

Hebrews 5:11-6:3

Intro: I miss cruise control. But I almost fell asleep. Lulled me into complacency and dullness

Need: Ever been dull in your faith? on cruise control? Lulled into a sense of quiet complacency?

Context: Last week we entered the main section of the Book of Hebrews. It's the section that runs from **5:1** through **10:25** on the priesthood of Jesus. Why is it better? Last week we built a foundation for that discussion by stating that Jesus, by God's authority, is our new priest and mediator. But now, we're going to enter a parenthesis. In the midst of this argument on the priesthood of Jesus, he's going to issue a warning and an exhortation. This is one of the most difficult sections of the book to understand. If you're hungry for the meat of the Word of God, you'll like the next few weeks. In **5:11-6:3** he's going to confront them with a harsh reality that he's observed in them. In **6:4-8** he's going to issue an even harsher warning. Then in **6:9-12** he's going to encourage them with an injection of confidence. Following this break, he's going to resume discussion on Jesus as HP.

Preview: In part one, we're going to look at the problem of dullness. In the next part I want us to explore the solution to the problem of dullness. You might think it's a no-brainer...the opposite of dull is sharp. It goes beyond that. I really don't like the warfare metaphor, but it's true that we are in a battle. We're in a battle against an enemy who wants to do whatever he can to defame the name of God. So, let's look at the problem of dullness together. Why is dullness dangerous?

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- I. Dullness is dangerous because it's degenerative (v. **11-14**). This is his assessment of them.
 - A. Dullness leads to spiritual atrophy (*define*¹). It hinders growth and fosters immaturity (v. **11-12**)
 1. They should have progressed in their faith
 - a. He wanted to share with them some deeper things about Jesus and Melchizedek (v. **11**) but couldn't because they were "**dull of hearing.**" Lit., their hearing was lazy (*me as a kid...my hearing was lazy*). It's also used in athletics of an athlete who's out of shape.
 - b. They had been converted for awhile. He expected that they would be able to teach others, but they couldn't. The progression of faith is always supposed to lead us to being able to impart things to those new in the faith. Maybe not up front, but we are all to teach others.
 2. Instead of progressing, however, they were perpetually stuck in infancy.
 - a. He wants to give them solid food, but their stomachs can't handle it. **They need milk.**
 - b. They were trying to survive on some basic things that they needed to move past.
 - i. He says in **verse 12** they need someone to teach them the **basics of God's message**, and yet **6:1-2** tells them to move past these "**elementary teachings.**" What's the deal?
 - ii. Look at the list of things in **6:1-2**. Are these NT or OT? These are not distinctively Christian things. In fact, note that "**baptisms**" is plural. Probably best understood as "**washings.**" It's never used in this way for Christian baptism. Remember that Judaism is antecedent of Christianity...the two are related. That's why Paul would go into the synagogues, to explain the truths of Jesus to a Jewish audience from the Old Testament. Many of the Christians in the mid-60s were Jewish. This audience is most likely predominantly Jewish. Because of the relationship, the early Church looked very Jewish. There was a carryover of similar type practices. I think that's what you see here. They were clinging to these "minimalist", basic expressions of Christian practice because of their familiarity with them. In fact, we have a witness in the 2nd century Church Father Hippolytus of this kind of thing. He notes that before a convert was baptized (usually on Easter), he would undergo some ceremonial washings the Thursday before in order to purify himself. So there were most likely some Jewish practices in the context of their Christian worship that, because of their familiarity were preventing them from moving on to deeper things. *It's not that they were bad, they're like the ABCs, we still use them but we build on them as we grow up.*
 - iii. What they needed to know (v. **12**) was how the message of the cross had equipped them to grow in maturity. They weren't getting this because they were comfortable where they were. So he wants them to quit going back to these, and, instead, to build on them in growth. By not moving forward in growth, they were stuck in infancy.
 3. When we are dull in our hearing, we get stuck and stagnate. We atrophy in immaturity.
 - B. Dullness is dangerous because it makes us a target.

