

The Right Use of ‘You’

More precisely, I should speak of the twofold right use of ‘you’: in preaching the word of God, and in appropriating it. Indeed, I should call these two uses the essential uses of ‘you’.

1. In preaching the word of God

I go so far as to say that it is criminal – yes, I use the word – criminal to avoid the use of ‘you’ when we preach. Alas, most preachers, as far as I can judge, almost always talk in terms of ‘us’ and ‘we’, rarely using ‘you’. Coupled with a signal lack of eye contact, and a weak use of questions – questions designed to elicit confirmation for the preacher rather than questions which confront, challenge and probe the hearer – modern discourses are often little more than bland lectures in the abstract.¹

In contrast, the biblical preachers were confrontational, liberal in their use of penetrating questions, and, above all for this booklet, they were ‘you’ men. In what follows, do not miss their use of ‘you’ – stated or clearly implied in their use of the imperative.

Take Joshua:

Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshipped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD (Josh. 24:15).

¹ For more on this, see my *Preaching*.

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When the Israelites tried to assure him that they would obey the LORD, Joshua replied:

You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you... You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD (Josh. 24:19-22).

Take the account of Nathan addressing David over his sin with Bathsheba. Imagine Nathan addressing David: '*We* are the men'! See 2 Samuel 12:7-10. How many times did Nathan use 'you' or 'your'?

Take Isaiah:

Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other (Isa. 45:22).

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David... Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon (Isa. 55:1-3,6-7).

Take Peter:

Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say... Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the

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cross... Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah... Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call... Save yourselves from this corrupt generation (Acts 2:14-40).

Addressing the crowd which gathered at the healing of the beggar at the temple, Peter declared the gospel, opening with a question:

Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said: 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people'.

Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham: 'Through your offspring all peoples

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on earth will be blessed'. When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways (Acts 3:12-26).

Paul, proclaiming the gospel to the Jews in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, said:

I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: 'Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you' (Acts 13:38-41).

Speaking to the Greeks at Lystra, when they wanted to worship him and Barnabas, Paul responded with a question:

Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy (Acts 14:15-17).

Paul and Silas, addressing the jailer at Philippi, could not have been more direct:

Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31).

Then we have the apostle's words to the Athenians at the Areopagus:

People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD'. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you (Acts 17:22-23).

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Finally, Paul's address to the Jews who met him in his lodgings in Rome:

The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet: 'Go to this people and say: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving". For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them'. Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen! (Acts 28:25-28).

Is this not preaching *at* people? So it is! So it ought to be! It goes without saying that treating the pulpit as a coward's castle, settling old scores, dealing with issues that should be dealt with personally, 6 feet above and 50 feet beyond criticism, is reprehensible. Nevertheless, our preaching must be personal and pointed. All the above examples were examples of such preaching, personal and directed preaching, with copious use of 'you'.

And what about the greatest example – the most personal and pointed preacher of them all – the Lord Jesus Christ? Where shall I start? Where shall I end? Consider this:

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you (Matt. 11:21-24).

And this:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in

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people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

Woe to you, blind guides! You say: 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath'. You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say: 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath'. You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?...

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say: 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets'. So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her

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wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say: 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' (Matt. 23:13-39).

Of course, many do not like this sort of preaching today. It is nothing new. The natural man never does like it. The 19th-century Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, put it in his dry, sarcastic, way: 'Things are coming to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade private life'. In other words, spiritual life, especially preaching (or, as he put it, 'religion') must remain detached, impersonal, bland, insipid. At all costs, the 'you' word must be avoided.

If he had lived a little longer, Melbourne would not have thought much of C.H. Spurgeon, would he? Oh no! Spurgeon was clear on the issue:

And now, says one: 'Sir, are there any here that you have been preaching *at*?' Yes, I like to preach *at* people. I do not believe it is of any avail to preach *to* people; preach right *into* them and right *at* them.²

Again, as he concluded a very pointed sermon on August 9th, 1857, Spurgeon mused aloud: 'Now, I do not know whether I have been personal to anybody this morning'. Was he apologising for it? Certainly not! 'I sincerely hope I have', he declared. He went on:

I meant to be. I know there are a great many characters in the world that must have a cap made exactly to fit them, or else they will never wear it, and I have tried as near as I could to do it. If you will not say: 'How well that applied to my neighbour', but just for once say: 'How well it applied to me', I shall hope that there will be some good follow from this exhortation; and though the antinomian may turn away, and say: 'Ah! it was only a legal sermon', my love to that precious antinomian. I do not care about his opinion. My Saviour preached like that, and I shall do the same. I

² Spurgeon sermon 128.

