**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**COLOSSIANS-017**. **CHRISTIAN PROGRESS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and builded up in Him …"*

*Colossians 2:6-7 (R.V.)*

It is characteristic of Paul that he should here use three figures incongruous with each other to express the same idea, the figures of walking, being rooted, and built up. They, however, have in common that they all suggest an initial act by which we are brought into connection with Christ, and a subsequent process flowing from and following on it. Receiving Christ, being rooted in Him, being founded on Him, stand for the first; walking in Him, growing up from the root in Him, being built up on Him as foundation, stand for the second. Fully expressed then, the text would run, As ye have received Christ, so walk in Him; as ye have been rooted in Him, so grow up in Him; as ye have been founded on Him, so be builded up. These three clauses present the one idea in slightly different forms. The first expresses Christian progress as the manifestation before the world of an inward possession, the exhibition in the outward life of a treasure hid in the heart. The second expresses the same progress as the development by its own vital energy of the life of Christ in the soul. The third expresses the progress as the addition, by conscious efforts, of portion after portion to the character, which is manifestly incomplete until the headstone crowns the structure. We may then take the passage before us as exhibiting the principles of Christian progress.

**I. The origin of all, or how Christian progress begins.**

These three figures, receiving, rooted, founded, all express a great deal more than merely accepting certain truths about Him. The acceptance of truths is the means by which we come to what is more than any belief of truths. We possess Christ when we believe with a true faith in Him. We are rooted in Him. His life flows into us. We draw nourishment from that soil. We are built on Him, and in our compact union find a real support to a life which is otherwise baseless and blown about like thistledown by every breath. The union which all these metaphors presupposes is a vital connection; the possession which is the first step in the Christian life is a real possession.

There is no progress without that initial step. Our own experience tells us but too plainly and loudly that we need the impartation of a new life, and to be set on a new foundation, if we are ever to be anything else than failures and blots.

There is sure to be progress if the initial step has been taken. If Christ has been received, the life possessed will certainly manifest itself. It will go on to perfection. The union effected will work on through the whole character and nature. It is the beginning of all; it is only the beginning.

**II. The manner of Christian progress or in what it consists.**

It consists in a more complete possession of Him, in a more constant approximation to Him, and a more entire appropriation of Him. Christian progress is not a growing up from Christ as starting-point, but into Christ as goal. All is contained in the first act by which He is first received; the remainder is but the working out of that. All our growth in knowledge and wisdom consists in our knowing what we have when we receive Christ. We grow in proportion as we learn to see in Him the centre of all truth, as the Revealer of God, as the Teacher of man, as the Interpreter of nature, as the meaning and end of history, as the Lord of life and death. Morals, politics, and philosophy flow from Him. His lips and His life and death proclaim all truth, human and divine.

As in wisdom so in character, all progress consists in coming closer to Jesus and receiving more and more of His many-sided grace. He is the pattern of all excellence, the living ideal of whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, virtue incarnate, praise embodied. He is the power by which we become gradually and growingly moulded into His likeness. Every part of our nature finds its best stimulus in Jesus for individuals and for societies. Christ and growth into Him is progress, and the only way by which men can be presented perfect, is that they shall be presented perfect in Christ, whereunto every man must labour who would that his labour should not be in vain. That progress must follow the threefold direction in the text. There must first be the progressive manifestation in act and life of the Christ already possessed, As ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. There must also be the completer growth in the soul of the new life already received. As the leaf grows green and broad, so a Christlike character must grow not altogether by effort. And there must be a continual being builded up in Him by constant additions to the fabric of graces set on that foundation.

**III. The means, or how it is accomplished.**

The first words of our text tell us that Ye have received Christ Jesus as Lord, and all depends on keeping the channels of communication open so that the reception may be continuous and progressive. We must live near and ever nearer to the Lord, and seek that our communion with Him may be strengthened. On the other hand, it is not only by the spontaneous development of the implanted life, but by conscious and continuous efforts which sometimes involve vigorous repression of the old self that progress is realised. The two metaphors of our text have to be united in our experience. Neither the effortless growth of the tree nor the toilsome work of the builder suffice to represent the whole truth. The two sides of deep and still communion, and of strenuous effort based on that communion, must be found in the experience of every Christian who has received Christ, and is advancing through the imperfect manifestations of earth to the perfect union with, and perfect assimilation to, the Lord.

To all men who are ready to despair of themselves, here is the way to realise the grandest hopes. Nothing is too great to be attained by one who, having received Christ Jesus as Lord, walks in Him, rooted and builded up in Him, a holy temple to the Lord.