

AI-Written Sermons? This Pastor Calls Them One Thing: 'Wicked'

Pastor John Piper had a strong reaction to pastors who would consider using artificial intelligence chatbots to write their sermons.

In a Feb. 24 episode of "Ask Pastor John," the longtime evangelical minister's question-and-answer podcast, Piper fielded a question from an anonymous pastor wondering if he could, in theory, leverage the power of AI to improve his sermon preparation.

"Pastor John, do you think it's OK to use AI platforms—like Gemini or ChatGPT—to help draft a sermon, youth lesson or Bible study, as long as I review, adjust and ensure it aligns with God's Word?" the pastor asked.

Piper described that human intellect is meant to correspond with affections toward God leading to worship, a reality in which AI by nature cannot participate.

"Worship is not simply right thinking, which computers can do. Worship is right feeling about God," he said. "That's really crucial, unless we begin to think that artificial intelligence can take the place of human beings in accomplishing the divine purpose in the universe. It can't."

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He added that human affections "are fundamentally of another nature than the logical thinking process of the human mind," which is why many are bothered "when a machine attempts to rejoice or delight or be glad or stand in awe or be amazed or

feel grief or fear.”

Despite the technological achievements of tools like ChatGPT, Piper argued that using the chatbot to write “an astonishingly well-written sermon” in mere moments is inappropriate.

He even said that by way of testing, he told ChatGPT to “please write an 800-word answer, in the theology and style of theologian John Piper, to the question, ‘What are the dangers of a pastor using AI?’”

Piper reported that the result was “excellent” and “unbelievable,” with the AI assistant producing a perfect response in five seconds.

But he also called that result “wicked.”

“I’m using a strong word because I feel strongly about this,” he warned. “This goes to the heart of God and the meaning of Christianity and the integrity of the church and her ministers.”

Piper also used the word “appalled” to describe the idea of a pastor using AI to write his sermons, even if he double-checks for theological accuracy after the first draft.

“I know that resources and websites have existed forever to help pastors cut corners: create your outlines, provide illustrations, tell you how to do research and so on,” he noted.

“There’s nothing new about this, and it’s been appalling to me all the way along, for this reason: one of the qualifications for being an elder-pastor-preacher in the Bible is the gift or the ability to teach,” he continued.

The Bible indeed says that ministers should, in the words of Piper, “have the ability, the gift, to read a passage of Scripture, understand the reality it deals with, feel the emotions it is meant to elicit, be able to explain it to others clearly, illustrate and apply it for their edification.”

Piper was right to react strongly in response to this trend.

There are some aspects of human life that simply cannot be replaced with machines.

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The duty of the pastor to labor over the Word of God, to himself be sanctified while wrestling with the passage and preparing his sermon, and applying the truths of the Bible to the flock he knows and loves, cannot and should not be delegated to a soulless algorithm created by an arguably even more soulless Silicon Valley technology conglomerate.

Both the pastor and the parishioners worship together not only during the songs and prayers in a Sunday service, but also during the sermon, jointly setting their minds on truths about God, feeling right affections for God, and reacting in heartfelt worship toward God.

American evangelical churches have sorrowfully been tempted toward pragmatism and vapid seeker sensitivity in recent decades, meaning that pastors using AI to write their sermons are by no means infeasible.

But Jesus himself told Peter, and by extension all pastors, to feed his sheep.

That command was not given to online chatbots.

If pastors prove themselves to be hirelings and shirk that

command, then their sheep will be left starving, and those pastors will find themselves without excuse before the Good Shepherd.

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