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believe it is right that Christians should be told what they should do.³

A few weeks later, he took the same line:

Now... by God's help, I shall labour to be personal... I ask... every... person that he will please understand that I am preaching *to him*, and *at him*; and if there be anything that is personal and pertinent to his own case, I beseech him, as for life and death, to let it have its full weight with him, and not begin to think of his neighbour, to whom, perhaps, it may be even more pertinent, but whose business certainly does not concern him.⁴

The users of social media have not be slow at cottoning on to the value of provocation. Much as I find the notion of Facebook 'pokes' reprehensible,⁵ at least they are designed to excite and attract those poked, and they call for a response. 'You' in preaching should be largely confrontational, prodding, reproofing, poking. God's pokes are to awaken and humble sinners. Preachers need to be pokers.

Sadly – weakly, criminally – in 1939, Neville Chamberlain – the then Prime Minister – successfully staved off a stream of appeals from Winston Churchill – then First Lord of the Admiralty – to take stiff action against Hitler, to do something far more serious than dropping pamphlets over Germany. Churchill proposed the mining of the Kiel Canal, for instance. Chamberlain would have none of it: he did not want to provoke Hitler! With hindsight, Chamberlain's stance seems fantastic, does it not? It was contemptible! I say the same about bland preaching.

J.A.James contrasted what he called 'the blameless commonplace and accurate insipidity of many modern [that is, mid-

³ Spurgeon sermon 145. And unbelievers!

⁴ Spurgeon sermon 165, emphasis his. See also his 'One More Cast of the Net' (Spurgeon sermon 1931).

⁵ A 'poke' is an unsolicited message (often from a stranger) which is intended to be provocative, exciting a response.

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19th-century] discourses' to the addresses of preachers in the past:

For pregnancy of thought, for knowledge of the word of God, for raciness of style, for evangelical warmth, for [knowledge of the] anatomy of the human heart, for closeness of application, and especially for intensity of feeling, where shall we find their equals? They preached *to* their congregations, and not merely *before* them;⁶ they felt that the objects of their addresses were immortal souls in danger of being lost, and [they] knew their business in the pulpit was to save these souls from perdition. They preached as if they expected there and then to achieve the great work of conversion;⁷ and felt as if the eternal destinies of their hearers were suspended on the name in which they discharged their duties, and as if they were to ascend the next moment after they had finished their sermons to give an account of them at the bar of God... The power [their sermons] exhibit, their heart-searching appeals in which they abound, are the very things now wanting. There may be, and should be, more... logical arrangement... precision... vigorous clear argument, but still, combined with this, there should also be the pointed interrogation, the pungent appeal, the bold apostrophe [that is, direct address], the gush of feeling, the forcible expostulation [that is, earnest remonstrance, protest], and the tender invitation... Especially should there be the direct personal address... Our

⁶ What an important point! *To not before*. I would broaden this to include *to not for*. How often a preacher is regarded as 'one who will preach *for* us today'. That tells us a great deal. I have been prepared to reply to an invitation to preach *for* a people to say that while I do not preach *for* men, I am willing to preach *to* them. But, in my experience, too often men would prefer a preacher who preaches *before* or *for* them not *to* them. As for preaching *at* them, that is rarely liked or wanted.

⁷ A man complained that he saw no conversions. Spurgeon retorted: 'You don't expect conversions every time you preach, do you?' 'No! Of course not', came the reply. 'There's your trouble', said Spurgeon (or words to that effect). See Lewis A. Drummond: *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers...*, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, 1992, pp411-412, for this, and for the occasion when Spurgeon had the point turned back upon himself.

