

## Plagiarism

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by Bill Crews

**“To steal or purloin and pass off as one’s own (the ideas, words, writings, etc. of another).”** Thus does a dictionary define the word “plagiarism,” and the practice is alive and well among men. It is a form of both theft and lying, and it is found among authors and writers, students and teachers, reporters and editors, politicians and preachers. It is not practiced to a large extent, and it is nearly always found out. When it is deliberate, it is reprehensible and inexcusable.

Many of the things that every individual has learned have come from others in the form of spoken words heard or written words read. Our minds are thus influenced and molded, and they retain those things that we believe to be true and accept as good and worthwhile. These, in turn, find expression in our own words, both spoken and written. Very little of what anyone writes is completely original in the truest sense of that word (cf. Eccl. 1:9; 2:12; 3:15; 6:10).

Hardly anyone who writes anything is going to do so without using some of the words and phrases, ideas and themes, points and conclusions of others. But this is a far cry from copying the material of others and giving ourselves credit for it by affixing our own names to it. Sometimes material is copied, and the name of the author is inadvertently left off. Sometimes such “anonymous” material is used, and a name mistakenly affixed to it as the author. Sometimes initials at the end of an article are misconstrued (some writers have the same initials). I have seen articles written by me attributed to others -- knowing how such things can happen and considering it an honest mistake (and flattered that anyone would think my material worth repeating), I usually do nothing about it. But when I see somebody else’s material attributed to me, I always want to write and correct it. But, again, all of this is a far cry from deliberate plagiarism.

This article is simply an appeal to every one who writes, prints, and circulates articles to be more careful and more conscientious. Put your name or initials at either the beginning or the end of your articles -- or otherwise identify yourself as the author (“all articles written by the editor unless otherwise specified”). When using material that you did not write, identify the author; if unknown, say so. But please resist the temptation to claim credit for words written by someone else. If you have ever knowingly and deliberately done so in the past, repent of it and resolve never to repeat it.

When I was a student in college, I lost respect for one of my teachers when I learned that many statements in his own textbook were taken directly from other authors (whose books were in the school library) without putting them in quotation marks and with no credit given to those authors in any fashion. I have a Bible handbook supposedly written by a brother in the Lord (who has published several books), but much of it is taken directly, word for word, from an older and larger Bible handbook without any credit given to the original author. An outlined article by Frank L. Cox was used by a brother in his local church bulletin, copied word for word, with his own name affixed at the end. Recently I received a bulletin with an old Erma Bombeck article (one of her few very serious ones, written more than ten years ago) in it. Credited as the author was a preacher who obviously didn’t write it.

Honest mistakes we all understand, but deliberate plagiarism is inexcusable. Anyone who resorts to it knows exactly what he is doing, and *“my brethren, these things ought not so to be”* (James 4:10).

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