

**GOD'S WORD
IS A SYMPHONY
OF PRAISE**

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PART I

A recent visit to a symphony concert was very enjoyable. I delighted hearing Brahms Symphony No. 2 performed by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. I did not realize at that time how God would use that experience to give me a deeper understanding of His precious word.

In musical terms, a symphony is described as a compound form. The classical symphony usually has four sections, or movements, and while it is possible for each movement to be performed separately, that is rarely done. The relationship between the movements, such as the interplay of mood, the creativity of structure, or the unfolding of a story, is what makes the listening experience complete.

Obviously, the Word of God is a compound form with 66 separate movements, or books. Each book can be read separately, but the full satisfaction comes from recognizing how each section is skillfully integrated into a meaningful whole.

There are two levels of appreciation when listening to a symphony. The first and most elementary is the emotional response. Every listener is able to appreciate on this level. However, the skill of the conductor lies in his ability to direct the various emotions to a point of unity. In other words, each listener will be directed toward the same emotional response. That feeling of oneness generated in an assembly of strangers is reason to visit a concert hall, as opposed to listening in solitude, where one misses out on that experience.

When we read or hear the Words of God, each of us can have an emotional response. We can marvel in awe at the act of creation, or cheer with the Israelites when David slays the giant. We cry along with Jeremiah and walk and leap and praise God with the lame man who was healed by the Apostles. These are common emotional responses. The role of the Holy Spirit, when we read or hear the Words of God, is to take us as individuals and lead us to a point of unity in Christ. Similarly, just as in a concert hall, for the blessing of unity to be realized, the assembling of the saints together should not be forsaken.

The second level of appreciation for a symphonic composition is reached through an understanding of the mechanics of construction. The whole process begins with a design concept in the mind of the composer who employs musical symbols on a printed page to transmit his concept to others. It can readily be seen that Scripture began as a design concept in the mind of the Almighty who chose to transmit this concept to us living today, through the printed page, the Holy Bible. Less obvious however may be the mechanics of this transmission, which will now be examined in detail.

Musical notes can be arranged in two ways; the linear arrangement which creates melody and the vertical arrangement which creates harmony. A melody is a meaningful arrangement of tones that is constructed with a plan or purpose. It is designed to attract our attention and elicit a response. Symphonic compositions that have delighted people through the ages are the ones that have immediately recognizable melodies. These melodies that are elevated to prominence in a composition are called themes.

Our beloved King James Bible has beautiful melodies that sing out from the pages. Each melody is made up of a series of words, for example, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.” This melody abounds throughout the Bible, in many variations and in many different contexts, but when we hear it, even if it has been disguised, we remember that we have heard it before and it is familiar to us. Or, consider the melody, “Behold the Lamb of God.” When this theme is encountered in the Bible and we remember the Lamb and think on Him, we interact with that melody to the stirring of our very soul.

One of the marks of greatness of a classical composer is his ability to manipulate melodic fragments into various constructs and then reorganize them into even more meaningful patterns. Full enjoyment of a symphony on this second, deeper level depends upon our ability to remember the melodies heard previously, and when, after a sometimes prolonged interlude, they reappear in all their majesty, it is like reuniting with an old friend. The more familiar we become with the composition, the more we anticipate the arrival of that recognizable melody. The same is applicable to the Bible’s major themes. Just as a symphony, with its different movements, is united by its thematic material, so is the Bible. The themes are manipulated, maneuvered, transformed, and sometimes disguised, but study and meditation can often reveal them. A musician who has studied the composition will understand it in greater depth and see the marvelous intricacies better than someone hearing it for the first time. However, the conductor, or in our analogy, the Holy Spirit can guide us into a more complete understanding.

