

Why Women Need Theology (And Why They Avoid it)

'Your testimonies are my heritage for ever, for they are the joy of my heart' (Ps 119:111).

Women need theology. We need it more than the clothes on our backs and the food in our fridges. Theology, or doctrine, is raw truth about God. Yet many women are theologically shy and have no appetite for it. To some, it is a 'man's world'. A realm of chunky books and long words, fit only for preachers and the intellectually charged. Some wives have admitted to finding their husbands' theological libraries intimidating; representing a world they will not understand and are not welcome to enter. This is very wrong indeed. As believers, we are all in possession of the powerful gospel realities given to us in Christ. So as Christian women many of us need to be encouraged confidently to enjoy the study of the things of God. To make them, like the Psalmist, 'the joy of our hearts'. 'Theology' or 'doctrines' are terms that can and should bring tingles to our spines and not shivers.

The Theologically Lazy

So some women avoid theology because they are theologically shy, and others because they are theologically lazy (and not just women but also men). I have witnessed theological laziness in women and have been guilty of it myself. It is a disgusting thing. Too often we just can't be bothered to do the mental work, telling ourselves that theology just isn't relevant to our endless everyday concerns. After a busy day at work, or running after the children, we'd rather amuse ourselves with a chick-flick than try to get our heads around what we see as a tricky contradiction or an obscure eccentric idea. There is a time for mental rest, of course. But too often we sell ourselves short. Loving the gospel means loving its truths; chewing on them; digesting them; staring their mystery and profundity in the face. Whatever the reasons we avoid theology, when we do we rob ourselves of biblical God-truth that can transform our lives and equip us to enjoy Jesus more. Theology is not dusty truth to be boxed up in a library. As Wayne Gruden has written, 'theology is meant to be lived and prayed and sung.'

The Theologically Patronised

There are, however, some women who get stuck into the study of theology and thrive on it. They consume or dip in and out of books on a whole range of doctrines and Christian belief, working hard to gain a fuller picture of the things of God. Yet some of these women have to fight for their interest and desire to study theology. You see, it is not just some women who think theology is a man's game. Sadly, some men think it too. Writer Carolyn Custis James, in her book *When Life and Beliefs Collide*, tells the true story of a female graduate who upon asking the male shop assistant of the location of the 'theology' section was told 'well, we have theology books for men'. And later, while making a purchase, was warned that her choice might be 'too deep'.

These women can be suspicious of the 'for women' genre and understandably so. Such works are frequently a disappointing watered-down alternative to the healthy and meaty theological stuff intended for men. These are the theologically patronised.

Wimpy Women

As John Piper once put it, 'Wimpy theology makes wimpy women.' With all the strains upon the contemporary woman from the world, from sin, Satan, and self, wimpy-theology-reading women will not survive let alone thrive unless they seek a solid theological worldview. 'Wimpy theology simply does not give a woman a God that is big enough, strong enough, wise enough, and good enough to handle the realities of life in a way that magnifies the infinite worth of Jesus Christ,' Piper says. We need to be equipped with healthy biblical God-truth to sustain our marriages, our singleness, our parenthood, our work, and our church life. If we are meaningfully to deter our own doubts, answer the questions of our inquisitive children, or encourage our troubled spouse, then our theology cannot be vague and superficial. Reminiscent of that famous wartime poster of a blue shirt clad woman, with her hair up in a red scarf pulling up her sleeves, we need a generation of women who are theologically robust: Women who know their theology and apply it throughout their relationships and the practicalities of life. Too long have women succumbed to the 'airy-fairy' sentimental Christian books that might feel like chicken soup to the soul for half-an-hour, but offer no sound grounding equipment for a tricky marriage blown this-way-and-that. I say, here's to pulling up our sleeves and fearlessly delving into Edwards on the beauty of God, or Calvin on the sovereignty of God, or Bavinck on justification – even if it makes us uncomfortable and confused. And of course, more than anything, loving theology means loving our Bibles. Let's 'rejoice at God's Word like one who finds great spoil' (Ps 119:162).

Is God calling you to understand more of the 'whole counsel of God'? Who, instead of shuddering at a load of old books, in casual conversation along the road or in the coffee shop, makes their listeners' hearts burn within them?



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