

Introduction

A correspondent asked me a very interesting question: What did I think about the use of the word ‘you’ in Christian circles? Her email spoke of the growing number of

...courses on how to change *your* life, *your* marriage, *your* church, *your* community... The whole emphasis seems to be on: ‘What it will do for *you*... Christ died for *you* – he had *you* in mind...’. Of course... he did come seeking the lost, but...

Clearly, my correspondent was concerned.

Was she right to be concerned? What about this use of ‘you’ in preaching, books, courses, and such like?

I thought her question merited more than a private response. Hence this booklet.

Let me say why I think the question is important.

For a start, small words – ‘for’, ‘but’, ‘if’, ‘yet’, ‘since’, ‘then’, for example – carry huge weight. As Donald G.Barnhouse said: ‘In studying the word of God, we must never underestimate the importance of little words’.¹ And the same goes for the use of little words when we are discussing and engaging in preaching and church practice.

Take the iceberg. We can only see the top 10%, but that 90% lurking below the surface has to be taken into account. So here. Seemingly innocent the issue might be, but in truth this emphasis on ‘you’ is very serious; it tells us what is going on underneath. And what it tells me is that the modern gospel – and that is what we are talking about – is man-centred, and not God-centred. And that is something to get worked up

¹ Donald G.Barnhouse: ‘The Meaning of the Term “Baptism”’, in Herbert F.Stevenson (ed.): *The Ministry of Keswick*, Second Series, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1964, p157.

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about! It not only demands our close attention, but – if my claim (and my correspondent’s concern) is true – it demands action.

Having said that, there is a right use of ‘you’. But the fact is, the wrong use – and the lack of the right use of ‘you’ – are stable mates or Siamese twins. To change the figure yet again, they are opposite faces of the same coin.

Let me explain. I begin with the wrong use of ‘you’.