

NYC Megachurch Pastor Believes Sexuality Shouldn't Be Discussed in Public Forum

While *Duck Dynasty*'s Phil Robertson is currently facing serious backlash in the wake of his comments about homosexuality, a popular New York City pastor has made it clear he will not take a public stance on the controversial issue.

Carl Lentz, who leads megachurch Hillsong NYC, told Katie Couric in an interview on her self-titled show that he did not believe he had a "moral imperative to speak publicly about some of these more controversial issues" because, he says, "We try to be like Jesus."

"Very rarely did Jesus ever talk about morality or social issues," the 35-year-old pastor explained in a pre-recorded interview that aired Thursday. "It was about the deeper things of the heart, and often people want to talk about behavior modification. Our church isn't about that."

"We're about soul transformation," he continues. "You start talking about some of the symptomatic stuff, that's not what we're about. We're about talking to people about their heart and the condition of their soul, and some of that stuff out-works itself. But we're not trying to change anybody because we can't."

When Couric asked Lentz if his church has a position on issues like gay marriage, he said, "We have a stance on love, and everything else, we have conversations."

Asked to explain what he meant, Lentz added, "Often people want you to make these big statements about things, and I don't believe that's fair. I don't think a public forum is

always the best place to talk about something that's so sensitive and so important to so many, because ... there's no discussion there.

"I'd rather have a conversation ... because if I make a statement publicly, there's no discussion, there's no explanation, there's just this comment."

On the same day the interview with Couric aired, Lentz appeared on *HuffPost Live*, where he spoke with host Ahmed Shihab-Eldin about similar issues. When asked if same-sex couples were welcome at Hillsong NYC, the pastor spoke out against those who insist he needs to take a public stance on social issues like homosexuality.

"Some media wants us to use our pulpit to have a soapbox for social issues," he said. "I don't believe that's our job."

He added, "You go look at what Jesus did. He was always talking about the heart of an individual and the soul of a person, not these symptomatic societal problems. People hate that, because a lot of churches are about what they're against. We're about what we're for."

"When it comes to people's sexuality, I don't want to use a public forum to talk about private things. Because how in the world could you have a dialogue? How in the world can I hear your story? How in the world can someone have a question?"

Lentz founded the New York megachurch with Hillsong United frontman Joel Houston, son of Hillsong founders Brian and Bobbie Houston, in 2010. The church, which has a weekly attendance of more than 5,000, is the first U.S. plant of the main church in Sydney, Australia.

Though Hillsong NYC is modern, with a club-like atmosphere and loud music, Lentz told Couric the church does identify as Pentecostal.

“We try to stay away from terms like *denominations* and *Pentecostal* [in America],” he said. “Typically that’s when people think of the weirdest, most awkward stuff in church. Sometimes that’s the label. In our church we do believe in the power of God. We do believe that the gifts that the Bible says you can have are real, but we believe the supernatural doesn’t have to be super spooky.”