

BEING FILLED UNTO ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD AND GOD BEING GLORIFIED IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST JESUS

BY WITNESS LEE

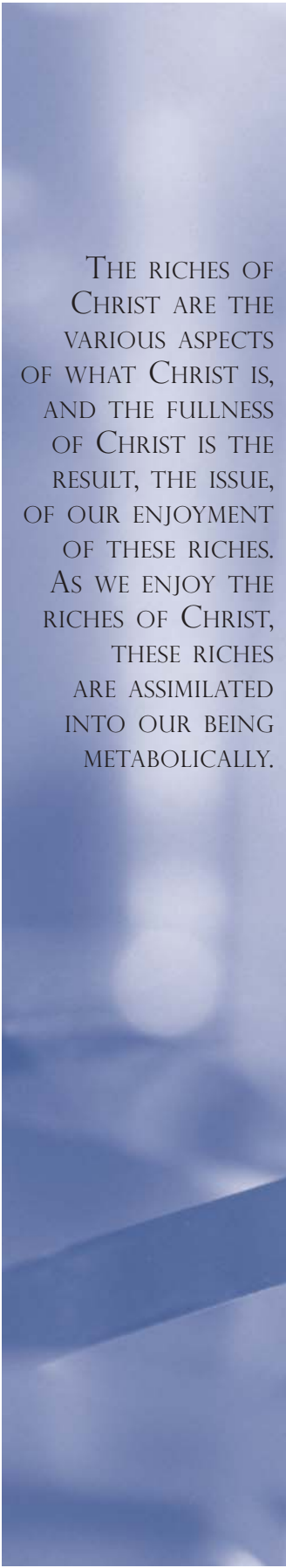
In Ephesians 3:19 the apostle Paul says, "That you may be filled unto all the fullness of God." When Christ makes His home in our hearts and when we are strong to apprehend with all the saints the dimensions of Christ and to know by experience His knowledge-surpassing love, we shall be filled unto all the fullness of God. All this fullness dwells in Christ (Col. 1:19; 2:9). Through His indwelling, Christ continually imparts the very element of God into our being. We can be filled with God to such a measure and can attain such a standard, even unto all the fullness of God. In this way we fulfill God's intention that the church should be the expression of God. When the riches of God are in God Himself, they are His riches. But when the riches of God are expressed, they become His fullness (John 1:16). When we speak of the fullness of God, we imply that the riches of all that God is have become His expression.

The Church Metabolically Constituted

The fullness of God is the church. Chapter 3 of Ephesians is not concerned with the organization of the church nor with the formation of the church, but with the constitution of the church. The church is neither organized nor formed; it is metabolically constituted in us through our experience and enjoyment of the riches of Christ. In order for the church to be constituted in a practical way, we need to be strengthened into our inner man. Then Christ must make His home in our hearts; He must occupy all the parts of our inner being and saturate them with His riches. Then we need to be rooted and grounded in love, rooted for growth and grounded for building. Following this, we must grasp the dimensions of Christ. This is to experience Christ in His universal dimensions. Along with this, we come to know in our experience the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ. As a result of all these experiences, we are eventually filled unto all the fullness of God. Therefore, being filled unto the fullness of God is the outcome, the result, of all the deeper, higher, and richer experiences of Christ described in Ephesians 3.

The Highest Definition of the Church

The highest definition of the church is that the church is the fullness of God. Some may be troubled at such a statement and may wonder how this claim can be substantiated. In verse 21 Paul says, "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus." According to the context, the church in verse 21 is the very fullness of God in verse 19. When in our experience we are filled unto all the fullness of God, the church comes into being in a practical way. It is at such a time that we could say what Paul says: "To Him be the glory in the church." This glory is the expression of God. Hence, in the fullness of God there is the expression of God. Therefore, the fullness of God is the church



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as God's expression. Some translations of verse 19 say, "Filled with all the fullness of God." According to this rendering, the fullness of God would have to be the element, the essence, with which we are filled. But this is a mistaken understanding of this verse. Here Paul is saying that we shall be filled unto all the fullness of God; that is, we shall be filled to be the expression of God.

