

WHY THEOLOGY MATTERS

Bob Kauflin

Why talk about theology at this conference? This is the Christian Musicians Summit not the Christian Theologians Summit. People are walking around carrying guitars. You can attend workshops for vocalists, keyboards, bass and drums. There are no classes on OT survey or eschatology or the doctrine of God. The goal is to inspire and equip you in the area of music.

Even at the Christian Musicians Summit, theology matters.

Theology isn't the most popular topic among Christians, especially Christian musicians. The word itself conjures up images of proud old men studying thick books, arguing about secondary topics that no one will ever understand any way.

Theology literally means "the study of God," particularly as he has revealed himself in Scripture. It includes not only studying the Bible, but understanding how the different parts of the Bible fit together.

Christian musicians need to know theology. But let me address 4 objections before I tell you why.

1. People just argue about theology.

Yes. Partly because we're sinful. But mostly because there are some truths that are worth defending and fighting for. Even dying for.

2. Theology just makes life complicated.

It depends on what you mean by *complicated*. If you think that knowing how to play your instrument makes it complicated, then yes, theology makes life complicated. And I can tell you that knowing God well involves more work than knowing your guitar or keyboard well. But if we could grasp God completely, he wouldn't be much of a god. If God is really God, our minds will be stretched to their limits as we try to understand him better.

Theology doesn't make life complicated. It actually makes life simpler. It protects us from reading verses out of context or reading only our favorite passages. Theology tells us what matters to God and helps us avoid making decisions based on impulse rather than truth. Theology tells us what words like *glory*, *gospel*, *salvation*, and *love* mean. Theology helps us understand what we're actually doing every Sunday. What complicates life is not theology but *ignorance* of theology.

3. Studying theology makes people proud.

It shouldn't. The better we know God, the humbler we should be. The more we should realize that what we know will always be dwarfed by what we don't know. Listen to theologian Paul:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

4. We'll never know it all anyway.

Just because we can't know everything about God, doesn't mean we can't know some things truly. God has revealed himself to us in his word and given us his Spirit so that we can *know* him.

Scripture is divine *revelation*. It is not a collection of opinions of how different people see things that tells us more about the people than the things. No. It gives us God's perfect knowledge of himself and of all reality. It is given to us in a form we can understand. The reason God gave it to us is that he wants us to know. Not to guess. Not to have vague impressions. And certainly not to be misled. He wants us to *know*. (David Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant*)

Instead of causing problems, theology, rightly applied, *solves* problems. It tells our minds what to think so our hearts can know what to feel and our wills can know what to do, all so we can love God more fully and passionately.

Here are three reasons theology should matter to Christian musicians:

1. You're already a theologian.

Every Christian, musical or otherwise, is already a theologian. The question is, are you a good theologian or a bad one?

We're *good* theologians if what we say and think about God lines up with what Scripture says and affirms. We're *bad* theologians if our view of God is vague, or if we think God doesn't really mind sin, or if we see Jesus as a good example and not a Savior, or if we our god is too small to overcome evil or too big to care about us.

How do you become a good theologian? First, by reading, studying, and meditating on the Bible, God's self-revelation. Many of us study our Bibles like we exercise. We know it's good for us. We try to get to it. We talk as though we actually have a regular routine. And most of the time we forget to do it.

You also become a good theologian by reading books written by those who have read, studied, and meditated on the Bible.

I've met people who don't read theology books because they don't want their understanding of the Bible to be influenced by anyone else. What they're saying is: "God couldn't possibly use another person to help me understand his Word more clearly." That's ridiculous. I need all the help I can get. So do you.

Knowledge of the Holy — A.W. Tozer

Knowing God and Concise Theology — J.I. Packer

Systematic Theology — Wayne Grudem

Worship Matters – I wrote this as a "Theology 101" for worship leaders and musicians.

2. God reveals himself primarily through words, not music.

Like me, you've probably had profound encounters with God during musical worship.

2 Chron. 5:13 when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever," the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, 14 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

Or how about when David played the lyre for King Saul (1 Samuel 16:23)? Haven't you experienced an unusual peace or sensed God's nearness in an unexpected way while music was playing? When that happens it's a gift from God.

But we can wrongly start assuming that words restrict the Spirit, while music enables us to experience God in fresh and powerful ways. We're drawn to that exciting world of emotions, unpredictability and spontaneous impulses that's hard to define but definitely experienced.

If God had wanted us to know him primarily through music, the Bible would be a soundtrack, not a book.

Being moved emotionally by music is different from being changed spiritually by God's truth. Music affects and helps us in many ways, but it doesn't replace truth about God. By itself, music can never help us understand the meaning of God's self-existence, the nature of the Incarnation, or Christ's substitutionary atonement.

To put it simply, truth outlasts tunes. If we want to know God better, we'll have to study his Word.

What if I were as devoted to studying and listening to God as I am to studying and listening to music? The results could be radical.

3. Being good theologians makes us better musicians.

I'm not saying that we should study theology so that we can become better musicians. But being a better musician is simply a fruit of being a good theologian. Here are some of the things theology teaches us:

- *Theology teaches us what music is meant to do.*
Music is meant to draw out and express strong emotions for God.
Music is meant to serve words, not overpower or overshadow them.
Music is meant to edify and express unity in the church, not discourage and divide it.
Music, with all its styles, variations, and genres, is meant to give us a picture of God's creativity and glory.
Music isn't meant to bring God down, make God show up, or somehow manipulate God's presence. That's the Holy Spirit's job, and he can make us aware of God's presence with or without music.
- *Theology teaches us that worship is more than music.*
The words we use translate "worship" in the Old and New Testaments have to do with bowing down, showing reverence, and serving God in all of life. Only a few times is worship connected with music.
Music is an expression of my worship to God, not the sum total of it or even the best part of it.
God is worshiped when husbands love their wives, when children obey and honor their parents, when we share the gospel, when we're committed to a local church, when we serve others, when we're generous and joyful in the midst of trials. We're worshiping God when we draw on his grace to resist gossip, pornography, and anger.
- *Theology teaches us that Jesus is better than music.*
Music can give me temporary comfort. Jesus can give me lasting comfort.
2Th. 2:16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace,

Music can't bring me into God's presence – Jesus can and did.
Heb. 10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,

Music didn't die for my sins to reconcile me to God. Jesus did.
1Pet. 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God,

Music isn't the mediator between me and God. Jesus is.
1Tim. 2:5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

Music can only make me FEEL hopeful. Jesus rose from the dead to give me REAL hope FOREVER.

1Pet. 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

So let us practice our instruments, develop our skills, pursue excellence in music with passion. But let's remember that we are **Christian** musicians, called to love God with all our hearts, souls, MINDS, and strength.

Let's seek to be not only the best musicians we can be, but the best theologians we can be. And may the name of Jesus be honored in our lives as we use our gifts for his glory.