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Should We Use Someone Else's Sermon?: Preaching In A Cut-and-Paste World



Synopsis

With easy access to sermons on the Internet, plus pressure to deliver the next sermon with little time to prepare, no wonder some pastors have resorted to plagiarizing other people's sermons, passing them off as their own. This growing epidemic has received coverage in the Wall Street Journal, on National Public Radio, and elsewhere. Some pastors have been caught in the act and dismissed from their churches. Is this fair? Is this stealing? How can you recognize it? How can it be prevented? This book not only helps explain the problem, but it also explores the ethical implications and gives advice on how to avoid it or deal with it if the problem surfaces in your church. It includes study questions at the end of chapters and a concluding case study.

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Customer Reviews

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Scott M. Gibson is the Haddon Robinson Professor of Preaching and Director of the ThM. Program in Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is the cofounder of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. He has served as a pastor and is one of the founders of Cornerstone Church Network. He is a graduate of Pennsylvania State University, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Princeton Theological Seminary, Knox College University of Toronto, and the University of Oxford (Dphil) Among his many books are Preaching to a Shifting Culture, Preaching for Special Services, and Planning Your Preaching. Dr. Gibson and his wife Rhonda live in Beverly, Massachusetts.

This book examines the problem of plagiarism in the pulpit in a fair and balanced manner. The author convinced me of the fact that plagiarism destroys the integrity of all who engage in this practice and deludes those who hear his message. Regardless of your personal opinion on the matter, read the book and let it speak for itself. A must read for all who care for the church.

Gibson delves into the murky gray area of sermon stealing. He provides popular and historical thoughts on the subject and then offers his own. You may not agree with all of his perspectives, but it will make you think through the issue. Good for preachers any church person dealing with a pastor who "borrows" material for his messages.

An incredible help to define the ethical boundaries of sermon stealing. A topic too often neglected and one masterfully handled.

Scott Gibson is a preaching professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He writes this book to encourage pastors to prepare their own sermons, to spend time exegeting and studying God's Word for themselves. The first chapter is a brief survey of a number of famous people who have been accused of plagiarism or who have been caught in the act of plagiarizing. He mentions poets, preachers, historians, and public speakers. In the next chapter, Gibson defines plagiarism as stealing other people's material and using it as your own. He says that plagiarizing sermons betrays the trust of the people, who are paying you and depending on you to study the word and bring fresh insight into issues affecting their lives and their parish. Gibson goes to say that pastors who plagiarize do it because they are insecure about their own ability to give home run sermons, or because they are lazy, or because they are depressed (hard to see where Gibson was coming from on this point), or because they feel a need to compete with the megachurch preachers. Gibson says that we should study responsibly, read widely, take notes, apply the text to ourselves, and give

credit when we do use other pastors' insights. No heavy documentation is necessary, simply say "I heard so and so say this," or "It has been said in the past," or "Church Swindoll writes."Ginson also advises pastors to be careful when navigating the world wide web. Pastors should should wisely, and do what is right. When we blow it, we should confess, repent, and get some accountability partners. There is a brief discussion near the end of the book concerning how to properly confront a minister suspecting of sermon stealing. This is a controversial topic, and I think Gibson does a good job with it.

This is a practical source to remind preachers where to draw the line in an ever-increasing pressure to cut and paste.

The author launches the discussion of the "use" of someone's sermon with a clear definition of plagiarism as, "stealing someone else's words, or thoughts and claiming them as your own." This idea is fundamental to everything that follows in this particular discourse regarding the presentation of information particular to a preacher. Clearly, as products of our environment living in what is commonly referred to as the information age, information related to any topic of any given matter is available, ad nauseum. The availability of information with the added ease of "cut-and-paste" technology readily available is a tempting alternative for anyone tasked with the traditional path of academic research. The local pastor is a life-long student of the Word with cloaked expectations that each week he will dazzle the audience with his intellect and unique insight with the subject matter. The added stress of an amplified audience through the medium of radio, internet, and cable only intensify the need for exceptional performance. Although it is somewhat understood that we rarely have anything original to say - this does not give the budding perpetrator license to unconsciously present the work of others as their own. The average attendee on a given Sunday morning is falsely resigned to the idea that the pastor came up with the message content solely of his own effort and intellect. For those of us involved in weekly preparation of sermons, we humbly agree that this is a false perception on the part of the listener. The Bible is the Word of God - not ours. Numerous dictionaries, diglots, commentaries, and outlines are perused as part of our background preparation. At the same time, which of us is inclined to offer such transparency as to divulge our true source with risk to endearing and sustained accolades? Indeed, we need to be prepared to introduce the "three hundred cows" that were milked in order to obtain, confirm, or validate the work of the Spirit in our diligent preparation. Gibson refers to the helpful words of Henry J. Fox, who referred to the product and probability of such work as "unconscious reminiscences." In

this day of celebrity pastors basking in the information age the `perfect storm' gathers to elicit unethical and self-serving behavior in the weekly grind to produce an unparalleled message for the expectant masses in waiting.

This book is very helpful. I wish that the final case study answered the questions with direct Scriptural principles but overall a very good treatment with good reminders for everyone, especially pastors.

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