



Authenticity Under Fire

A packed house at BELIEVES was treated to an open and authentic session on April 14th led by Sonny Perdue, the former governor of Georgia.

“I believe you are here for authenticity,” said Perdue as he kicked off the session focused on the topic of *‘Authenticity Under Fire.’*



“The question is ‘How do we blend our faith into who we are?’” Perdue posed to everyone. “We’ve been trained in the United States to compartmentalize. That is not what I believe we are called to do as Christians.”

Drawing from his own personal experiences, Perdue told the full house that often times when he was governor, the press would ask him what he was most proud of. His answer was the same each time – the impact he could have on others, especially young people.

“When people ask me for political advice, my first counsel is to be authentic ... be who you are. God made us all unique. Embrace it.”

When Perdue ran for governor of Georgia in 2002, he recalled that Georgia had never had a Republican governor or a Republican legislature. He felt no one really expected him to win.

“We weren’t running to win,” said Perdue. “We were running because it is what Mary and I felt we were called to do. We were going to be victorious either way.”

When running for office, and once he was in elected office, the one thing Perdue said the press would regularly pick out was his faith. Why?

“Because it was who I was,” said Perdue.



In true candid fashion, Perdue acknowledged that we often see a lot of people use faith to manipulate. Nevertheless, he ran as a believer.

“In a moment here, I want to challenge you with some questions on how to live out your faith as a believer,” he forewarned.

One question the former governor was asked early on by the press once elected was since he openly campaigned as a person of faith, how would he reconcile that now that he was entering a public role.

“My response was, ‘OK, what do you know about a Christian?’ which would often lead them to say something about loving one another and things like that,” recalled Perdue. “So then I would ask them, ‘what’s wrong with being a governor like that?’”

In office, one thing he did to intentionally create an environment where this could be lived out was in how he and his team would handle tough issues they faced.

“When we would have tough issues to deal with, we would pull together a dozen people in a bullpen session to get a full range of perspectives and thoughts,” said Perdue, “but we’d always end with ‘what’s the right thing to do.’”

“So my first question to challenge you all with this morning is – what is a Christian?”

Everyone paused for a brief moment before Perdue added, “If you are a mom or dad, for example – authenticity is most important. People are watching all the time, especially the eyes of little ones. We are all leaders in our own perspective where people watch what we say and what we do. In the end, the business of leading is influencing.”

Thinking about authenticity in other areas of our society, Perdue added, “I would submit that the church has a bad name sometimes because we haven’t walked with authenticity – showing love and exhibiting servanthood.”

Letting everyone soak for a bit about the importance of authenticity in all areas of life and society, Perdue revisited his earlier remark about how much we have been trained in the United States to compartmentalize.

“How can you separate or compartmentalize faith, public, and family?” he asked. “Somehow, in the United States, we have done a pretty good job of this.”

This led to Perdue’s second question to challenge everyone with.

“2 Corinthians 5:17 says, ‘I am a new creature in Christ,’” Perdue cited. “So what are the challenges you face in living that faith-filled life?”



With that, the former governor invited everyone to go to their tables to discuss the challenges they face in living a faith-filled life – and discuss they did.

At one table, Gerald Zukauckas, Deacon at the Cathedral of Christ the King, shared that he feels temerity and apathy are two challenges that are faced.

“In short, there is a fear to be Christian,” Zukauckas said. “We want to be popular. There is a disconnect.”

Zukauckas went on to say that he admires fundamentalists who wear their faith on their sleeves, and told of an encounter one time when he was working at Emory and was praying during a regular bus ride.

“When I got off the bus one time, someone came up and said, ‘I want to commend you for praying publicly. I am Muslim and we do that regularly.’”

Another attendee, John Monroe, CFO at TradeRocket, told his table that his desire is to live his faith.

“The challenge is, in the workplace my personal desires conflict with being a servant leader. How do I balance housing and clothing a family without letting it become my God?” Monroe shared. “Sometimes I find myself clutching my possessions.”

As the attendees talked at their tables, the former governor spent time walking around to each one and listening to the discussion that was taking place. When he brought everyone back together, he made mention of a comment heard at one particular table.



“Yovany said something meaningful,” stated Perdue. “He said, ‘It’s tiring to live a schizophrenic life.’ This is true, it is very psychologically tiring to do this – and then we end up seeing something snap.”

At another table, Perdue said someone mentioned that people are followed by people who live what they are saying.

“Sometimes people might tell me, ‘I am not a leader’, but I tell them ‘yes you are.’”

Perdue mentioned so often we want to find a reason for the hope that is within is that’s stated in 1 Peter 3.

“As we go through life we all go through valleys. Think about the influence we can each have on a colleague going through the loss of a loved one’s life, or some other tough time. Who will they come to in those moments? They will come to you because they will be drawn to authentic hope and joy.”

Before opening the remainder of the time for any questions, Perdue shared one other reflection.

“In America, our goal of independence has gone to an extreme. We want to be in charge. But guess what? We’re not. It’s not about us, it’s about Him.”

He added, “We don’t get an opportunity to share our faith, if we haven’t lived our faith. Once others have seen it lived, they’ll want it.”

And with that, Perdue invited more questions. Yovany Jerez, Corporate Training Manager at AT&T, started things off by asking the former governor what one or two practical techniques are that he would recommend to gain consensus among adults.

“As humans, we are inherently selfish,” Perdue responded. “That’s sin nature. In America, we’ve been trained to think not only that I want to win, but I want you to lose. Consensus is about seeing how we can both gain. In politics, I came to understand there are convictions and preferences. On convictions I won’t be moved, on preferences I can let that go.”

Bob Lyford, insurance agent at East Mountain Insurors, followed by asking how Perdue handles the polarization of politics.

“I think you personalize it,” answered Perdue. “In politics, we have such a win-lose mentality, we have left out America. E Pluribus Unum – out of many, One.”

As a personal challenge, he recommended if there is someone we just don’t get along with – take a moment to get to know them.

“Get to know them,” Perdue emphasized again. “Generally, we can’t solve politics – from this room or anywhere. We move things one by one. I hate to be trite, but it does go back to WWJD.”

At an even deeper level than politics, Perdue honed in again on the importance of how we treat individuals one by one.

“That’s the revival – 1-by-1,” he said. “The most impactful thing is to show people what life’s all about. Living it. We can do that with customers, family, anyone.”

There was time for one last question before the time came to a close, and Patrick Moore, Managing Partner at Set Consulting, got in the last one.

“It’s always easier to see God in life looking backwards. How have you discerned God’s voice in moments in life in the present moment?” Moore asked.

“You’ve got a black book on the table there (referring to a Bible in front of Moore). What does the inscription say?” Perdue asked.

Moore opened the Bible, and read the inscription ...

Patrick,

I could not give you a gift that means more to me than this Book. Neither it nor its Author have ever failed me.

With gratitude,

Sonny Perdue

Micah 6:8

“There is no need to pray about it when there’s clear direction from God,” said Perdue. “It gets back to conviction versus preference. Hearing and listening is what it’s all about. It’s not about us. It’s about Him. It’s about being led by the Holy Spirit.”

After which, Bob Lyford, briefly followed by asking Perdue, “Do you have any aspirations to run for President?” prompting everyone to laugh heartily as the session came to an end.

