

## Directions for Young Christians

**Richard Baxter**

### **Direction I - Concerning the Novelty of Godliness**

Take heed lest it be the novelty or reputation of truth and godliness, that takes with you, more than the solid evidence of their excellency and necessity; lest when the novelty and reputation are gone, your religion wither and consume away.

It is said of John [the Baptist] and the Jews by Christ, "**He was a burning and a shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light**" (John 5:35). All men are affected most with things that seem new and strange to them. It is not only the infirmity of children, that are pleased with new clothes, and new toys and games; but even to graver, wiser persons, new things are most affecting, and commonness and custom dulls delight. Our habitations, and possessions, and honours, are most pleasing to us at the first; and every condition of life doth most affect us at the first: if nature were not much for novelty, the publishing of news-books would not have been so gainful a trade so long, unless the matter had been truer and more desirable. Hence it is that changes are so welcome to the world, though they prove ordinarily to their cost. No wonder then, if religion be the more acceptable, when it comes with this advantage. When men first hear the doctrine of godliness, and the tidings of another world, by a powerful preacher opened and set home, no wonder if things of so great moment affect them for a time: it is said of them that received the seed of God's word as into stony ground, that "**forthwith it sprung up,**" and they "**anon with joy received it**" (Matt. 13:5,20); but it quickly withered for want of rooting. These kind of hearers can no more delight still in one preacher, or one profession, or way, than a glutton in one dish, or an adulterer in one harlot: for it is but a kind of sensual or natural pleasure that they have in the highest truths; and all such delight must be fed with novelty and variety of objects. The Athenians were inquisitive after Paul's doctrine as novelty, though after they rejected it, as seeming to them incredible: "**May we know what this new doctrine whereof thou speakest is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.**' For all the Athenians and strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else, but to tell or hear some new thing" (Acts 17:19-21).

To this kind of professor, the greatest truths grow out of fashion, and they grow weary of them, as of dull and ordinary things; they must have some new light, or new way of religion that lately came in fashion; their souls are weary of that manna that at first was acceptable to them, as angels' food. Old things seem low, and new things high to them; and to entertain some novelty in religion, is to grow up to more maturity: and too many such at last so far overthrive their old apparel, that the old Christ and old gospel are left behind them.

The light of the gospel is speedilier communicated, than the heat; and this first part being most acceptable to them, is soon received; and religion seemeth best to them at first. At first they have the light of knowledge alone; and then they have the warmth of a new and prosperous profession: there must be some time for the operating of the heat, before it burneth them; and then they have enough, and cast it away in as much haste as they took it up. If preachers would only lighten, and shoot no thunderbolts, even a Herod himself would hear them gladly, and do many things after them; but when their Herodias is meddled with, they cannot bear it. If preachers would speak only to men's fancies or understandings, and not meddle too smartly with their hearts, and lives, and carnal interests, the world would bear them, and hear them as they do stageplayers, or at least as lecturers in philosophy or physick. A sermon that hath nothing but some general toothless notions in a handsome dress of words, doth seldom procure offence or persecution: it is rare that such men's preaching is distasted by carnal hearers, or their persons hated for it. **"It is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun"** (Eccl. 11:7); but not to be scorched by its heat. Christ Himself at a distance as promised, was greatly desired by the Jews; but when He came, they could not bear Him; His doctrine and life were so contrary to their expectations. **"The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come into His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap"** (Mal. 3:1-3). Many when they come first (by profession) to Christ, do little think that He would cast them into the fire, and refine them, and purge away their dross, and cast them anew into the mould of the gospel (see Rom. 6:17). Many will play a while by the light, that will not endure to be melted by the fire. When the preacher cometh once to this, he is harsh and intolerable, and loseth all the praise which he had won before, and the pleasing novelty of religion is over with them. The gospel is sent to make such work in the soul and life, as these tender persons will not endure; it must captivate every thought to Christ, and kill every lust and pleasure which is against His will, and put a new and heavenly life into the soul; it must possess men with deep and lively apprehensions of the great things of eternity; it is not wavering dull opinions, that will raise and carry on the soul to such vigorous, constant, victorious action, as is necessary to salvation. When the gospel cometh to the heart, to do this great prevailing work, then these men are

impatient of the search and smart, and presently have done with it. They are like children, that love the book for the gilding and fineness of the cover, and take it up as soon as any; but it is to play with, and not to learn; they are weary of it when it comes to that. At first many come to Christ with wonder, and will needs be His servants for something in it that seemeth fine; till they hear that the Son of man hath not the accommodation of the birds or foxes; and that His doctrine and way hath an enmity to thier worldly, fleshly interest, and then they are gone. They first entertained Christ in compliment, thinking that He would please them, or not much contradict them; but when they find that they have received a guest that will rule them, and not be ruled by them, that will not suffer them to take their pleasure, nor enjoy their riches, but hold them to a life which they cannot endure, and even undo them in the world, He is then no longer a guest for them. Whereas if Christ had been received as Christ, and truth and godliness deliberately entertained for their well-discerned excellency and necessity, the deep rooting would have prevented this apostasy, and cured such hypocrisy.

