

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT PREACHING SOMEONE ELSE'S SERMON (PASTORAL PLAGIARISM)?

**Is it wrong to preach someone else's sermon?** Intentionally using someone's sermon or sermon outline/structure is plagiarism, even if the author allows it, unless you clearly and specifically communicate that it is someone's sermon/outline. In every other field of employment/work education, media/journalism, politics, academics, writing, the arts, etc. plagiarism is condemned as stealing & misrepresentation...so why would the pastorate be justified for such a practice?

**We need to be careful not to justify a practice that God speaks quite clearly to.** The issue of plagiarism is not merely offensive to the person you take your sermon/outline from, or merely an offense to the congregation to whom you misrepresent your sermon preparation, but plagiarism in preaching is a direct offense to God.

**“Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who steal my words from one another.” (Jeremiah 23:29-30, ESV)**

D.A. Carson summarizes the issue of plagiarism well in “When Has a Preacher Crossed the Line into Plagiarism in His Sermon?” “Taking over another sermon and preaching it as if it were yours is always and unequivocally wrong, and if you do it you should resign or be fired immediately. The wickedness is along at least three axes: (1) You are stealing. (2) You are deceiving the people to whom you are preaching. (3) Perhaps worst, you are not devoting yourself to the study of the Bible to the end that God's truth captures you, molds you, makes you a man of God, and equips you to speak for him.

If preaching is God's truth through human personality (Phillips Brooks), then serving as nothing more than a kind of organic recording device in playback mode does not qualify. ...Taking over the structure, perhaps the outline in exact wording, and other significant chunks, while filling in the rest of the substance yourself, is not quite so grievous but still reprehensible.”

“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” (James 4:17, ESV)

May pastors be men who intentionally encounter God through His Word in sermon preparation and humbly lead His sheep into His presence. Do not steal God's words from one another, lest the Lord come against and discipline you.

Other helpful resources:

- “What is plagiarism?” by Matt Perman
- “On Ghostwriters” by John Piper

“To base the structure of your sermon on someone else's sermon, but to use your own words, is plagiarism. ... The central problem with plagiarism is twofold: (1) it is stealing; and (2) it bears false witness. Obviously, both of these are unacceptable for Bible-believing Christians (see Exodus 20:15; Mark 10:19; Matthew 15:19, etc). Stealing and bearing false witness fail to love your neighbor as yourself (Romans 13:9).” Matt Perman