

Thy Rules for Thine Edification

By Michael Foster

In reading The Bible, there are those words that sound so “old fashioned”: thee, thou, thy and thine.

They are scattered throughout Shakespeare’s works. They’ve been used them for years when speaking at Renaissance events. They are something lost in English that other languages -- Spanish, French, even Russian -- still have: A formal and informal way of speaking to others.

The English personal pronouns "thou, thee, thy and thine" show exactly who is being spoken to, and no one else.

(A "pronoun" is a word that "stands in for" another noun or noun-phrase. A "personal pronoun" is one which stands for a person. The personal pronouns are classified as first person, second person and third person by their relationship to the one speaking.)

Because these terms are most commonly read in The Bible and in Shakespeare, some people believe that that they were really just “... *poetic forms used in religious language and love poetry...*”. Others think that “thou” was for one person and "you” was for more than one person.

Do not believe most of what you read on the Internet. People write things as if they were experts and a lot more people believe them.

In facsimiles of hundreds of books re-printed from the 1400s through the 1600s everyone – soldiers, surgeons, sailors – used these words in their everyday writings.

In the England of Queen Elizabeth, the 1st, people would have said “you” to people that were of a higher class (to people who were above them: royalty, nobles, people richer than themselves, more educated, etc.). They would have said “thou” to people with whom they were very familiar (friends, family, servants, etc.).

Of course, EVERYONE called the Queen “you” and everyone called God “thou” (because everyone has a personal relationship with God).

Also, strangely enough, people called their horses “you”, too, and that was mainly because the horse is considered a “noble beast”. One may wonder what the Queen called her horse... you or thou...

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So, the rule was, if someone did not know the person, or that person appeared to be above his or her “station”, he or she would have been better off calling the other person, “you”. Later, they might become friends and, if they were about the same level in life, they would call each other “thou”.

Another thing that a lot of people don’t realize is that the words “my” and “mine”, alongside “thy” and “thine”, once followed the same rules as “a” and “an”: if the noun SOUNDS like it starts with a vowel (a, e, i, o, and u), you used “mine”, “thine” and sometimes even “your’n”. And, if the word begins with a vowel, but SOUNDS like it starts with a consonant, “an”, “mine” and “thine” are not used.

(Some words begin with an “h” that is silent, taking on the sound of the vowel. These mostly comes from French where they do not pronounce “h”. The English often pronounce them, but Americans usually do not so sometimes words like herb, hotel, and historical will have “an” in front of them.)

Thus...

- a table, my table, thy table, your table
- a horse, my horse, thy horse, your horse
- a university, my university, thy university, your university
- an egg, mine egg, thine egg, your’n egg
- an heir, mine heir, thine heir, your’n heir
- an herb, mine herb, thine herb, your’n herb

What makes this even more interesting is that some well-known English names were created using these rules:

Mine Ed (as in “Oh, Mine Ed, love of my life.”) became “My Ned” and, thus the nickname “Ned” for “Ed”. Other English names that came from this are Nan (and Nancy) for Ann, Nell (and Nellie) for Ellen, and Noll for Oliver.

Attached is a chart with the guidelines and specific intent implied by these words.

Notice that replacing "thou/thee/thy/thine" with the more common "you/your" does not really make it clear who is being talked to. A lot of modern bibles replace "thou/thee/thy/thine" with the "you/your" which makes something that was very clear sort of confusing because the reader is not always sure to whom God or Jesus or even Job would be speaking.

Oh, and “ye” was once “the”, but using the “thorn” character (the “th” sound dropped from the English alphabet). There was never a word “ye” as in “ye old”, though. Victorian linguists that that “thorn”+“e” was “ye” instead of “the”.

Here are the definitions and the rules for the use of thee, thy, thou and thine:

1st Person - The speaker **himself**, and any others he may include as part of his group.

2nd Person - Those **to whom** the speaker is speaking.

3rd Person - Those **about whom** the speaker is speaking.

Person	Number	Nominative	Objective	Possessive
-	-	-	-	-
1st Person	<i>singular:</i>	I	Me	My (or Mine)
-	<i>plural:</i>	We	Us	Our (or Ours)
-	-	-	-	-
2nd Person	<i>singular:</i>	Thou	Thee	Thy (or Thine)
-	<i>plural:</i>	Ye	You	Your (or yours)
-	-	-	-	-
3rd Person	<i>singular:</i>	He/She/It	Him/Her/It	His/Hers/Its
-	<i>plural:</i>	They	Them	Their (or Theirs)
-	-	-	-	-

So, using this table, one can be very sure about who is being addressed: one person, more than one, someone of the same class or someone higher up.

Here are examples from The Bible that use these rules:

Verses expressing the Importance of "thou, thee, thy and thine."

1. Exodus 4:15, "**THOU** shalt speak ... I will be with **THY** mouth...and will teach **YOU** what **YE** shall do."

"Thou/Thy" refer to Moses himself, but "You/Ye" refer to the entire nation of Israel.

2. Exodus 29:42, "...I will meet **YOU**, to speak there unto **THEE**."

The "You," referring to the children of Israel, is explained in the following verse, but "Thee" refers to Moses, who had the holy privilege of hearing the words of God directly (Leviticus 1:1).

3. 2 Samuel 7:23, "And what one nation in the earth is like **THY** people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for **YOU** great things and terrible, for **THY** land, before **THY** people, which **THOU** redeemedst to **THEE** from Egypt."

Here David prayed to God in the second person singular, but referred to the people of Israel as "You." What confusion could result if this important distinction were done away? It could be incorrectly thought that David was praying in part to the nation, or that the land belonged to the people and not to God.

4. Matthew 26:64, "Jesus saith unto him, **THOU** has said: nevertheless I say unto **YOU**, hereafter shall **YE** see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

"Thou" refers to the High Priest, but "You/Ye" include all those who were standing there in addition to the high priest.

5. Luke 5:24, "But that **YE** may know...I say unto **THEE**...take up **THY** couch, and go into **THINE** house."

"Ye" refers to the crowd, but "Thee/Thy/Thine" refer only to the man with palsy.

6. John 3:7, 11, "Marvel not that I said unto **THEE**, **YE** must be born again."

The message was spoken to the individual Nicodemus ("Thee"), but obviously has wider application to all those who desire to follow Christ ("Ye").

7. John 14:9, "Have I been so long time with **YOU**, and yet hast **THOU** not known me?"

The "You" refers to the crowd, but "Thou" is addressed specifically to only one man, Philip.

8. 1 Corinthians 8:9-12, "...this liberty of **YOURS**...If any man see **THEE** which hast knowledge... through **THY** knowledge...but when **YE** sin."

The plural forms "Yours/Ye" refer to the liberty and sin of all believers in Christ as a whole, but the singular forms "thee/thy" refer only to those individual believers that find themselves in this particular circumstance.