

Pastors more like webslinger than Man of Steel

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HOUSTON—Pastors are more like Spider-Man than Superman, Kevin Cosby told participants at the 2010 [African American Fellowship Conference](#) July 13 in Houston.

Cosby, pastor of [St. Stephen Baptist Church](#) in Louisville, Ky., preached from the 14th chapter of Acts. The New Testament passage describes how the Apostle Paul healed a crippled man, and a crowd of pagans treated him as if he and his fellow apostle Barnabas were gods. Paul protested, telling them, “We, too, are only men, human like you.”

Kevin Cosby

“Every preacher ought to profess the Pauline confession,” Cosby said. “It identifies who the pastor is: We are men who have struggles—the same struggles as you, ... the same frailties as you, ... the same human condition as you.

“Paul says, ‘Don’t venerate us. We are the channel of the miracle, not the source of the miracle.’”

Pastors and laypeople alike ought to understand that distinction, which also describes pastors, he noted.

“If the pastor were a ... comic book superhero, he would not be Superman. He’s more like Spider-Man,” Cosby insisted.

“Superman is from another planet, Krypton. Like Spider-Man, the pastor is from here. Superman is alien and has supernatural power. Spider-Man is human, but he acquired power.

“Superman is Clark Kent, who only acts quiet and shy. But Spider-Man is Peter Parker, who actually is shy.”

Similarly, Superman is emotionally detached and remote, because he is alien. But Spider-Man “has all kinds of issues,” such as anger and insecurity, because he is human and endures human feelings, he said. Bullets bounce off Superman, but Spider-Man can be injured and feels pain like everyone else.

So, pastors are much more like the human Spider-Man than the superhuman alien Superman, Cosby stressed.

“It is very important that pastors not forget what Paul said: ‘We are men.’ Just like deacons, just like trustees, just like men in the choir.”

Just like Spider-Man, the pastor is flawed, Cosby acknowledged.

“He might go around acting super, but that’s an illusion. He’s flawed,” he said. “But in spite of being flawed, he’s got to do some supernatural things.”

For example, the pastor must be diligent, he said, explaining: “That means work hard. There might be some lazy pastors around, but I don’t know how a good pastor can be lazy.”

To illustrate, he asked laypeople in the audience to consider how much time is required to craft a sermon.

“The pastor has to deal with the recurring Sabbath,” he said. “That’s like having a major term paper hanging over your head every week. It was easier being a prophet in the Old Testament than a local church pastor. Prophets only spoke when they were inspired. But a pastor has to speak, even when he’s not inspired.”

Pastors also must deal with diversification, Cosby reported, noting that, in

addition to preaching, pastors must handle all the trivia of ministry.

“Jonah got swallowed by a whale. But a pastor gets nibbled to death by minnows,” he said. “A pastor has to shake as many hands as a politician, memorize as many names as a high school principal, administer like a college president, raise money like a banker and be a conflict mediator like a diplomat.”

The pastorate additionally requires discipline, he suggested.

“There is no other profession in which the messenger and the message are inseparable,” he said. “You can be a good mechanic but not a good man, and people still will let you fix their car. The mailman can have affairs with 10 women on his route, but you don’t care as long as he delivers the mail on time.

“But a preacher, he can’t even get angry, mad or frustrated, or else the people will say, ‘He’s supposed to be a preacher.’”

Cosby told a story about a pastor who built a deck in his backyard, and a little neighbor boy came over and watched for hours and hours.

The preacher asked him: “Son, why are you here? Would you like to learn how to be a carpenter?”

“No,” the boy replied. “I want to find out what a preacher says when he hits his hand with a hammer.”

“Can I be honest?” Cosby asked the audience to howls of laughter. “He says the same ‘damn’ thing you say. ... Because he’s Spider-Man and not Superman.”

Pastors should admit they’re merely human not only because they’re flawed, but also because the church is fickle, he said. In the Scripture text, other religious leaders turned the once-adoring crowd against Paul and

Barnabas.

Cosby described similar circumstances today, such as those who preach a compelling health-and-wealth gospel, or visiting preachers who are more eloquent but not substantive.

“Another preacher will come to town, and they’ll turn on you,” he warned of churches.

But although pastors are flawed and congregations are fickle, God alone is faithful, Crosby promised.

He compared the pastor’s ultimate job to the way, night after night for years, late-night television sidekick Ed McMahon introduced “Tonight Show” host Johnny Carson. McMahon stood offstage, behind a curtain, and announced, “Heeeere’s Johnny!”

“All the preacher does is stand behind the curtain and say, ‘Heeeere’s Jesus!’” Crosby said. “He raised the lame man—‘Heeeere’s Jesus!’ He woke me up this morning—‘Heeeere’s Jesus!’ He made a way out of no way—‘Heeeere’s Jesus!’ He put food on my table—‘Heeeere’s Jesus!’”