¹ The degeneration of cells. Decline in effectiveness or vigor due to underuse or neglect.

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1. You know we have an enemy that wants to bring us down. **God's warning to Cain, "Sin is crouching at your door, and its desire is for you." 1 Peter 5, "prowls about."** His goal is to bring dishonor to God by sabotaging those who demonstrate His glory...us. And dullness makes us easy targets. *Animal Planet, you go after the immature ones because they are weak.*
2. Those who are dull and immature are easy targets for sin and error (**v. 13-14**).
 - a. One mark of immaturity is an unfamiliarity with the "**Word of righteousness.**" This is most likely moral – right conduct. Sin has an easy time with the immature because they don't know what pleases God. But he takes this a step further in **v. 14**. Those who are mature, in their condition of maturity CAN discern good and evil (**Romans 12:2 – "test and approve God's will"**). NIV and most translate this as "**through practice.**" I don't think that's the best way to understand. Surely it's true that maturity is a process, but here I think it's more of a condition. Point is that those who are mature, **bc they are mature**, can see the difference between good and evil (*like adults can appreciate a fine meal...kid's can't. The reason, adults are mature, they've had more experience*). The immature can't. So sin has an easy time with those who are unable to discern what is right and wrong.
 - b. But dullness also makes us easy targets for error. That's what was going on here. These guys were in danger of being lulled back into Judaism. *Have you ever gotten ready to take a hot shower, and when you stuck your hand in the water to test it, it was scalding hot. What did you do? You immediately pulled your hand out and turned on some cold water to balance it out. But have you ever been in the shower on a cold day and kept turning the hot water up and up and up? I do this all the time, I turn it up to a point that I never would have been able to get in the water at, I get out of the shower with burn marks on me. What happened? I got sensitized to it and allowed it to get hotter.* Those who are immature face the danger of being lulled into conceding important things little by little until, eventually, they are swept away in error. Have you ever seen this happen? A new convert gets swallowed up in some erroneous teaching falls. **Eph. 4:14-15.** *why you watch your kids.*

(Now, I don't want my application to simply be...don't be dull. Maybe we need a little more.)

- **Mind the little things.** *Tubes in London the lady always says "mind the gap." Pay attention to the gap in between the platform and the train so you don't fall through the crack.* Well, we need to mind the little things so we don't fall through the cracks.
 - As we said, Dullness is dangerous because it is degenerative. It eats away at our spiritual muscle and leads us back to immaturity in our faith. That makes us an easy target for sin and error.
 - Remember, these guys had found it quite comfortable to practice some things that were common in the early Church that were familiar to them because they were related to Jewish practices. The problem was that this familiarity made them lax. They didn't want to grow by building on these basic practices. They wanted to hang out where they were. That's dangerous precisely because their familiarity made it that much easier for them to forsake Christ entirely when the heat got turned up around them. Because of their familiarity the line was more fuzzy. How easy is it to concede little points that we think are insignificant when it means we can live more comfortably. They were on a slippery slope of concession, that, if followed to its end, could very easily mean their abandoning the faith all together.
 - We can concede the little things without realizing that degeneration is nothing more than the sum of many little concessions? Our culture tells us that homosexuality is ok, marriage isn't as sacred as God makes it out to be, a lie isn't always a lie...whatever. Dullness is dangerous because it lures us into conceding. Now I know what you're saying. The Church could never come to believe that the Bible isn't true, or that homosexuality is ok. We would never say that immorality wasn't a big deal. I think you see my point. When we are dull and immature, we forget to mind the little things...and we are in danger of slipping through the cracks.

