

CHAPTER XIX.

DIRECTIONS FOR PROFITABLE HEARING THE WORD PREACHED (Section 2).

Richard Baxter

OMITTING those directions which concern the external modes of worship, (for the reasons mentioned part. iii. and known to all that know me and the time and place I live in,) I shall give you such directions about the personal, internal management of your duty, as I think most necessary to your edification. And seeing that your duty and benefit lieth in these four general points: 1. That you hear with understanding. 2. That you remember what you hear. 3. That you be duly affected with it. 4. And that you sincerely practise it: I shall more particularly direct you in order to all these ends and duties.

Section. 2. Directions for Remembering what you Hear.

That want of memory, which cometh from age and decay of nature, is not to be cured; nor should any servant of Christ be over-much troubled at it; seeing Christ will no more cast off his servants for that, than he will for age or any sickness: but for that want of memory which is curable, and is a fault, I shall give you these Directions following.

Direct. I. It greatly helpeth memory to have a full understanding of the matter spoken which you would remember. And ignorance is one of the greatest hinderances to memory. Common experience telleth you this, how easily you can remember any discourse which you thoroughly understand (for your very knowledge by invention will revive your memory); and how hard it is to remember any words which are insignificant, or which we understand not. Therefore labour most for a clear understanding according to the last directions.

Direct. II. A deep, awakened affection is a very powerful help to memory. We easily remember any thing which our estates or lives lie on, when trifles are neglected and soon forgotten. Therefore labour to get all to your hearts, according to the next following directions.

Direct. III. Method is a very great help to memory. Therefore be acquainted with the preacher's method; and then you are put into a path or tract, which you cannot easily go out of. And therefore it is, that ministers must not only be methodical, and avoid prolix, confused, and involved discourses, and that malicious pride of hiding their method, but must be as oft in the use of the same method, as the subject will bear, and choose that method which is most easy to the hearers to understand and remember, and labour to make them perceive your tract.

Direct. IV. Numbers are a great help to memory. As if the reasons, the uses, the motives, the signs, the directions, be six, or seven, or eight; when you know just the number, it helpeth you much to remember, which was the first, second, third, &c.

Direct. V. Names also and signal words are a great help to memory. He may remember one word, that cannot remember all the sentence; and that one word may help him to remember much of the rest. Therefore preachers should contrive the force of every reason, use, direction, &c. as much as may be, into some one emphatical word. (And some do very profitably contrive each of those words to begin with the same letter, which is good for memory, so it be not too much strained, and put them not upon greater inconveniences.) As if I were to direct you to the chiefest helps to your salvation, and should name, 1. Powerful preaching. 2. Prayer. 3. Prudence. 4. Piety. 5. Painfulness. 6. Patience. 7. Perseverance. Though I opened every one of these at large, the very names would help the hearers' memory. It is this that maketh ministers, that care more for their people's souls, than the pleasing of curious ears, to go in the common road of doctrine, reasons, uses, motives, helps, &c. and to give their uses the same titles of information, reproof, exhortation, &c. And yet when the subject shall direct us to some other method, the hearers must not be offended with us: for one method will not serve exactly for every subject, and we must be loth to wrong the text or matter.

Direct. VI. It is a great help to memory, often in the time of hearing to call over and repeat to yourselves the names or heads that have been spoken. The mind of man can do two things at once: you may both hear what is said, and recall and repeat to yourselves what is past: not to stand long upon it, but oft and quickly to name over, e. g. The reasons, uses, motives, &c. To me, this hath been (next to understanding and affection) the greatest help of any that I have used ; for otherwise to hear a head but once, and think of it no more till the sermon is done, would never serve my turn to keep it.

Direct, VII. Grasp not at more than you are able to hold, lest thereby you lose all. If there be more particulars than you can possibly remember, lay hold on some which most concern you, and let go the rest; perhaps a other may rather take up those, which you leave behind. Yet say not that it is the preacher's fault to name more than you can carry away: for, 1. Then he must leave out his enlargement much more, and the most of his sermon; for it is like you leave the most behind. 2. Another may remember more than you. 3. All is not lost when the words are forgotten : for it may breed a habit of understanding, and promote resolution, affection, and practice.

Direct. VIII. Writing is an easy help for memory, to those that can use it. Some question whether they should use it, because, it hindereth their affection. But that must be differently determined according to the difference of subjects, and of hearers. Some sermons are all to work upon the affections at present, and the present advantage is to be preferred before the after perusal: but: some must more profit us in after digestion and review. And some hearers can write much with ease, and little hinder their affection ; and some write so little and are hindered so much, that it recompenseth not their loss. Some know so fully all that is said, that they need no notes ; and some that are ignorant need them for perusal.

Direct. IX. Peruse what you remember, or write down, when you come home : and fix it speedily before it is lost; and hear others that can repeat it better. Pray it over, and confer of it with others.

Direct. X. If you forget the very words, yet remember the main drift of all; and get those resolutions and affections which they drive at. And then you have not lost the sermon, though you have lost the words; as he hath not lost his food, that hath digested it, and turned it into flesh and blood.