Let us digress at this point as we ponder the role of the conductor. He (or she) never adds to, subtracts, or in any way changes the score that the composer has written. The job of the conductor is to interpret the information on the page and to lead, guide and direct the musicians in the performance. As pertains to the matter of interpretation, there are certain notations that may not be changed; for example, the notes themselves may not be altered unless there is an obvious misprint. The work must be performed in the same key that was chosen by the composer because a certain mood or impression can be generated through this choice of key. However, when the composer writes “allegro” on the score, to define the speed at which the music is to be performed, just how fast is “allegro”? If he writes “pianissimo” on a section, just how soft is that? The conductor determines these criteria within certain universal parameters and thus puts his signature on the performance.

As the Holy Spirit clarifies God’s words and brings us to a knowledge of the truth, it is not accomplished by changing or modifying those words in any way. What

God has written is forever settled and preserved for us. The role of the Holy Spirit is to equip us to understand and perform God's Words as was intended by the composer Himself. Just as a conductor cannot transmit the message without participation by the musicians who bring their own special gifts and abilities to the performance, **the Holy Spirit uses the saints of God to perform the Words of God.**

Now we revert back to our study of the mechanics of a symphonic composition. We have discussed the linear construction, or melody. Next we consider the vertical structure, or harmony. The chordal structure is implemented to support the melody by setting the melody in a certain tonal environment. This setting, or context, then determines the mood of the composition, much the same way that wall color determines the mood of a room.

To illustrate this concept as it applies to The Words of God, let us consider various books of the Bible and establish a prevailing mood for each. For example:

The book of Psalms	majestic
Song of Solomon	intimate, playful
Jeremiah	melancholy
Proverbs	neutral
Ruth	bright
Revelation	foreboding

If we were musically notating the book of Ruth, we would certainly not end it in a minor key. This book, with the underlying theme (melody) of redemption, would undoubtedly end in triumph, the genealogy of David triumphantly proclaiming the redeemer to come. Contrast this with the book of Jeremiah "the weeping prophet," where the idea of redemption is more obscure and the entire book would be musically portrayed in a minor key. It is the harmonic construction that gives each book its distinctive color, or mood.

The third element in a musical composition we have not yet mentioned. It is the element of rhythm. One can readily understand that even the most sophisticated progression of notes would be meaningless without rhythm. Rhythm brings order; that order resulting from repeated occurrences. God Himself established rhythm; in the seasons, in the oceanic tides, and in the heavenly spheres, where events are repeated enough to establish meaning. In fact, as early as the second verse in the creation account (Gen 1:2) we see the earth without form and void until the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. That word, "moved" means, literally, "vibrated," producing rhythmic waves of energy. So, we can see how the Creator used rhythm to bring order out of formlessness.

The examination of the subject of rhythm in God's Word brings numerous examples to light. We have obvious rhythm in the book of Judges, each leader punctuating the course of a nation's history, either for good or for evil, one reign flowing rhythmically into the next with the often repeated refrain, "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." We see rhythm in the book of Joshua; in fact, it is a marching rhythm as Israel conquers the Promised Land. We have obvious rhythm in the

Psalms, the structure of which is sometimes so precise and the words so melodious, even in translation, they can be turned into song without any modification at all. With the advent of computers, we have discovered Bible codes, (an unfortunate term) where rhythm is being discovered in the actual words themselves as they appear on the printed page, and that rhythm pulses as intended so long as the words have not been altered or changed. The truth is, if the Words of God are quick and powerful, then they have the pulse beat or the rhythm of life itself.

As with any comparisons, more could be said. Perhaps through this short musical journey where we have compared Scripture to a finely constructed symphony, we have come to appreciate our KJB even more. Unfortunately, as with any comparison of things earthly to things heavenly, the earthly falls far short. One observation does remain true however, the Words of God, although composed in eternity past, have been completely recorded for us in book form and preserved by divine covenant. We are able to hold this miraculously written letter from heaven, stained with the blood of martyrs, in our very hands, translated into the English language and infallibly preserved. Our beloved King James Bible resonates with the harmonies of eternity and the rhythm of life. But it is the glorious melody, that pervasive theme, composed of the notes of mercy and grace, that saturates the whole so completely and lovingly. It is a melody we can sing in our hearts. Jesus Christ, our blessed redeemer, is that unchanging melody. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.

