

Luke

And the Child Grew

Luke 2:39, 40, 52

With Study Questions

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So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their *own* city, Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him...⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:39, 40, 52).

Introduction

Thomas Sowell defines an *intellectual* as one whose end products are ideas with no objective rules or accountability. By this standard, if you're an engineer, or a brain surgeon, since there is a finished product by which you will be judged (even though you may be smarter than an intellectual) you don't fall into that category. Intellectuals only care about what other intellectuals think. If you're a, say, deconstructionist, all that matters is the opinion of other deconstructionists.

I have found this definition useful when scrolling untethered theologians on the internet. They are, generally speaking, not answerable to any council or institution. They can write, or podcast, whatever they please without fear of repercussion. In one sense I think this is fine. People should be able to voice their personal opinions. In another sense I think this is highly flammable.

That people feel so free to offer such random opinions about the things of God (many of these opinions being historical heresies) is a testimony to how we, as a culture, just don't take the most important of all disciplines very seriously. People are less inclined to offer medical advice or legal advice, important issues to be sure. But when it comes to the things of God, with heaven and hell hanging in the balance, forums of quackery seem endless. There was a time when these types of things were taken much more seriously.

This thought hit me when I read our current text which begins with what seems almost to be a mere transition of thought.

So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their *own* city, Nazareth (Luke 2:39).

According to the Law

The temptation is to just move into the meat of the passage. But something hit me when a friend (an actual friend who is also a Facebook friend) posted her opinion on the highly controversial *He Gets Us* Christian ad during the Superbowl. I have no intention of weighing in on this ad here, since I haven't seen it. But this friend has taken it upon herself to begin her own ministry.

As I read the comments, what jumped out from those who enjoyed the ad was their harsh criticisms of the church. The church doesn't reach out. The church is unloving. The church is judgmental. The church is self-centered and on and on (not sure if this was implied in the ad). I do find it a bit ironic how comfortable people are in their judgments of the judgmentalism of others.

Having said that, I am also very aware of the pain that poor decisions and behavior within the church, especially its leadership, can cause. It is a deep wound, touching souls in their most tender nerves. But one would be hard-pressed to find a church that had descended, in almost every category, as the church that Jesus born into.

The clergy at the time of Christ, and according to Christ, placed **"heavy burdens...on men's shoulders."** They did their works **"to be seen by men."** They loved **"the best places at feasts."** The **"shut up the kingdom of heaven against men."** They devoured **"widows' houses."** They and their proselytes were **"sons of hell."** They were like **"whitewashed tombs...full of dead men's bones"** and the list goes on (Matthew 23).

But it was this church where Mary and Joseph **"performed all things according to the law of the Lord."** A church which was full of sinful and corrupt leaders did not keep Mary and Joseph from having Jesus circumcised (Luke 2:21). Mary and Joseph somehow continued to participate in **"her purification" (Luke 2:22).** They faithfully presented Jesus, as the first born, with an offering of **"A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:23, 24).**

They brought Jesus into the temple (which Jesus would later call a den of thieves-Luke 19:45) **“to do for Him according to the custom of the law” (Luke 2:27)**. A bent church did not keep Mary and Joseph from performing **“all things according to the law of the Lord.”** A good question for us to ask, is why?

I would like to preface my answer to that question with the recognition that it is possible for a church to descend, morally and spiritually to a place where they are no longer a church at all, but a synagogue of Satan (Revelation 2:9; 3:9). The Westminster Confession, 25, 5 says it well.

The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan.

At the same time, God has made a wonderful promise to preserve His church (Genesis 12:3; Matthew 16:18). So, the paragraph continues,

Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth, to worship God according to his will.

Mary and Joseph fulfilled all their “religious duties” because the church that God has preserved, with all of its warts and carbuncles, is His church, purchased at a great price.

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

Shepherds in Christ’s church are to **“take heed.”** They should not fall under the earlier definition of “intellectual.” They need to be accountable to others, as exemplified by the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). Because there is a greater accountability, which should cause a quivering in the hearts of church leaders,

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you (Hebrews 13:17).

The members are to subject themselves to the elders and the elders are accountable to God. The dismissal of the church, as a means of grace and a means to advance God's kingdom is not an option. This is like people who choose to live together rather than get married because so many marriages end in divorce. As if the problem is the institution of marriage and not their own sinful hearts.

I have chosen to approach the end of chapter two with the bookends of the passage. The beginning and end of the passage emphasize the growth of Christ in spirit, wisdom, stature and favor with God and men. Notice the context for all of this is the faithfulness of Joseph and Mary in their religious duties and Jesus Himself (we will not get to this until next time) during a religious feast in a religious setting, the temple. And this, in the very unique presentation as a twelve-year-old.

And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him...⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:40, 52).

The Growth of Jesus

One of the great and critical doctrines of the Christian faith is coined in the Latin, *Deum verum et hominem verum*, that is 'truly God and truly man.' These two natures are inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Briefly, the one nature does not become the other nature, it is not composed of the other nature, nor are they in any way mixed together.