To conclude this part, let me say one thing about culture and our relationship to it. It's easy to hear me say these things and to think, "That's easily solved. We'll just hide away inside the Church, ignore the culture, and be ok." Not what I'm saying. First, the Church is not immune to sin. Sin and error will find a way in. Second, and more important, to do that ignores the reason we're here in the first place. We're not here to hide behind walls, but to engage a lost world with the love of Christ in order that they might

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embrace that love for themselves. *To engage means to “participate or become involved in.”* How can we engage while hiding? The answer to the danger of dullness is neither to hide nor to be militant about every little thing (things that may not be, in and of themselves, sin). The answer to the danger of dullness is to pursue maturity (that’s next week). The more mature we are, the more we can engage the culture while remaining anchored in our faith. Able to stand firm in the storms of life because we are rooted deep in the ground. *Braveheart refusing the drug so he could keep his wit. Take it off of cruise control.*

II. With God’s help, move on to maturity (v. 1-3)

- A. The move to maturity is a strenuous movement against the natural flow of things
 - 1. **“Leaving behind...move forward” (v. 1)**
 - a. Again, it’s not that the old was unimportant. *ABCs are important and not to be neglected.* But we’re to build on them to deeper things. Incidentally, the Christian life is not so much about discovery of new truth as it is about discovering deeper aspects of the truth that we already have and know. *Reading through Bible different each time.*
 - b. The idea of **“moving on”** is *to change from one state to another with the implication of progress.* My own move from *Cub Scouts to Boy Scouts.* *I didn’t forget what I learned in Cub Scouts, but I added to it in a forward progression.*
 - 2. This is not easy. It’s never easy to leave the comfortable and familiar.
 - a. As we said, v. 1-2 were things that familiar to them in Judaism that early Church adopted. They wanted to live there, but author said move on. That’s not easy.
 - b. Maturity is never easy. It’s a struggle of sacrifice. That’s why the language of maturity in Scripture is so hard. Paul said, **“I press on to lay hold of the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”** Jesus said that the life of a disciple was one characterized by a **cross**. We read about the Christian life as a labor.
- B. That’s why the author stresses a dependence on God’s help. We need His grace (v. 3)
 - 1. God grows us. He governs our development. All about His grace. **Phil 2:12-13.**
 - 2. The author here is hopeful for them as I am for us. But if we are going to grow to maturity it will be bc God gives us the grace to desire it and ability to overcome dullness and attain it.

III. Our call is to plant ourselves in a position to grow (v.3)

- A. We can’t grow ourselves, but we can place ourselves in a position of growth. *Farmer doesn’t make crops grow, but he can put them in a position to grow.* Let me suggest 4 things we can do.
 - 1. Get in the Word (read it, meditate on it, memorize it, apply it)
 - 2. Pray (talk to God, worship God, listen for God’s leading through the Spirit and Word)
 - 3. Take the community seriously (God sanctifies us in community. That means He uses others to help us grow. So, participate in the community of faith, come to church, fellowship with one another, use your gifts in serving, give)
 - 4. Evangelize (love those around you who don’t know Christ’s love. Befriend and love them. Then, as God opens the doors, communicate to them the message of the Cross.
- B. In order not to stagnate, we have to have an inflow and an outflow.
 - 1. *An athlete has to have a correct diet (a proper intake) and they make sure that they exercise (outflow).* If either are out of whack, he can’t perform the way he was meant to.
 - 2. But the outflow is dependent on the intake. If he eats junk, he won’t be very good. Our ministry is an outflow of our walks with God. If we don’t take in, we can’t give out.

Conc. These guys were dull. They had been believers for awhile but they had never progressed beyond the basics in their faith. Because of that, they were easy prey when the storms of life tempted them to move back into Judaism...in fact, for them, it was a gradual slide. He had warned them before about the danger of casually drifting away from the source of salvation, and here he warned about the danger of dullness in stagnating their growth, slowly lulling them back into an inferior belief. His exhortation to them is to press on to maturity. To turn into the wind and grow in their faith in order that they might withstand the onslaught of persecution. This is our call as well. To press on to maturity in our faith by doing the things that foster growth and then calling on God for his help. Preparing and then praying.