The Riches and the Fullness

When I first began to speak on the difference between the riches of Christ and the fullness of Christ, some tried to argue with me by quoting John 1:16: "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace." They said, "John 1:16 declares that of His fullness we have all received. Isn't this fullness the riches of Christ? How then can you make a distinction between the riches of Christ and the fullness of Christ?" When Christ was on earth with His disciples, would you say that the riches of God were there with Him or that the fullness of God was there with Him? If the riches had been with Him but the fullness had not, something would have been lacking; there would have been no completion.

For example, suppose a glass jar contains just a few pieces of delicious candy. The jar contains some riches of the candy but not the fullness. However, after the jar is filled with candy, it will have not only the riches but also the fullness. If the jar remains only partly filled, there will not be the expression of the candy in the jar. Because the fullness is the expression, without the fullness there can be no expression. Only when the candies fill the jar to the brim will there be the fullness as the expression of the riches.

When the Lord Jesus came, He no doubt brought all the riches of God with Him. However, with Him there were not only the riches of God, but there was also the fullness of God. This is the reason John 1:16 says that we all have received of His fullness; it does not say that we have received of His riches. If you take a piece of candy from a jar filled with candy, you will be receiving candy, not from the riches of the jar, but from its fullness.

The fullness is the completion of the riches. In Greek the word for *fullness* means completion. Hence, it is correct to render this Greek word as "completeness." The Greek word translated "of" in John 1:16 means "out from" or "out of." Thus, out of the fullness of Christ, the completeness of all the riches of God, we have all received. When Christ came, He did not come only partially filled with the riches of God. On the contrary, He was filled to the brim. Hence, the fullness, the completeness of what God is, was present with Him. This fullness, this completeness, is the expression of God. The Lord Jesus was like the glass, and the riches of God with which He was filled unto all the fullness of God were like the protein drink. The disciples received not merely of the riches of God, but of His fullness.

Metabolically Assimilating the Riches of Christ

In the New Testament the fullness is the expression through the completeness of the riches. This is the reason that in Ephesians 3:8 Paul speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ and then in 1:23 and 4:13 speaks of the fullness of Christ. The riches of Christ are the various aspects of what Christ is, and the fullness of Christ is the result, the issue, of our enjoyment of these riches. As we enjoy the riches of Christ, these riches are assimilated into our being metabolically. Then they constitute us into the fullness of Christ, into the Body of Christ, the church, as His expression. Therefore, the fullness of Christ in 1:23 is the very fullness of God in 3:19. The fullness of God is the issue of the believers' being constituted metabolically through their experience of the riches of Christ.

In order to assimilate Christ metabolically, we need to be strengthened into our inner man. We also need Christ to make His home in our heart, that is, to occupy, possess, and metabolically saturate every part of our inward being with all that He is. Then we shall be rooted for the growth in life and grounded for the building. Furthermore, we shall become strong to grasp Christ experientially in all His universal dimensions. Along with this, we shall know through our experience the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ. When we have experienced Christ to such an extent, we shall be filled with the riches of Christ unto all the fullness of God. All this is for the constituting of the church in a practical way as the Body of Christ for His expression.

The Need for a Vision

We all need to see the vision of how the church is constituted. How we need to be strengthened into our inner man! Every fiber of our being needs to be strengthened into our inner man. Not one part of our inward being should remain in a weak condition. We need to be strengthened so that the indwelling Christ can spread Himself throughout our being and make His home in our inward parts. As Christ spreads within us, He saturates every area of our inner being metabolically with all that He is. Then we are rooted and grounded in love, we lay hold of the dimensions of Christ, and we know His love that surpasses knowledge. Then, ultimately, we are filled unto the fullness of God, which is the church. What a high revelation of the church this is!

