

Self-loathing fuels gays' attacks on other gays

It's never easy to come to grips with your shortcomings, mistakes or those characteristics that cause you shame. That may be especially true for those who are struggling with homosexuality.

"It's common to hate in others what you hate in yourself," said Royal Oak author and psychotherapist Joe Kort. "Gay men are reviled so much in this society, they often internalize the hate."

That, said Kort, can turn into internalized homophobia: a desire by gays to persecute



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other gays.

The man in the mirror

Perhaps the most recent example is the case of evangelical minister Ted Haggard, who earlier this month was fired as senior pastor of the 14,000-member New Life

Church in Colorado.

His ouster followed allegations that he had a three-year sexual relationship with a male prostitute with whom he did drugs. Haggard has admitted buying crystal meth but said he threw it away. He has not confessed a homosexual relationship, but admitted to "sexual immorality."

Haggard was a vocal supporter of a constitutional ban on gay marriage in Colorado, and told the New Republic in 1996 that gay pride parades are "like having Murderer's Pride Day."

Haggard was the president of the National Association of Evangelicals, the powerful lobbying organization from which he has resigned. His

former church members have surrounded him with forgiveness, something that is in order from a community of Christians.

But if the allegations of homosexuality prove true, it will be hard to understand why Haggard — and possibly other closeted politicians and religious leaders before him — would so vocally preach intolerance of gays instead of compassion.

The greatest love of all

Mark Bidwell, 47, understands how a gay man could be attracted to an antigay theology.

"I thought that the closer I got to God, those feelings would go away," said Bidwell,

an openly gay minister at the Metropolitan Community Church of Detroit in Ferndale.

"I kept trying to bury those feelings, but I couldn't."

When Bidwell heard of Haggard's fall from grace, he was stung.

"My heart went out to him," said Bidwell, who lost his marriage and was banned from his church when he admitted his homosexuality at age 29. "But I pray that no lives were lost because of the fear engendered by his rhetoric."

Kort agreed. "Studies have shown that some of the worst homophobes are gay," he said, citing studies by the University of Georgia and Northeastern University in Boston.

"They don't want to live that way, so they punish everyone who is."

Kort said that often the urge to persecute gays subsides once a person comes out of the closet. "Once they start experiencing compassion for themselves, then they can start to have compassion for other gays," he said. "Some of the worst bullies have made the best advocates."

Only Haggard knows whether he is indeed gay. But one thing is clear: A fall from grace is a lot shorter when you're preaching compassion rather than condemnation.

Contact **DESIREE COOPER** at 313-222-6625 or dcooper@freepress.com.