But, alas! poor ministers find by sad experience, that all prove not saints that flock to hear them, and make up the crowd; nor **"that for a season rejoice in their light,"** and magnify them, and take their parts. The blossom hath its beauty and sweetness; but all that blossometh or appeareth in the bud, doth not come to perfect fruit: some will be blasted, and some blown down; some nipped with frosts, some eaten by worms; some quickly fall, and some hang on till the strongest blasts do cast them down; some are deceived and poisoned by false teachers; some by worldly cares, and the deceitfulness of riches, become unfruitful and are turned aside; the lusts of some had deeper rooting than the word; and the friends of some had greater interest in them than Christ, and therefore they forsake Him to satisfy their importunity; some are corrupted by the hopes of preferment, or the favour of man; some feared from Christ by their threats and frowns, and choose to venture on damnation to escape persecution; and some are so worldly wise, that they can see reason to remit their zeal, and can save their souls and bodies too; and prove that to be their duty, which other men call sin (if the end will but answer their expectations); and some grow weary of truth and duty, as a dull and common thing, being supplied with that variety which might still continue the delights of novelty.

Yet mistake not what I have said, as if all the affection furthered by novelty, and abated by commonness and use, were a sign that the person is but a hypocrite. I know that there is something in the nature of man, remaining in the best, which disposeth us to be much more passionately affected with things when they seem new to us, and are first apprehended, than when they are old, and we have known or used them long. There is not, I believe, one man of a thousand, but is much more delighted in the light of truth, when it first appeareth to him, than when it is trite and familiarly known; and is much more affected with a powerful minister at first, than when he hath long sat under him. The same sermon that

even transported them at the first hearing, would affect them less, if they had heard it preached a hundred times. The same books which greatly affected us at the first or second reading, will affect us less when we have read them over twenty times. The same words of prayer that take much with us when seldom used, do less move our affections when they are daily used all the year. At our first conversion, we have more passionate sorrow for our sin, and love to the godly, than we can afterwards retain. And all this is the case of learned and unlearned, the sound and unsound, though not of all alike. Even heaven itself is spoken of by Christ, as if it did participate of this, when He saith, that **"joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, that need no repentance"** (Luke 15:7,10). And I know it is the duty of ministers to take notice of this disposition in their hearers, and not to dull them with giving them still the same, but to profit them by a pleasant and profitable variety: not by preaching to them another Christ, or a new gospel: it is the same God, and Christ, and Spirit, and Scripture, and the same heaven, the same church, the same faith, and hope, and repentance, and obedience, that we must preach to them as long as we live; though they say, we have heard this a hundred times, let them hear it still, and bring them not a new creed. If they hear so oft of God, and Christ, and heaven, till by faith, and love, and fruition, they attain them as their end, they have heard well. But yet there is a grateful variety of subordinate particulars, and of words, and methods, and seasonable applications, necessary to the right performance of our ministry, and to the profiting of the flocks: though the physician use the same apothecary's shop, and dispensatory, and drugs, yet how great a variety must he use of compositions, and times, and manner of administration.

But for all this, though the best are affected most with things that seem new, and are dulled with the long and frequent use of the same expressions, yet they are never weary of the substance of their religion, so as to desire a change. And though they are not so passionately affected with the same sermons, and books, or with the thoughts or mention of the same substantial matters of religion, as at first they were; yet do their judgments more solidly and tenaciously embrace them, and esteem them, and their wills as resolutely adhere to them, and use them, and in their lives they practise them, better than before. Whereas, they that take up their religion but for novelty, will lay it down when it ceaseth to be new to them, and must either change for a newer, or have none at all.

And as unsound are they that are religious, only because their education, or their friends, or the laws or judgment of their rulers, or the custom of the country, hath made it necessary to their reputation: these are hypocrites at the first setting out, and therefore cannot be saved by continuance in such a carnal religiousness as this. I know law, and custom, and education, and friends, when they side with godliness, are a great advantage to it, by affording helps, and removing those impediments that might stick much with carnal minds. But truth

is not your own, till it be received in its proper evidence; nor your faith divine, till you believe what you believe, because God is true who doth reveal it; nor are you the children of God, till you love Him for Himself; nor are you truly religious, till the truth and goodness of religion itself be the principal thing that maketh you religious. It helpeth much to discover a man's sincerity, when he is not only religious among the religious, but among the profane, and the enemies, and scornors, and persecutors of religion; and when a man doth not pray only in a praying family, but among the prayerless, and the deriders of fervent constant prayer; and when a man is heavenly among them that are earthly, and temperate among the intemperate and riotous, and holdeth the truth among those that reproach it and that hold the contrary; when a man is not carried only by a stream of company, or outward advantages, to his religion, nor avoideth sin for want of a temptation, but is religious though against the stream, and innocent when cast (unwillingly) upon temptations; and is godly where godliness is accounted singularity, hypocrisy, faction, humour, disobedience, or heresy; and will rather let go the reputation of his honesty, than his honesty itself.