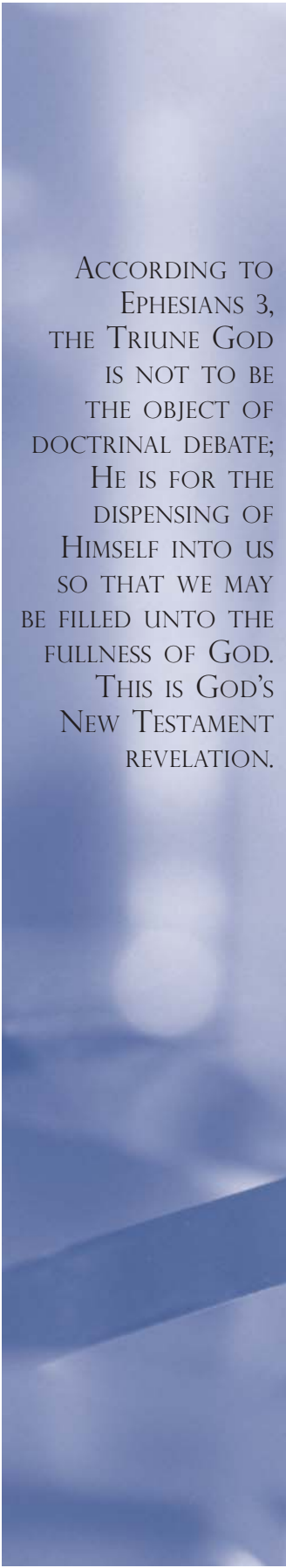
In light of such a vision, we see that it is utterly wrong to regard the church as a material building where “services” are held. It is also not adequate to view the church merely as the *ekklesia*, the gathering together of God’s called-out people. Although many Christians today use the term *the Body of Christ*, few have any clear realization of what this term signifies. The Body of Christ is the expression of Christ. It is also the fullness of Christ, which is the fullness of God. This fullness of God comes into existence in a practical way by our being strengthened into the inner man, by Christ making His home in our hearts, by our being rooted and grounded in love, by our grasping the dimensions of the immeasurable Christ, and by our knowing Him as the knowledge-surpassing love. When we have been filled with all the riches of Christ and metabolically saturated with all that Christ is, we become the fullness of God. Surely this is the highest definition of the church.

Only by receiving such a vision do we truly know what the church is. Although chapters 1 and 2 of Ephesians give us a definition of the church, this definition is still not adequate. We need chapter 3 to show how the church is constituted organically and metabolically with the riches of the living Christ. Not until chapter 3 does the church come into existence actually and in a practical way. In this chapter the church comes into being as the expression of God, that is, as the very fullness of God. It is at this point that Paul is able to sound a high praise, even a doxology: “To Him be the glory in the church.” Now that the church has come into existence in a practical way, Christ can be glorified in the church. Such a church is not merely a gathering of God’s called-out people; it is the actual fullness of God.

The Effect of the Vision

We all need such a vision, such a revelation. If we see this vision, our being will be changed. If we are filled with this vision and then go forth to speak for God, we shall surely be God’s sent ones and His spokesmen. We shall be today’s apostles and prophets. This vision unfolds the unique way for the Lord to build up His church. Only when we see this vision will the Lord have a way to accomplish on earth the building up of the church. After more than nineteen centuries of Christian history, what has been accomplished for the Lord? Consider today’s situation. Hardly any have seen the

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vision in chapter 3 of Ephesians. May the Lord burden us to pray, "Lord, have mercy on me. I need to see this vision. I need to see the fullness of God and how it comes into existence. Lord, show me the constitution of the Body. Show me how the church can be constituted in a practical way." Once we have seen this vision, we will become different persons. We will be apostles and prophets. Wherever we go, we will be a sent one, and whenever we speak this vision, we will be God's spokesman speaking Christ for God's economy.

Filled unto the Expression of the Triune God

In these verses in chapter 3 of Ephesians concerning the economy of God resulting in the fullness of God, we see the Triune God. The Father (v. 14) answers and fulfills the apostle's prayer through the Spirit (v. 16) so that Christ, the Son (v. 17), may make His home in our hearts. Thus, we are filled unto the fullness of the Triune God. This is the dispensing of the Triune God into our entire being that we may become His expression. According to Ephesians 3, the Triune God is not to be the object of doctrinal debate; He is for the dispensing of Himself into the believers so that they may be filled unto the fullness, not only of the Father, nor only of the Son, nor only of the Spirit, but of God. Paul prayed that the Father would strengthen us through His Spirit so that Christ might make His home in our hearts and thereby fully occupy our inward being with the result that we might be filled unto the expression of the Triune God. How glorious and how marvelous! This is God's economy, God's dispensation. This is also God's New Testament revelation.

