

Why Are So Many Ministers in the Closet

I am troubled by the black church's lack of response to the down-low epidemic.

There is no doubt in my mind that it's God's will for homosexuals to be set free from same-sex attraction. I preach Jesus and His saving power, and I know complete healing is possible. But as an African-American pastor, I am deeply troubled by the black church's lack of response to an epidemic called the "down-low," a term used to describe men involved in closet homosexuality, but who pretend to be heterosexual.

In fact, one of the biggest obstacles to reaching gay men with the gospel is the prevalence of "down-low" activity among leaders.

In an online article titled "God, Gays and the Black Church," gay author Herndon L. Davis addresses the issue:

"There have always been whispers, rumors and innuendo concerning alleged private bisexual and homosexual lifestyles of some publicly anointed black church favorites. Yet there is stunning, if not astonishing, silence around them and a deep resistance to openly reprimanding high-profile church figures for their 'homosexual sins.'"

How long can we afford to ignore the elephant in the room? If the covers of mercy were snatched off the black church today, there would be total calamity.

Lawsuit-seeking young men would come out of the woodwork with true stories of abuse and mistrust.

In times past, black Pentecostal churches were known to have "shut-ins," at which older saints would "tarry" with younger

believers. Those times were characterized by the laying on of hands, all-night prayer, fasting, casting out of demons and baptisms in the Holy Spirit. It is sad to say, but these kinds of services are few today.

I believe men desiring to be delivered and set free need an encounter with God. Like Jacob did in the book of Genesis, there must be a time when we confront the issues within our lives.

Jacob realized at Jabbok, after he wrestled with an angel, that God wanted to change not only his name, but also his life. It was at this time that the “supplanter” or “trickster” had an encounter with God and his life was preserved (see Gen. 32:22-30).

I believe we must be willing to offer restoration to people involved in any type of homosexuality. The Bible says God will bring us back to Himself.

“Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope. Even today I declare that I will restore double to you” (Zech. 9:12, NKJV).

I know the down-low lifestyle isn’t unique to the black church, but since my congregation is predominantly African-American, I must challenge the souls that have been entrusted to me. I can only hope that white, Hispanic, Asian and other pastors are confronting immorality from their pulpits.

Increasingly, it is becoming politically incorrect to define homosexual activity as sin. But we cannot afford to be named among the culprits passing out condoms to protect against the consequences of sexual irresponsibility.

As Baltimore pastor Frank Reid says, “To deny a church its right to define the issues of sexual immorality, sexual preference and safe sex for its members in a way that is consistent with the congregation’s understanding of Scripture is a form of spiritual fascism that must not be tolerated.”

Jesus is the hope of the world, and the church must preach His gospel without apology. Restoration is possible. I've seen it. But freedom will come only if the truth is preached.

Michael A. Stevens Sr. is the senior pastor of University City Church of God in Christ in Charlotte, North Carolina. He is the author of the book *Straight Up: The Church's Official Response to Downlow Living* (Creation House). He and his wife, Sharon, have three children, Michael Jr., Matthew Courtlin and Charisma Lindsey.