professedly treated of our progress in religion, and pointed out the several steps in the scale of perfection, have always represented their sentiments of the matter by obvious allegories and familiar allusions. Thus we find Christianity sometimes compared to a race, at others to a wrestling match, and at others to a warfare. And the passage of sacred Scripture now before us is no way to be understood without this metaphorical way of interpretation: the phrases used in it, being in a great measure borrowed from the circus,³ and the diversion of racing therein represented. Thus when the apostle tells his Philippians that he counteth not himself to have apprehended, [p. 2] in order to understand him, it must be remarked that the word we translate “apprehended” is in the original Greek⁴ almost always applied in a technical sense to him that wins the race and carries off the prize. It being the custom to hang the crown which was to be the victor’s reward over the goal, which he was looked upon as entitled to who came in first of the competitors and reached the prize and carried it off with him. So that when the apostle saith he counteth not himself to have apprehended, his meaning is that he does not think himself already possessed of his crown, nor yet that he is so secure of it as not to be exposed to some danger of losing it. He imagineth not that he hath yet attained the reward of his labours, nor sufficiently ascertained himself of victory in the contention wherein he is engaged; and therefore, as he elegantly goes on, “this one thing I do,” or this is my only care, “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ.” And here again are two terms [p. 3] borrowed from the racers to be explained. The phrase which we have rendered “forgetting those things which are behind” is in the original, “not looking behind me,” and the term “reaching forward” is

¹If this indicates the date that CW preached the sermon, it was the day their ship set sail from Gravesend for North America. It may indicate instead the date CW completed writing the sermon. There is no surviving evidence of CW preaching on this text again.

²Likely σύν θεῷ; “With the help of God.”

³*OED*, “A large building, generally oblong or oval, surrounded with rising tiers of seats, for the exhibition of public spectacles.”

⁴“κατειληφέναι.”

something stronger in the Greek,⁵ being expressed by a word that signifieth vehemently to stretch forward. Now these are plain allusions to Olympic game racers' customs, who stand not idly looking back and examining either how far their antagonists are behind them, or how much of the course they have passed over, but set ardently to their business and endeavour to overtake and outrun all that are before them, and to get through the remainder of the race and arrive at the goal as soon as possible.

[2.] So that the sense of the words may be thus paraphrased: "My brethren, I count not myself to have attained my crown, nor do I think that I am so sure of it as that I can't miss it. But this one thing I do, without marking or considering how much of my race I have got through, or how many of my competitors I have overcome, I stretch as hard as I can to get to the end of that which is unfinished. And so having alway[s] in my mind the goal, and keeping my eye fixed upon the way marked out for me to [p. 4] run to it, I make all possible speed, that so I may in good time gain the crown which God in Christ Jesus hath proposed to me."

The words thus explained will furnish us with these several topics of discourse.

First, to show that in this world Christians are never absolutely certain of their crown of reward.

Secondly, that it is never to be attained by resting contented with any pitch of piety short of the highest.

Thirdly, that a constant progress towards Christian perfection is therefore the indispensable duty of all Christians.

[I.] I am first ... [to show that in this world Christians are never absolutely certain of their crown of reward.]

[1.] We know this world is a state of trial and probation wherein we are placed by providence to work the works of God, to conquer and subdue the enemies of our salvation, and to do penance for those manifold sins and iniquities whereby our nature is wholly corrupted and depraved. Now a state of trial always supposeth a state of danger, and whilst we are only in our probation for heaven we may not think ourselves secured from all possibility of losing it. True it is we are inheritors of God's kingdom, and we [p. 5] have his gracious promise to secure us of our title to this inheritance.⁶ But then it must be remembered that all God's promises are conditional, and that we are bound to fulfill our part of the covenant or else have no right to expect that he should stand to his. Our covenant with God we know partly consists in a vow of perpetual enmity and war against the world, the flesh, and the devil.⁷ Those are our spiritual foes which can never be entirely vanquished whilst we continue in this life. So long as we live in the world and carry the flesh about us, so long must we be unavoidably exposed as well to their temptations, as to the attacks of that powerful, that invisible enemy who in Holy Scripture is represented as going to and fro in the earth,⁸ and walking about in it, seeking whom he may devour.⁹ We know the great abilities of this our spiritual adversary, nor are we ignorant of his

⁵“ἐπεκτεινόμενος.”