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hearers must be made to feel that they are not merely listening to the discussion of a subject, but to an appeal to themselves. Their attention must be kept up, and a close connection between them and the preacher maintained by the frequent introduction of the pronoun 'you',⁸ so that each may realise the thought that the discourse is actually addressed to him. Many preachers do not come near enough to their congregation.⁹

How many nails did James hit on the head in that extract? Note, yet again, the emphasis on the use of questions, and on the use of 'you'. In short, 'many preachers do not come near enough to their congregation', both literally and spiritually. The pulpit, with its surrounding rails, and (often) high desk (even up to the arm pits),¹⁰ in itself keeps the preacher and his hearers yards apart. To make sure of it, a heavy communion table, surrounded by its complement of chairs – not forgetting a lectern or two – all beautified by at least one bowl of flowers – fills the space. But more than that, the preaching itself fails to connect, fails to grip.

Let me use a personal illustration. I do not want a GP (a physician, a doctor) who fails to connect with me. I do not go to his surgery (office) for him to deal with disease in the abstract, in the third person. I want him to deal with me – with me and my complaint, my prognosis, my treatment. I do not go to be given a lecture on the pharmacopeia, or the history of medicine. I want – I need – medical treatment for me, myself! Does the same not apply to preaching? If so, then how can this be done without constant use of the 'you' word? How will the GP tease out my condition unless he asks questions? And, having teased it out, surely he wants to treat me – *me* – and, if he can, help *me* to get better.

⁸ I cannot resist drawing attention to this vital point yet again, coupled with the 'pointed interrogation'.

⁹ John Angell James: *An Earnest Ministry the Want of the Times*, Hamilton, Adams & Co., London, 1848, pp126-128.

¹⁰ See my *Preaching* for notes on pulpit design, and remarks by Spurgeon and D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

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I called the above 'a personal illustration'. But is there anybody reading this who wants otherwise for himself? The GP knows what is required – or ought to! As D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it:

In medicine we are not concerned with truth in a theoretical, or abstract, or academic manner; we are concerned with it, and interested in it, because we are confronted by a patient, a problem, an illness, and the call which that presents to us to do something by applying the knowledge which we may possess. That is true of medicine, thought of as the treatment and cure¹¹ of disease; and I would argue that it is also true of preventative medicine. This essentially medical interest in applying knowledge to the treatment of the condition is, then, my fundamental reason for calling attention to this subject. The state of society, of the world, and of this country [the UK] in particular, calls for our urgent attention at the present time.¹²

While on the subject of a physician and his patient, we all know that although the good physician finds the patient's symptoms invaluable – even essential – and while he knows that he must make the fullest possible use of them (and, of course, wants to relieve them where he can), nevertheless, he is a criminal physician who does nothing else but alleviate symptoms. What he should be concerned with – what he must be concerned with – is the cause of the trouble, the root of the disease or complaint. Likewise with the gospel. The preacher (in the widest sense of the word)¹³ who deals with the pagan's symptoms, and not the cause of those symptoms, is to be censured. I have already referred to Romans 1:18. Paul does not begin his delineation of the gospel with the sinner's symptoms, but with their cause and consequences – leading to their cure. Indeed, he announces the cure (thereby

¹¹ Original had 'care'.

¹² D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *The Approach to Truth: Scientific and Religious*, The Tyndale Press, London, 1963, p3.

¹³ See my *Pastor, The Priesthood*.

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showing the cause of man's plight) right at the start (Rom. 1:15-17). And all this, mark you, when writing to believers!

So much for the first proper use of 'you' – in preaching. In close connection with the above, I now move on to the second proper use of 'you'.

2. In appropriating the word of God

Let us suppose that the preacher is indeed making proper use of 'you'. How should the hearer respond? The same goes for the reading of Scripture, of course. What is the scriptural method of reading the word of God or hearing it preached? This is the question I want to raise here.

The answer is plain. We properly read or hear the word of God only when we appropriate it to ourselves – God speaking to us, God speaking to me. We must never leave Scripture in terms of the abstract, in terms of the third person. The sacred writers do not leave their words there. Let me illustrate.

Take the first part of Psalm 65:4:

Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts!

