

Spiritual Warfare Author Questions How We Do Church

Novelist Frank Peretti may be known for his tales of spiritual warfare, but the *New York Times* best-seller delivered a lighter rhetoric to the crowd at Liberty University Convocation on Monday, using a surprising amount of energy, humor and silly voices to ignite conversation about the state of today's church.

Peretti's message unofficially kicked off Church Planting Emphasis Week at Liberty.

Johnnie Moore, Liberty's vice president for executive projects who manages Convocation, said Peretti did not even know it was Church Planting Week but his message fit perfectly with the theme and was a great way to get things started.

"It is amazing the way the **Holy Spirit** works," Moore said.

Peretti said the church has become more concerned with "the enterprise, with all the organization, all the customers and the executives and the technology, that we don't have time to be focused on Jesus, really focused on Jesus."

Peretti explained he grew up in the church and has seen how distractions come between people and God. He warned the students to be cautious of three things: task orientation, customer expectations and technology.

Exploring his first warning, Peretti shared how the church in today's culture has become viewed as an enterprise, laden with tasks. From whiteboards to worship teams, Sunday school to women's tea, church is run like a business with members as its clients, he said.

He told a story about a ministry for inner-city youth in

Nashville, Tenn., that was asked by some potential supporters what “the return” would be on their “investment.”

“There is a funny little thing going on in the church where the gospel becomes kind of an ‘agenda,’” Peretti said. “We become so obsessed with getting people saved and fulfilling the mission that we don’t care about the people.”

With that he asked if it is about the numbers or about the people and their relationship with Jesus.

Once people have a relationship with Jesus, Peretti explained they are often weighed down with a “cloud of shame” because they fail to live up to “customer expectations,” the differing church sub-cultures that dictate how one is supposed to act in order to be called a Christian.

“We pride ourselves in being under grace, not under the law, and yet we lift up our own laws,” he said.

Peretti said rather than shame people for not meeting expectations, the church should “feed them Jesus,” because no one can live up to all the standards but Jesus transforms hearts and spurs real growth.

He warned that the church has become so immersed in buildings, staff and budgets that we don’t know any other way to do it and added that technology may be used by people, but it also uses people.

He likened today’s church to the moneychangers in the temple who Jesus drove out with a whip because they had turned the Lord’s house into a den of thieves. Today, Peretti said, Jesus likely would just go into the basement and flip the breaker. Jesus cleansed the temple because people added so much to it, distorting its purpose.

“We Christians tend to look at our whole faith as what happens within the church building,” Peretti said. “Knock down the

walls of the church building, take a look outside, all the rest of all creation belongs to the word of God, all of it is His.”

The biggest mistake we can make is telling Him the things that we do will define our walk with Him, Peretti said, concluding by asking what we would do if the power went out in our church.

After convocation Peretti interacted with students and signed copies of his books, including his latest work, *Illusion*.

Peretti has been called “America’s hottest Christian novelist.” Though he is best known for his adrenaline-laced supernatural thrillers, Peretti has written 19 books of various sizes for differing audiences, including a best-selling children’s adventure series, and has sold more than 15 million copies worldwide.