⁶See Matt. 25:34, Acts 20:32, Rom. 8:17, 1 Pet. 1:4, etc.

⁷Cf. *BCP*, Baptism Liturgy; Collect for 18th Sunday after Trinity.

⁸See Job 1:7, 2:2.

⁹See 1 Pet. 5:8.

devices and of his many cunning wiles, whereby he lieth in wait to deceive. And cunning and powerful as he is, will he, do we think, propose temptations which have no strength nor are attended with any possibility of success? No—he knoweth our weak side, and understandeth where [p. 6] to make the most successful attacks upon us. And so strong, so irresistible I had almost said, are his temptations that happy, thrice happy, is he who is not sometimes ensnared by them. He is the prince of the power of the air,¹⁰ and therefore wanteth not strength to assault us. He is the old serpent that deceiveth the world, and therefore wanteth not cunning sometimes to circumvent us. Indeed so great is his power, so ensnaring his wiles, that of ourselves we can by no means be a match for him. And all the hopes we have of success against him are founded upon our belief of that great truth of the gospel that greater is he that is with us than he that is against us;¹¹ and that God is on our side, who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.¹²

[2.] But further, we are exhorted in Holy Scripture to be constantly upon our guard,¹³ to take to ourselves the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand in the day of temptation and having done all to stand.¹⁴ Again, we are *advised*, that he that “thinketh he standeth should take heed lest he fall,”¹⁵ [p. 7] and commanded to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.¹⁶ Now to what end is all this caution, what occasion for all this carefulness and fear, unless there be some mighty danger in the case? Why should we take to ourselves the armour of God, were there no difficulty in conquering the enemies that attack us? Or wherefore should we be bid to look to our steps, were there no danger in the snares that are laid for us? Were the crown of glory already in our hands, our labours must needs be at an end—as men are always supposed to have finished their work before they receive their reward for it. But we are expressly told that our life must be a constant labour, that we must daily strive against sin, and regularly watch against all assaults of our enemy. And therefore it may be concluded that we have not apprehended, or attained, either the reward of our labour or the pitch of grace and Christian perfection from which we can never be shaken or removed.

[3.] The great apostle Saint Paul had reason to think that he had not yet attained, neither was already perfect, and found himself obliged still to press forward [p. 8] toward the mark of the high calling of God in Jesus. And great presumption would it be in us to think that we had attained either to a pitch of perfection, or a height of security, which a divinely inspired apostle fell short of. Now if there was danger of *his* miscarrying, much greater reason have we not to *build* ourselves up with fancied security. If notwithstanding the abundance of the revelations given to him, Saint Paul still thought himself bound to work out his salvation with fear and trembling, much stronger ground have we to follow his advice, and not to be high-minded but fear. God knows the best among us must content himself, as with acting in a much lower sphere,

¹⁰See Eph. 2:2.

¹¹See 1 John 4:4.

¹²See 1 Cor. 10:13.

¹³See 1 Pet. 5:8.

¹⁴See Eph. 6:11–18.

¹⁵1 Cor. 10:12.

¹⁶See Phil. 2:12.

so with fulfilling the duties of his station in a manner infinitely inferior to what this great apostle did. And therefore all the caution and watchfulness, that vigour and resolution, that labour and industry, that fear and trembling which became him, do more immediately *belong* to us.

