

# Vestal focuses on God in final sermon as CBF leader

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FORT WORTH—There were plenty of big developments for Daniel Vestal to address in his final sermon at the [Cooperative Baptist Fellowship](#) general assembly, including approval of the 2012 Task Force report, a distinctive CBF identity for congregations that desire it and a \$12.4 million budget.



Daniel Vestal drew on Ephesians 3:20-21 in a message to the CBF General Assembly about glorifying God in an age of spiritual doubt.

But Vestal, CBF's outgoing executive coordinator, preached on none of that. Instead, he drew from Ephesians 3:20-21 a message about glorifying God in an age of spiritual doubt.

"There is among many of us a crisis of belief," he told the general assembly

at the Fort Worth Convention Center. "It's what I call a loss of theological and spiritual nerve."

Vestal concluded his 15-year service to the Atlanta-based Fellowship after two days of business that launched the search for his replacement and the organizational restructuring outlined in the 2012 Task Force report.

The report also suggested congregations publically affirm their CBF affiliation by sending a letter detailing the ways they cooperate with the organization. The wording of that section was amended to clarify such letters are not a requirement for membership.

Vestal only lightly brushed on these issues by reminding members why CBF exists.

"We exist as a fellowship to serve and extend the life of churches—not to ask churches to extend our life," he said.

Vestal noted he learned that lesson many times over his career from "God's surprises."

He pointed to the time in 1976 when his children became aware his name was listed on the church sign as pastor and asked him who is the boss of the church. He answered "Jesus." They were silent a moment before asking, "Who's really the boss?"

These surprises always "showed me how little I know" about Baptist life, CBF and faith, he added.

But few of Vestal's listeners expressed surprised he delivered an old-fashioned sermon instead one trying to spin CBF's future.

"What we heard tonight is really Daniel's heart," said Michael Smith, senior pastor of Central Baptist Church of Fountain City in Knoxville, Tenn., and a longtime friend of Vestal's.

It wasn't a typical farewell speech, but added he would have been surprised had Vestal given one, Smith said. Vestal is known for being Christ-centered and deflecting attention away from himself, he added.

Even so, Task Force Co-chairman David Hull said he felt like Vestal offered CBF leaders direction and motivation in the work that lies ahead.

"He called us to realize what is more important: how God can do much more than we can ever imagine or dream," said Hull, pastor of First Baptist Church of Hunstville, Ala.