The Church as the Corporate Fullness of God

The fullness of God is the expression of God. According to John 1:16, the fullness of God came with Christ, who is the embodiment of God's fullness (Col. 2:9; 1:19). With Christ, the expression was an individual matter. This expression, therefore, needed to be enlarged, to be expanded, from an individual matter to a corporate matter. The church today is to be the fullness of God in a corporate way. In the church God is not expressed through an individual; He is expressed corporately through the Body, through the believers who have together been filled to the brim with the riches of Christ. Therefore, the fullness of God is embodied in the church. The church as the embodiment of the fullness of God is the expression of the Triune God.

God Being Glorified in the Church and in Christ

Verses 20 and 21 of Ephesians 3 say, "To Him Who is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power which operates in us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen." These verses are a doxology, a high praise, even the highest to be found in the New Testament Epistles. Such a high praise could not have been uttered before the church came into existence in a practical way.

In verse 19 we see the church as the fullness of God. The fullness of God is the result, the issue, of our experience of the riches of Christ. After such a church has come into existence, the apostle Paul sounds forth the doxology in verses 20 and 21, ascribing to God glory in the church and in Christ Jesus. Only after the church has come into being as the fullness of God can the glory of God be manifested.

The Fulfillment of God's Word concerning the Church

Although the church has been on earth for more than nineteen centuries, it has not yet reached the point of being the fullness of God. The highest definition of the church is

that it is the fullness of God. We must admit that we do not yet have the church as the fullness of God, as God's full expression. However, we believe that the church will come up to this level. The fact that the Lord has spoken such a word concerning the church is an indication that He will do what He has spoken. The Lord's word will not return to Him vainly (Isa. 55:11). Whatever He speaks, He will perform. For example, when God spoke something in Genesis 1, it came to pass. Therefore, we believe that the Lord's word regarding the church as the fullness of God will be accomplished. Not only do we believe this word, but we also claim it and pray according to it. We need to pray, "Lord, You have spoken concerning the church as the fullness of God. Now You must fulfill what You have spoken." When the church on earth reaches the stage of being the fullness of God, we shall be able to say with Paul, "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus."

The Way God is Glorified in the Church

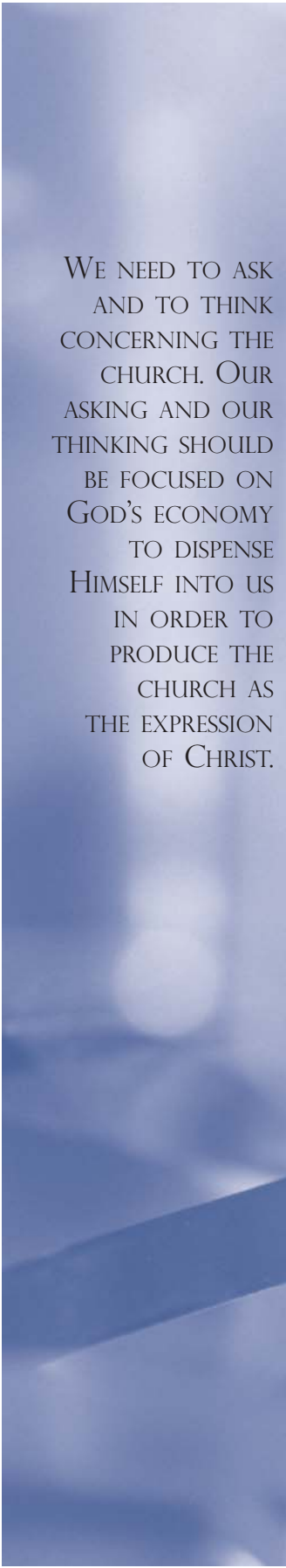
The words *but to Him* in Ephesians 3:20 convey the thought that something has initially gone forth from God and is now returning to Him. In his prayer Paul asked that the Father would strengthen the saints according to the riches of His glory. This implies that the glory of God is wrought into the saints. In the doxology Paul said, "To Him be the glory" (v. 21). This implies that the glory of God returns to God after it has been wrought into the saints. First, the glory of God is wrought into us; then it returns to God for His glorification. As an illustration, Isaac's wealth was first given to Rebekah for her beautification; then when Rebekah came to Isaac, all the wealth came back to Isaac with Rebekah for his glorification (Gen. 24:47, 53, 61-67). The apostle prayed that God would strengthen the saints according to His glory, but eventually God's glory, after being wrought into them, returns to Him along with the strengthened saints. This is the way that God is glorified in the church.