[4.] I know there is a sect of people in England who have received it as an unquestionable tenet of religion that grace once received, can never be forfeited, and that he who has attained to a given degree of faith and holiness can never fall [p. 9] off from it. But this is a mistake which has arisen from mixing metaphysics with divinity, and making everyone's private opinion his rule of faith. When people began to dispute about grace and free will without understanding wherein either the one or the other consisted, no wonder that difficulties were raised which none of them could solve, and that schism and heresy were brought into the church by turning points of philosophy into religious disputes and making the quirks and quibbles of the schoolmen upon them of as much consequence as if they had been so many articles of faith. Holy Scripture, I am sure, has taught us no such doctrine; but on the contrary, has assured us that as the wicked man may turn from his wickedness, so likewise the righteous man may turn from his righteousness.¹⁷ Nay, moreover we are told that we may apostatize so far as to commit things worthy of death, and to be guilty of sins in which we shall surely die. And the catholic church of Christ always thought that all Christians were in this world constantly exposed to temptation, and of consequence constantly in danger of falling. We need not multiply quotations to prove this. [p. 10] It appears plainly enough from their solemn form of addressing Almighty God in behalf of the penitents as it is recorded in the Apostolic Constitutions, wherein every Christian is bound to acknowledge his own obnoxiousness to sin, and to pray to God for his preventing and restraining, as well as assisting grace, to preserve him from falling.¹⁸ And when the penitent is restored, the congregation are moved by the deacon to pray, and afterward by the mouth of the priest or bishop, do pray, for the reconciled penitent that God would keep him steadfast, and unmovable in the way of righteousness, and would grant he might never fall, nor be shaken more. Now their prayers would be superfluous, were it not allowed that the most perfect estate in the world is but a state of trial and probation, and that the highest pitch of perfection attainable in this life is not sufficient to exempt us from all danger of falling. We know even the Son of God himself did not escape being tempted by the devil, and therefore his disciples and followers must expect to be more nearly beset with them. That grand enemy of our souls knows [p. 11] full well that the crown of glory is not in this life given us, and therefore is never without hopes of preventing us from attaining it. And if his temptations be backed by any fancied security of our own, and his assaults come upon us unawares and catch us unprovided for them, greater, far greater hazard is there of their prevailing and working their designed effect upon us.

[5.] Thus have I at large insisted upon the first doctrinal point contained in my text, and sufficiently proved that no Christian is in this life absolutely secured of attaining his crown of reward, or can pretend to have advanced so high in the school of Christ as to be free from all danger of falling from his station and forfeiting that portion of God's grace he has now attained. The order laid down at the beginning for my discourse now leads to the consideration of my second point. But as the time will not permit me perfectly to discuss it at present, I choose rather

¹⁷See Ezek. 18:21–24.

¹⁸Cf. Apostolical Constitutions, Bk. VIII, Chs. 8–9; as known to CW in William Whiston, *Primitive Christianity Revived, in four volumes. ... Vol. II. The Apostolical Constitutions, in Greek and English* (London: the author, 1711), pp. [531–36].

to waive entering upon it now and instead thereof shall conclude with a practical inference, drawn from what has been already said.

[6.] My inference is this, that since we are not so secured of our reward as [p. 12] to be excluded from all possibility of losing it, we are not at liberty to indulge ourselves in a state of ease and security. We may easily perceive and know that since our reward is not given, our work is not as yet perfectly performed. Instead therefore of enjoying ourselves in peace, and indulging our hearts in an imaginary certainty of attaining our inheritance in heaven, vigour and [[curbing?¹⁹]] industry, and perseverance become the necessary duties of Christians. We must watch and pray that we enter not into temptation, or that we may have power to overcome those which we cannot escape from. We must be continually striving to enter in at the strait gate,²⁰ and be constantly fighting against our spiritual enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil.²¹ When we are upon our guard we are always safe, but if we trust to our best performances, and think them sufficient to secure us, I need not tell you how grievously we shall find ourselves mistaken. There is not perhaps a more dangerous piece of self-deceit than for a man to think himself beyond the power of temptation, or out of the reach of [p. 13] danger. It makes us careless in our duty and negligent in our *station*; and when we are so, we greatly impose upon ourselves, if we are secure either of the favour of God or from the assaults of the devil.

