

Musings on Scripture and Music

I - Myriad Interpretations. Each musical piece has more than a hundred interpretations. Indeed, although thousands of musicians could read the same manuscript piece of music, the performances would vary quite widely. Take Beethoven's Piano Sonata in C Minor, Opus 13, for example. Some would honor every marking on the score, some would take liberties and change markings, some would devote a lot of their practice time studying Beethoven's life when he wrote the sonata, some would not devote anytime studying the historical component of the composition. Interestingly, the greatly acclaimed pianists and their interpretations both honor every marking on the score and devote much of their practice time studying Beethoven's life concerning that piece. The other pianists and their interpretations have fallen by the wayside, not standing the test of time.

The same can be said for the Word. There are many possible interpretations on a single passage of Scripture. If we take Philemon as an example, some interpreters would study the book in Greek and execute a grammatical analysis, while others would not. Some interpreters would study the cultural context in which Paul wrote his message, while others would not. And just like the careful, attentive performances of Beethoven's Opus 13 Piano Sonata, the interpretations which studied and honored the Philemon text as closely as possible, combined with the extra investigation into the original context of the passage, are more convincing, reliable, and enduring.

II - Where Meaning Lies. There are three kinds of musicians: those who believe the meaning of music lies within the composer, those who would argue the manuscript score itself holds the most authority, and those who assert the interpreter brings the most meaning to the

performance. In this current day of age, the majority of musicians fall into the third category. At first thought this may seem strange, but considering we live in a post-modern era, where meaning and truth is thought to be fairly subjective, it is actually not surprising.

The same can be said for the Word. There are those interpreters who assert the meaning of the passage comes from the original author, while others believe the text itself is the place of authority, while others hold the interpreter as the origin of meaning. Although I hold the conviction that each component - the author, text, and interpreter - plays a part in giving a passage its meaning, I also believe the origin of its meaning lies within the Godhead - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is difficult to discern which functions each person of the Trinity fulfills in whatever endeavor, but concerning the creation of Scripture it is likely that Father God breathed inspiration into the original author through the Holy Spirit, which created the text (the Word). This is because the Greek word for Holy Spirit is 'pneuma,' which means "wind, breath, or spirit" and 2 Timothy 3:16 states "All Scripture is God-breathed," which the last word in Greek is "theopneustos."

(Furthermore, it is safe to say the Holy Spirit gives the receiver illumination for the text. There is not enough space in this paper to elucidate on this point, but one should read 1 Corinthians 2:7-12 for further investigation. In the passage, Paul writes how the mysteries of God and how we "know the things that have been freely given to us by God" are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.)

III - Living and Breathing. In today's American culture, classical music is unfortunately seen more and more as a boring and irrelevant music genre by the younger generation. Concert sales are dwindling, symphonies are going on strike, and fairly soon I'm afraid a Beethoven piano sonata will be seen as an antique, something to be museumized. But as a classical pianist, I

can attest that all of Beethoven's sonatas are living and breathing, full of vigor and transforming power. What is missing from the general public in order to truly appreciate Beethoven's sonatas, and classical music in general, are trained ears and more importantly, a willingness to listen. If people put aside their preconceived notions and open up their hearts and minds to music such as a Beethoven sonata, exciting transformation will take place.

The same can be said for the Word. Considering America's entire population, biblical ignorance is highly prevalent. Some may view the Bible as boring or irrelevant, some may think its heresy, and some may never be exposed to it. Personally, until I was 23-years-old, I thought it was an ancient, humongous, and tedious book, full of difficult verses to memorize. Whatever one may believe about the Bible, it is incredibly full of life and transforming power. Indeed, Hebrews 4:12 states, "For the word of God is alive and active." What is missing from the general public is a willingness to listen, sets of ears which will dare to hear. This is what Jesus meant in the gospels when he cried out to the crowds, "He who has ears, let him hear." When He was teaching about the kingdom of God, usually in parables, He would periodically insert this phrase in order to call for people's genuine attempt to listen and understand - to put forth an interest in - His teachings. And once people in today's society open their hearts, minds, and spirits to the Word, exciting transformation will indeed take place. The Spirit will continue to be at work in the world, calling and convicting people of their unbelief; it will primarily depend on a person's response to the Holy Spirit's work if true transformation takes place.

IV - The Real Difference. Unfortunately, musicians can get in the way of a certain piece's power. I am well aware of some who can play all the right notes and rhythms at the right time, but no change takes place in the audience. They have comprehended the music, perhaps extremely well, but something is missing. Frankly, some of my performances have been this way

and lacked a lot of inspiration. Probably in response to one of these moments, I remember one of my piano teachers used to tell me, "Stanton, you have to live the music. You have to thoroughly enjoy it to your core's depth. You've got to eat, breathe, and sleep the music you're playing!" On the other hand, there are some performers who instantly captivate audiences. They arrest your attention and it's obvious they live the music. The joy (or despair) of the music is shown on their face and body, which is simultaneously transmitted through the sound of their instrument. Thankfully, I have been blessed with providing these types of performances as well.

The same can be said for the Word. Some interpreters can study a chapter of Romans in depth, using a historical-grammatical analysis. In addition, they may read numerous commentaries and preach a well-structured sermon, but when all is said and done, they had significantly comprehended the material yet something is missing. Namely, it is the lack of transformation in the speaker. On the other hand, there are some interpreters who live the Word and, using the words of my past piano teacher, "eat, breathe, and sleep" the Word. They actually believe the meaning of the passage to their core's depth and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, especially joy. Put in another way, they enjoy the Word! Their combined efforts of studying the Word in depth and putting into practice the application of their exegesis, is captivating to people. Observers stop and ponder for a moment, perhaps thinking "They have something I don't have. I want to be like them." Indeed, their lives are the most effective evangelists for the gospel.

V - Epilogue. How does one become this kind of interpreter? The answer breaches the scope of this paper, but the short answer is time, worship, prayer, constant time in the Word, an openness to God's guidance in the process, and God's grace. But like musicians honing their craft of reading and performing music, interpreters and preachers must devote their lives to the

process. Perhaps that is a daunting statement, but here is a word of encouragement. Just as music transforms and inhabits in the musician each time he approaches the music stand, the same can be said for the Word. Professor Jon Huntzinger would say, "Each time people approach the Word, they become a bit more transformed into the Word. It lives inside of them more and more." That is God's grace at work in the process. He is so eager for the Word to live inside His children, he has set that principle in motion! How wonderful to realize this fact! And just as J. S. Bach would write "Soli Deo Gloria" at the end of all his compositions, we can study the Word with a recognition that all the glory - the insights, the beautiful results of applying biblical principles, and yes, even the praise for sermon-giving - goes to God!

Soli Deo Gloria.