GOD'S WORD IS A SYMPHONY OF PRAISE

PART II

The foregoing treatise is an analogy that perhaps gives one a greater understanding and appreciation for God's Word. Comparing Scripture to a finely constructed symphony is a delightful exercise, both intellectually and spiritually. However, if the treatise ends here, is there any lasting effect? To make an impact, we must make it apply to our lives. The remainder of this presentation will instruct you on how to perform God's Symphony. You, the saints of God, are the musicians called to perform the Words of God each and every day. Are you qualified?

Let's suppose for a moment that you are going to an audition for participation in a symphony orchestra. Obviously, the first requirement is that you are able to play your instrument; that you can decipher the notes on the page and produce an accurate rendition. If you are going to accurately decipher the Words of God for performance purposes, the first qualification is faith. You must have faith in the living Word, Jesus Christ, before you can acceptably perform God's written Word. While it is true that there

are those who attempt to perform the Words of God without possessing a saving faith, their performance is not pleasing because without faith it is impossible to please Him. (Heb 11:6). The performance may be technically flawless, every note accurately played, but there is no connection. The performance is lifeless; without heart; dead. Why is that? We remember in the OT how God condemned the bringing of offerings and sacrifices to Him without the right attitude of the heart. Their performance was technically correct, but without understanding. Faith is the qualification that makes us alive to the things of God and gives us an understanding heart so that our performance may be acceptable in His sight.

The second qualification is a desire to perform well. While there is a place for amateurs in a youth orchestra, musicians are expected to perfect their skills. This is impossible without practice; many, many hours of practice. As a musician desiring to play God's Symphony, you must also practice. You must study the notes (Words), engrave them on your heart, meditate on them in your mind and thoroughly understand them before you attempt to bring them to performance. Do you have a musician's dedication?

This brings us to the question, "What will you do with the difficult passages?" There are two possibilities. One is to practice them unto perfection. The second is to allow the other musicians to carry the difficult passages without you. Ladies, do you allow your husband's commitment and dedication to carry you through the difficult passages? Do you allow him to carry the load that is rightfully yours? Do you understand that the trumpet cannot play the part that was written for the violin? The performance of God's Symphony with your husband should be a duet; each part in harmony with and complementing the other. The part he has been given to play may be the more prominent, but he needs the underlying harmonic support that has been written for you. We must study the whole Word of God, being familiar with all, but we must, as individuals, be dedicated to performing the passages written specifically for us.

There is one more qualification that is absolutely essential to symphonic performance. Each musician must be subject to the authority of the conductor. Remember that previous imaginary audition? Suppose you only agreed to perform on Sundays? Suppose you only agreed to perform **your** musical version even though it was far different from the original? Suppose you only agreed to perform at your convenience; in your season? Suppose you insisted on being the final authority of how those notes should be interpreted instead of being guided through the performance by the conductor? You would soon hear the words, "audition over" and your chance to shine would be extinguished. But Jesus says, "Ye are the light of the world" (Mt 5:14) and "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works (a pleasing and acceptable performance of God's Words) and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Mt 5:16).

My prayer for all of us is that we learn to be proficient, capable musicians, dedicated to the performance of a lifetime. The house lights have dimmed, a hush has descended and the curtain is rising. The audience is watching and prepared to listen. The musicians are tuned up and ready to perform. All are anticipating the arrival of the

conductor who appears from the wings and makes his way to the podium. There is no delay; he lifts his baton and the performance begins. The Symphony of Praise rings out from the stage, fills the hall, and resounds in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:8) The magnificent harmonies reach the heavens and enter into the court of the composer Himself, where it is forever settled.

O God, we desire to bring honour and glory to you through our performance of your precious, preserved Words. Under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit, may those eternal Words become A Symphony of Praise.

Amen.