[7.] Caution and watchfulness is a necessary characteristic of a true Christian. It is enjoined by our blessed Lord himself frequently to his disciples, and by them the obligation to it extended to all mankind, “What I say unto you I say unto all, watch.”²² None, you see, is excepted from the duty. No excuse can be urged for not performing it. Watch therefore for the coming of your Lord, for ye know neither the day nor hour of his coming.²³ Let your loins be girded, your lamps burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that watch for their Lord, that they may be ready to enter in with him when he cometh. For blessed are those servants whom, his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing.²⁴ Stand fast therefore in the faith; be strong and quit yourselves like men.²⁵ That so in God’s good time ye may at length apprehend or attain that crown of glory which is laid up for those that unfeignedly love God, that faithfully serve, honour, and humbly obey him. [p. 14]

[II.] I now proceed to my second general head, wherein I am to show that our crown of reward is never to be attained by resting contented with any pitch of piety, short of the highest.

[1.] *Christian perfection* is the goal of our religious race, the stand whereon our crown of reward is placed. Hitherto therefore must all our desires be bent. Hitherto must all our endeavours tend. To this are all the promises of the gospel made. *This* therefore is the only title

¹⁹In the sense of “restraining.” CW left a blank at this point in the longhand; adding the word in shorthand in the left margin.

²⁰See Matt. 7:13.

²¹See *BCP*, Litany; Collect for 18th Sunday after Trinity.

²²Mark 13:37.

²³See Matt. 25:13.

²⁴See Luke 12:35–38.

²⁵See 1 Cor. 16:13.

we can pretend to have to them. We know that in a race the prize is never to be obtained without arriving at the end of it. And we are plainly taught in Scripture that our religion bears a near resemblance to this exercise. And therefore, to carry on the allusion, if we stop in our Christian course, and strive not to reach the end of it, we must be contented to sit down without our reward. The idle racer who spends his time in viewing the space he hath run through, and fancies he hath gone far enough to obtain the prize, and therefore sits down in the middle of his course, must expect both to lose the reward and to suffer the scorn and insultings of [p. 15] his brethren. Just so the lazy unactive Christian who judges that he has already merited heaven by his performances, and therefore seeks not for higher degrees of perfection in religion, must not wonder to hear himself condemned to lose the prize, and to see himself the contempt and derision of men and angels. Our wages should not be scanty and deficient, and therefore neither should our labour be so. The highest pitch of happiness is proposed to us, and therefore it deserves the utmost pains and industry to attain it.²⁶ The gates of heaven are wide opened to us, and we are invited by God himself, *thither* to come, and there²⁷ to take up our constant, our eternal residence. And does not such a reward more than deserve the labours of a life? Are not fourscore years well spent, if eternity is gained thereby? Or can anyone think it a hard bargain to be obliged to spend all his days upon earth, which at best are but few and evil,²⁸ in the service of God—when by so doing he secureth to himself an everlasting inheritance? See we not the tradesman toiling in his business, regular and constant in his employment, and zealous in the prosecution and attainment of everything which may make him eminent in his profession, and all to gain a competence in [p. 16] the world, an estate to supply him with necessaries and conveniences whilst he lives. And does not the Christian's prospect deserve the same eagerness and intense application of his business as the trading doth. Is a treasure in the kingdom of heaven of less value than the fading riches of the world? No, no! Heaven is a matter of such consequence that nothing else is worthy our seeking besides it. And therefore it must bespeak the same ardour and diligence in working out our salvation as the children of this world use to attain the pleasures, riches, and honours of this present life. And as a man must be a master of his trade that would get an estate by his business, so must he be a perfect Christian who would secure to himself these invaluable riches by his Christianity.

[2.] Again, all our pretensions to heaven we know are only founded upon the promises of God. We have no manner of reason therefore to hope for it except we fulfil the conditions upon which it is promised. Now I would desire to know whether Christian perfection is not the only way which the gospel proposeth to us to obtain salvation by Christ. Has not our blessed Lord himself expressly required us to be perfect as our Father which is in heaven is perfect?²⁹ Are we not exhorted to be holy as the Lord our God is holy?³⁰ To be pure as he [p. 17] is pure?³¹ And to

²⁶“It deserves” is struck out and changed to “we ought to raise,” in a hand other than CW.