It is a great, and common, error for us to think of Jesus the man, as more than a man. I recall thinking, 'sure He may be a man, but He can call upon the God-card when necessary.' So, He may be a man, but a bit of a superman. And all of this from birth. But this passage does not allow such a view.

God doesn't grow. God doesn't become strong in spirit. God doesn't increase in wisdom. God is eternal and infinite in all these things. But it is said of Jesus,

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted (Hebrews 2:17, 18).

Jesus is not to be thought of as some cold, wholly other deity. He has all the feelings which belong to man. I might sit with someone and seek to grasp their trial, their pain, their hurt, their frustrations in their efforts at advancement. At some level I might be able to get partway there. But God the Son knows the human condition, its pains, sorrows, heartaches, longings, limitations (it should not surprise us that Jesus did not know the hour of the apocalypse-Matthew 24:36 or that the cross could somehow have been avoided-Luke 22:42) more deeply than can be described.

The author of Hebrews later writes,

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Sinfulness, though universal is not necessary to humanity. Adam and Eve for a time were without sin. And when we read a passage like this sermon's text, we should learn what it takes to fight sin. Jesus was being prepared for His victory. We certainly can't imitate Jesus' deity, but we can imitate His humanity.

We might mistakenly think that since He was without sin, He really didn't know temptation the way we fallen sinners know temptation. It is thought that He had an advantage. C. S. Lewis attacks this.

No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all,

you find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness – they have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means – the only complete realist.

That Jesus “strong in spirit” testifies that, as a man, He was in need of that which the Spirit provides. We would see this in its fulness when He is later baptized on the Spirit descends upon Him (Luke 3:22). We are ever dependent upon the Spirit of God to sanctify us. This is accomplished through His word, the sacraments, prayer, worship and the manifold means God supplies for our growth.

I might add here that one of the effective means of grace is the affliction, the suffering, God ordains in our lives.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings (Hebrews 2:10).

Those who would become strong in the spirit, should expect that this not always a comfortable process. Preparation for ministry may include the challenge of the classroom (or, as we shall see next week, 12-year-old Jesus in the temple). But the classroom is not like the lab, where things blow up in your face. We are still at an era in Jesus’ life where He is finding favor with God and men. That will soon change.

Verse 40 tells us that the child was “**filled with wisdom**” (present, passive, participle-“**being filled with wisdom.**” And verse 52 speaks of the “**increased wisdom**” (progression of that wisdom-active). Hendriksen aids with a definition.

What is meant by wisdom? That it includes knowledge is clear. But it far surpasses knowledge. It implies the ability and the desire to use this knowledge to the best advantage. The truly wise man is reaching for the highest goal and uses the most effective means to achieve it.¹

James writes,

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere (James 3:17).

Jesus was being filled with wisdom. We are all being filled with something. That might be a valuable thing for us to examine.

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips (Romans 1:29).

In our passage, Luke is comparing the growth of Jesus' stature (which could be size or age) to His growth in wisdom, with **"the grace of God"** upon Him. From this we learn that it is a day-by-day process. In the same way there are things that will stunt a growing child's progress, there are things that will stunt our spiritual progress.

The verb Luke uses to describe Jesus' progress is active and aggressive. The word **"increased"** *proekopten*, in its "original sense [meant] 'to make one's way forward by chopping away obstacles² or chopping ahead or forward (as is done by pioneers), was advancing, making progress."³

What are you reading, listening to, watching, engaged in that is either in the way of or clearing the path for godliness? What needs to be chopped down?

¹ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Vol. 11, p. 180). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

² Marshall, I. H. (1978). *The Gospel of Luke: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 130). Exeter: Paternoster Press.

³ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Vol. 11, p. 188). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we err if we think that the pursuit of righteousness on the part of Christ was merely to provide an example, as valuable as that might be. But as we read earlier, all of this was accomplished that He might **“make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17)**. Though sinless, The baby Jesus could not have gone to the cross for the sins of humanity. Twelve-year-old Jesus could not have gone to the cross for our sins, nor the thirty-year-old Jesus. It was necessary that He live in such a way as to **“fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15)**. Sinlessness is not the same as righteousness.

Jesus lived the life of perfection, both in what He did not do and what He did do, having achieved the fulfillment of righteous, that in His death and resurrection, He might give that righteousness to us.

For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

As I. H. Marshall notes, “When Jesus next appears [in this gospel], it will be as One ready to be consecrated to his task.”⁴

⁴ Marshall, I. H. (1978). *The Gospel of Luke: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 130). Exeter: Paternoster Press.

Questions for Study

1. How do we see Thomas Sowell's definition of an 'intellectual' work itself out in today's theological landscape (page 2)?
2. Is the church critical the one's spiritual welfare? Describe the church Jesus was born into? How did this affect His upbringing? How should it affect ours (pages 3-5)?
3. Discuss and contrast the deity of Christ with the humanity of Christ. Why is the humanity of Christ important (pages 5, 6)?
4. What is true wisdom? How should we approach godly wisdom (pages 7, 8)?
5. Was the life of Jesus merely to provide an example for us? Explain (pages 8, 9).