In Ephesians 3:16 Paul prayed that the Father would grant us, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power into our inner man. To be strengthened according to glory is to have the glory of God worked into our being. This is the only way to be strengthened according to God's glory. Suppose a person who is physically very weak can be strengthened according to someone who is physically strong. This would mean that the strength of the strong one is wrought into the very fibers of the weak one. In the same principle, to be strengthened into the inner man according to the Father's glory means to have His glory wrought into our being. First, the glory comes to us, and then it goes back to God. When the glory comes into our being, we are filled and strengthened. When it returns to God, He is glorified in the church.

The Greek word rendered "but" in verse 20 can also be translated "now." In such a case *now* would mean "in view of the fact that" or "based on the preceding." In verses 20 and 21 it seems that Paul was saying, "Now that the church has come into existence as the fullness of God, God can be glorified in the church. Before this time it was impossible for the glory to return to God. But because the church has become the fullness of God in a practical way, this is now possible."

It is correct to translate the Greek word here as either "but" or "now." In either case the word is not a meaningless insertion. The word *but* suggests that the glory that has come to us and that has been wrought into our being is now going back to God with us. The word *now* suggests that, in view of the fact that the church has come into existence as the fullness of God, God may at this time be glorified in the church. Both are true. The church is the glory of God coming to us with God and going back to God with us. In such a church there is two-way traffic between God and us, and between us and God. By means of this two-way traffic, God's glory is wrought into us and God is glorified in us. This traffic is signified by the little word *but*.

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Above All We Ask or Think concerning the Church

In verse 20 Paul speaks of "Him who is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think." Strictly speaking, *ask or think* here refers to the spiritual things related to the church, not to material things. For these spiritual things, we need not only to ask but also to think. We may think more than we ask. God fulfills not only what we ask for the church but also what we think concerning the church, and God is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think for the church through the power which operates in us.

God's ability to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think, as revealed in verse 20, is different from His ability in creation. Verse 20 refers not to creation but to the church. A number of times I have heard this verse quoted in testimonies concerning experiences of God's material blessing. To quote this verse for such a purpose is to misapply it. Paul's concept here is related not to what God does outside of us but to what He does inside of us. He specifically mentions "the power which operates in us." This is the inward power, the resurrection power, as mentioned in 1:19 and 20.

God's creating power is the origin of the material things in our environment (Rom. 8:28), whereas God's resurrection power accomplishes the spiritual things for the church within our inward being. In order for God to give us a good job, there is no need for resurrection power to operate in us. God's being able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think is related not to His acts in our environment but to His working organically and metabolically within us. As far as the environment is concerned, there may be times when God apparently does nothing for you. You may pray for a promotion, but He allows you to be laid off from your present job. During this time of unemployment, God may operate within you to enable Christ to make His home in you. When we are in a favorable environment, there may be very little opportunity for Christ to spread Himself in our hearts. But when we are placed in a difficult environment, the Lord may have more of an opportunity to spread within our inward being. From our side, it may seem beneficial for us to be in a good environment, but from the Lord's side, it may be better for us to be in a difficult environment, for then He may have greater opportunity to work within us.