²⁷Orig., “their.”

²⁸See Gen. 47:9.

²⁹See Matt. 5:48.

³⁰See 1 Pet. 1:16.

³¹See 1 John 3:3.

offer our spirits, souls and bodies a holy and perfect, or unspotted sacrifice acceptable to God.³² Now if this be so (and what Christian dares to say it is not) we must of necessity conclude that he that wilfully stoppeth short of Christian perfection, for aught³³ he knows to the contrary, stops short of the mercy of God.

[3.] But here it may be urged that in God's house are many mansions,³⁴ and that the stations of the kingdom of heaven shall differ in glory;³⁵ and of consequence therefore all mankind are not expected to attain to an equal pitch of piety, or to be entitled to an equal degree of glory. In answer to which I must observe that though there be different degrees of glory in God's kingdom, yet that he who aspireth not after the highest is not prepared for the lowest. The man that doth not endeavour to become a perfect Christian deceives himself, if he thinks he is any Christian at all. True it is, God knoweth our frame and constitution.³⁶ He understandeth the weakness of our nature, and is acquainted with the strength and number of those temptations to which [p. 18] we are exposed. And therefore of his infinite mercy and goodness he vouchsafeth, not to exclude us absolutely from his favour for every crime that we commit.³⁷ But still it cannot be shown that he doth not require perfection at our hands. I mean that he doth not require us to aim at it. The terms of his new covenant with man is that he should do the very best he can for his Maker, and observe all God's commands to the utmost of our power. And therefore however his mercy may prevail upon him to overlook those sins which, through his own infirmities and his adversary's power, man daily commiteth; yet will not his justice permit him to pass by those defects and imperfections which are wilful and voluntary or to pardon those sins which through neglect and stubbornness we run into. The infirmities of nature are therefore so far from being an argument against aiming at Christian perfection, that they ought to be the strongest incitement to it. Because a sense of our many unavoidable defects should teach us great caution and diligence not to add to the account of our trespasses by sins of wilful negligence, or careless indifference. [p. 19]

[4.] Thus have I fully evinced the truth of my second general proposition and sufficiently proved that our crown of reward is never to be secured or attained by resting contented with any pitch of piety short of the highest and most perfect that we are capable of in this world.

[III.] I therefore proceed to my third general head, wherein I am to show that a constant progress in Christianity is the necessary indispensable duty of all ranks and degrees of Christians.

[1.] They that would hope in *time* to attain to perfection, must, as the royal psalmist expresses it, "go on from strength to strength."³⁸ Whilst we can be better than we are, we are not

³²See Rom. 12:1.

³³Orig., "ought."

³⁴See John 14:2.

³⁵Cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Cor. 15:40–42.

³⁶See Ps. 103:14 (AV).

³⁷"Crime that we commit" is struck out and changed to "sin of which we may be guilty," in a hand other than CW.

³⁸Cf. Ps. 84:7.

to think of ourselves as perfect. And he that thinketh he is so good as that it is impossible for him to be better, would do well to follow the apostle's advice and "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think."³⁹ Alas, whilst we are in the world, we are surrounded with snares, and beset with temptations! By some of which the best among us daily falls.⁴⁰ We often repent and often sin again. And therefore sure may we be that "we have not yet attained, neither are already perfect."⁴¹ Our crown is not [p. 20] yet put into our hands, nor the victory over our spiritual enemies perfectly gained. Still therefore must we fight and strive against them. Still must we press forward toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.⁴² Whilst we are in the world, we are but in the road to heaven, and therefore must keep marching on, would we hope ever to get thither. Life is our pilgrimage, heaven is our home. And as here we have no abiding city,⁴³ so neither have we any end of our labours. Death will put an end to all our toils, but whilst life lasts our work will never have an end. We may sit down and please ourselves with thinking what we have already done, but be assured that such a thought does only make us lose our time and hinder us from finishing what yet is left undone. When we have done all that we can, our Saviour directs us to look upon ourselves but as unprofitable servants.⁴⁴ And whilst we are so, it can never be a time to rest contented with our state, but rather to aim at more exalted holiness, and aspire after higher degrees [p. 21] of perfection.