Clearly, David is speaking in the third person – the one whom God chooses, and so on; he is speaking especially of the blessedness that comes to such a man or woman. But he does not leave it there, in general terms. Look how he immediately goes on:

We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!

He moves from the abstract or detached – the third person – into the personal, the 'we': 'We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!' It is not merely that God blesses the man or woman in question, but that he blesses us. David is making a personal appropriation of the truth, making a personal application of

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it, fixing it firmly upon the readers and singers of his psalm. Indeed, and more importantly, he actually includes himself; he, himself, is appropriating the truth, the experience, the blessing; it belongs to me, he is saying. As John Trapp expressed it:

[David] makes himself one of the number of God's elect (as Paul also does often), and... hence concludes to himself...

Spot on! And, as Trapp observed, it is not only David. Paul does precisely the same. Writing to the Galatians on justification (and, even more, on the issue of progressive sanctification),¹⁴ while the apostle does speak in general terms, within a very short time he is moving decisively into the personal 'we', and then even more heavily into the 'I':

We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified... Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose (Gal. 2:16,19-21).

A little later, he does something similar:

All who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written: 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them'. Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith'. But the law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them'. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree' – so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:10-14).

¹⁴ See my *Christ; Sanctification in Galatians*.

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Again, when writing to the Romans, having set out the doctrine of justification by faith alone on the basis of God's grace alone, through Christ alone, using Abraham as a prime example of what he was saying, the apostle goes on:

The words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we [or, let us] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we [or let us] rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom. 4:23 – 5:5).

And:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Rom. 5:6-11).

And so he continues – see Romans 7:3-4; 8:1-39.

Notice how Paul moves from the general to the particular in this passage:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him

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those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

See how Paul moves from 'the man of God' to particular emphasis upon Timothy himself in 2 Timothy 3:17 to 4:1 (there should be no chapter division).

Take Hebrews 4:14; 6:9; 8:1; 9:11-14; 9:24; in particular, do not miss the way in which the writer moves from the general to the personal in Hebrews 10.

See also James 1:12-16; 1 Peter 4:10.

Let me give a practical example of what I am trying to say. Take the account of the woman who attended the ministry of John Fletcher of Madeley. Her husband was a very violent man, a man who implacably resented his wife's spirituality. So intense was his hatred, he forbade her ever to go to the meeting to listen to Fletcher, but she was determined. On seeing his wife leaving home, clearly defying his order, the man threatened to kill her on her return, vowing to dispose of her remains in the furnace. Nevertheless, she went to the service.

All this was unknown to Fletcher, of course. But when he stood to preach, he confessed that his original matter had completely left him, and he had been given the very strong impression that he should speak on the passage dealing with the three cast into the fiery furnace, thrown there for defying an evil king and his edict. Fletcher obeyed what he felt God was telling him to do. As the woman was able to declare: 'It was all for me'.

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The sequel to the story is that on her return, she found her husband subdued, even repentant. But, for my purposes, the punch line is: 'It was all for me'.

That is how to read the Bible and hear it preached.

Before I close this section and chapter, a word from C.H. Spurgeon. In his *Flowers from a Puritan's Garden*, he quotes Thomas Manton, before adding his own comment. Take this:

A hen that soon leaves her nest, never hatches her chicks.
Just so, a sudden glance at truth without meditation upon it,
brings nothing to perfection.

So said Manton. Spurgeon responds:

How can she? Patience is needed, and the quiet self-denial by which she renders up the warmth of her heart – otherwise her eggs will lie as dead as stones! The value of truth will never be known by those who look at it and hurry on. They must brood over it, and cover it with their heart's love – or it will never become living truth to their souls. We must apply ourselves to a doctrine, giving our whole soul and heart to it – or we shall miss the blessing. Herein is wisdom.

Spurgeon turns to prayer:

Lord, when I hear a sermon, or read in a good book – let me not be as the hen which neither sits on her eggs, nor hatches them. But make me to ponder your word, and to rejoice over it as one who finds great spoil.

And he quotes the word to Joshua just before he led Israel across the Jordan:

Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth. Meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful! (Josh. 1:8).

Let James, bringing that extract into the new covenant, have the final word:

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Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing (Jas. 1:22-25).

Amen!