The asking and thinking referred to in Ephesians 3:20 should be applied to the church. We need to ask and to think concerning the church, not concerning trivial things related to our environment. Our asking and our thinking should be focused on God's economy to dispense Himself into us in order to produce the church as the expression of Christ. When our asking and thinking concern the church, God will always do superabundantly above all that we ask or think. We need to ask and to think concerning Christ making His home in our hearts and concerning the church being filled unto all the fullness of God. If we ask and think in this way, we shall certainly be in the spirit. Then whatever we ask concerning the church will be answered, and it will be answered superabundantly. How we need to ask and to think concerning the church!


God Glorified in Christ

Verse 21 says, "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen." God's glory is wrought into the church, and He is expressed in the church. Hence, the glory in the church is to God; that is, God is glorified in the church. God's glorification is not only in the church but also in Christ. Hence, the word *and* is used here to emphasize this point. In the church the sphere of God's glorification is narrow, limited to the household of faith. But in Christ the sphere is much broader, because Christ is the Head of all the families in the heavens

and on earth (1:22; 3:15). Hence, God's glorification in Christ is in the realm of all the families created by God, not only on earth but also in the heavens. Not only is the sphere in Christ much broader than that in the church, but the scope in Christ is eternal, as indicated by the phrase *unto all the generations forever and ever*. All the generations forever and ever constitute eternity. God's glorification in the church is mainly in this age, whereas God's glorification in Christ is for eternity.

The church is just one of the many families in the universe. The other families include the angelic family, the family of mankind, and the family of Israel. According to verse 15, God is the source of the angelic family in the heavens and of all the human families on earth. Of course, He is also the source of the church, which is the family, the household, of the believers. To say that God is glorified in the church means that He is glorified in just one of the many families. But to say that God is glorified in Christ means that He is glorified in Christ as the Head of all things. Christ is the Head over the angels, over mankind, over Israel, and also over the church. If God were glorified only in the church, He would not be glorified in an all-inclusive way. For Him to be glorified all-inclusively, He must also be glorified in Christ. God will be glorified not only in this age, the age of the church, but also in the coming age, the age of the kingdom, and forever and ever, which is eternity. For God to be glorified in all the ages, from the present age throughout eternity, He must be glorified both in the church and in Christ.

The Church Taking the Lead to Glorify God

As the household of the believers, the church, we take the lead to give the glory to God the Father by having God's glory wrought into our being. In order for the glory of God to be wrought into us, we need to be strengthened into our inner man according to the riches of God's glory. Then this glory comes to us with God and, after being worked into us, will return to God with us. By means of this two-way traffic the church takes the lead to give the glory to God. In this universe, as the believers, we are the firstfruit. If we take the lead to give glory to God, all the other families, both in heaven and on earth, will follow us to glorify Him. 

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The Believers' Being the Fullness of the One Who Fills All in All

The Bible says that the fullness of God dwells in Christ (Col. 2:9; 1:19). It also says that the church is the fullness of Christ (Eph. 1:23; 3:19; 4:13). This is the highest and the deepest truth in the Bible. Whether in the East or in the West, all men have natural, religious, moral, and ethical concepts. They think that philosophy, religion, and classical writings are for the improvement of human behavior and the cultivation of our character. However, this is not what the Bible teaches...We must set aside every natural, religious, moral, and ethical concept so that...the revelation in the Bible can be written on us.

The Bible speaks concerning the accomplishments of Jesus Christ. Through His death on the cross He dealt with sin. This includes man's sinful nature and sinful deeds. He also dealt with Satan and his power, the world, the old man, the flesh, and everything of the old creation. Through His all-inclusive death on the cross the Lord terminated all the negative things in the universe. Then He resurrected from the dead and became the life-giving Spirit. In His resurrection the Lord brought all His believers into resurrection and produced the new creation. Today everyone who believes in the Lord has an organic union with Him in their spirit. Jesus Christ, the manifestation of God, is now the Spirit of life in His believers. He is the fullness of God, the development of the riches of God, dwelling in the believers. Therefore, believers do not need to cultivate their character or improve their behavior. Believers are people who contact, receive, and gain the Lord daily. The Lord lives in them as the supply of life.

From *The Fullness of God* by Witness Lee, pp. 50-51