He that has often done his duty to God, and laboured earnestly to do good to his brethren, has no right to sit down contented with what he has done and to think no more is required of him. No! Such a thought would taint his piety, tarnish the lustre of his virtue, and spoil the merit of his best performances. When we have done all the good we can, we are still to seek for opportunities of doing more. And though we have been ever so charitable to our brethren, yet if charity increaseth not, if we do not seek out for farther objects of it, and farther means of assisting and relieving them, it is but an imaginary virtue, and has no manner of title to the name of Christian charity. And what is true of charity may likewise be said of all the virtues of the gospel. Their very essence consisteth in the improvement we make of them. And their nature is wholly changed whenever we think we are far enough advanced in the practice of them.

2. But farther, it is a maxim universally true, and established by the general consent of all mankind, [p. 22] that he that maketh no progress is sure to go backward in the world. Now this maxim is as infallibly certain when applied to religion, as to any other thing. He therefore that would stand still in the paths of virtue⁴⁵ must not be surprised if he find that he goeth back therein. He not only wasteth his time, but loseth his ground too; and will find, if ever he awakes out of his sleep, that he has not only less time to run his race in but more of his course to go .”through than he before imagined. He that doth not constantly and daily strive against the storm

³⁹Cf. Rom. 12:3.

⁴⁰“Daily falls” is struck out and changed to “are sometimes overcome,” in a hand other than CW. The same hand changes the beginning of the next phrase to “Do we not often ...

⁴¹Cf. Phil. 3:12.

⁴²See Phil. 3:14.

⁴³See Heb. 13:14.

⁴⁴See Luke 17:10.

⁴⁵“Virtue” is struck out and changed to “piety,” in a hand other than CW.

of vice and torrent of iniquity wherewith the world is now overflowed, will be infallibly carried down thereby. There is no resting in the midway between heaven and hell. We must pursue our way to the former, or we shall infallibly make quick advances toward the latter.

3. All virtue consisteth in habit; and habits, we know, are only to be obtained by constant and repeated acts. He therefore that would be truly pious must be always exercised in piety, and he that would attain [p. 23] to real Christian charity must never cool in his labour of love. If we keep continually labouring in the task our great Master has given us to do, we must of consequence continually increase in our ability to perform it. But if we ever abate of our zeal, we must not wonder if our habit of virtue begins to fail us. Besides, in order to attain a habit constant repeated acts are not only necessary, but we must likewise take care that every act of piety be proportionably better than the last. He that contenteth himself with a bare plodding at the rudiments of learning will never make a scholar. And he that aspires no higher than the first steps in the scale of perfection will never make a Christian. It is Saint Paul's advice to the Hebrews that they should leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ and go on to perfection,⁴⁶ not resting satisfied with laying the foundations of Christianity, but endeavouring to raise a proportionable superstructure thereupon. And were this advice regularly complied with, Christianity would be in another condition than [p. 24] at present can be boasted of. Men would not be babes in Christianity all the days of their life, nor would a hoary head and an ignorant heart be such frequent companions as God knows at present they are. Did people daily aspire after improving themselves in Christianity, we should see youth more sober and old age more venerable. The longer men lived, the wiser would they grow; and the wiser they were, the more holy would they be.

[4.] Thus have I shown by three unanswerable arguments that people of all ranks and conditions are indispensably obliged to make a constant progress and proficiency both in the knowledge and practice of true Christianity. The doctrines of this discourse are so plain and evident that they need no application, and so necessary and indispensable that they will sufficiently recommend themselves to the serious consideration and practice of all that hear me. Instead therefore of an exhortation to them, I choose rather to require you to join with me in prayer to God that he would graciously assist us in the performance of them. For which purpose I shall conclude with an excellent [p. 25] collect of our Church.

Collect for Second Sunday after Trinity.

O God who declarest thy [al]mighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity, mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running [the way] of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Source: Methodist Archive and Research Centre, MA 1977/597/1.

⁴⁶See Heb. 6:1.