



Sermon – April 25, 2021
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 2:16 – 19

Romans 14:16 - 19

Well good morning, Central family. How are you doing this morning? Well, I didn't hear you. So hopefully you're awake. But I'm glad you're here today. This is a beautiful day, isn't it? Driving in, seeing the sunshine, getting an opportunity to join with our brothers and sisters in Christ in worshipping the Lord. Today is the day, just rejoice that God is on the throne and we can lean on Him, we can turn to Him, He is our rock, our fortress, our refuge. I want you to hear a very familiar passage out of the book of Jeremiah this morning. As you come into worship and find a place, hear these words from the Lord. Verse 11 says, Jeremiah 29:

¹¹For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹²Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will hear you. ¹³You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart.

This morning, the choir wants to sing over you today a song that says, "All my hope is in Jesus." And as they sing over you, will you seek the Lord? Will you turn your face toward Him and let's begin our worship together?

Hey, Central family, welcome to worship this morning. And if you're a guest with us, welcome home. We'd love for you to fill out one of the Connect Cards in the seat back in front of you, bring it out front to our Welcome Desk to get a gift after the service. And if you are thinking about stepping into membership, whether you're new here or been here for some time, I just want to encourage you to take that step today during our response time in preparation for next week's New Member Workshop. We're excited to see the Lord continuing to add to our numbers. I'm up here for a special moment this morning. I want to invite someone to the stage named Kelsie Vier. If Kelsie can start making her way up here. If you recall, a few weeks ago, Annalee Anderson who's been serving for years as our Special Needs Director was called away from Central to lead a ministry up in the Metroplex. And what we told you then is that we were trusting God would raise up somebody who could serve for us in an interim role as we prayed about where the Lord was taking us next as a church. And that's why I want to introduce you to

Kelsie. And Kelsie is a recent graduate from A&M. She's been a faithful volunteer in our Special Needs Ministry for quite some time. And the Lord has provided her for us for this season to serve in this way. So I wanted you to see her so you could recognize her, know her, so that we can invest in our ministry in the days ahead. Aren't you excited about that? And I also want us to take a moment right now to pray for her, to pray for our Special Needs Ministry in this time. So if you'll go to the Lord with me.

Father, we're coming to You with grateful hearts. That You have provided from our own for this need, Lord. And we pray for our children and our adults with special needs here that You would continue to enable us to show them the love of Christ. That we might be a respite and an encouragement to their families. That You would raise up Kelsie and our entire special needs team to continue to walk faithfully in all that God has called us to by the power of Your Spirit. And we ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.

Amen.

Church family, as we continue in worship, hear these words from Psalm 145. It says:

⁸The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ⁹The Lord is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made. ¹⁰All Your works shall give thanks to You, O Lord, and Your saints shall bless You! ¹¹They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom and tell of Your power, ¹²to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of Your Kingdom. ¹³Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations. [The Lord is faithful in all His words and He is kind in all His works.]

Church family, the Lord and Lord alone is worthy of our worship this morning. He's faithful in His words. He is kind in His works. So let's stand together and continue to praise Him this morning.

There is no one like Jesus. Amen? Now we all know this great hymn. So I invite you to put your hands together. Let's lift it to the Lord. He's our God. He's our help in ages past. And He's our hope for all the years to come. Congregation, left lift it as a body this morning. O God.

God, You're worthy. God, hear our hearts this morning. We need You, God. We're desperate for You. We need Your Spirit.

O Father, to be overwhelmed by Your presence. How amazing that experience. Father, not to be satisfied with yesterday's power or yesterday's blessings or yesterday's call. But today, God, to want a fresh touch from You, to seek You with all our hearts, soul, mind, strength. And Father, not just to come and go through some motions, sing some songs, hear a message, but to truly go deeper with You. To lean more of ourselves on You each and every day. To trust You more. God, help us recognize the things in our life that we lean on more than You, that we trust more than You. Help us repent of those things. And Father, to trust that all our hope is in You alone. You will never fail us. So God in these moments, tune our hearts to hear Your voice. In Jesus name. Amen.

As you grab your seats, let's open our Bibles together. We're going to be back in the book of Colossians, chapter 2, verse 16. We're going to pick back up on our series that we were doing before our Easter series here at Central. And it feels a little bit like coming home after a long road trip. You know, you go out, you enjoy some spaces, but it's not the same when you're not sleeping in your own bed. You're not in your own circumstances. It's like we're coming back home here to the book of Colossians. And what Paul is going to do is he's going to bring us to the heart of the issue that's caused him to write. There are false teachers in the midst of the church that need to be confronted. But in order to see what he's going to do with unpacking this false teaching, we need to remember where we've come from.

Think about this book of Colossians. Throughout the entire first chapter and a half that we've been working through, what Paul has done is exalted Jesus Christ. He's focusing on the supremacy of Christ and what that means for our lives. He calls us to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. He calls us to be knit together in love and he's doing it under the backdrop of what's happening right there in their midst. These false teachers have come in and they're willing to say that Jesus is essential, but that He's not enough. That more needs to happen if your faith is going to be true. If it's going to be genuine. We've heard Paul confronting these false teachings, but now this morning we're going to get ourselves the clearest picture yet from Colossians about what precisely it was that they were teaching and claiming that were leading people astray within the church. Follow along with me here. Let's look at Colossians 2 beginning in verse 16. We'll read down to verse 19.

16Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. 18Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism or worship of angel, going on in details about visions, puffed up with reason by his sensuous mind, 19and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

Let's pray together.

Father, that's the desire of our hearts this morning. We want to grow with a growth that can only come from You. And I'm asking now in this moment, Lord, that You would clear the distractions, that You would clear the ways that we feel disqualified. And instead renew us by Your grace, renew us by Your Spirit so that we might walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. And we ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.

Well, there's a lot of experiences over the last year we haven't been able to enjoy due to COVID. And in church life, one of those has been the church potluck. You remember what those were like back in the days. As a matter of fact, our life group after the service today is going to be having our first potluck together. And unless, in case your potluck skills are a little bit rusty, let me give you some pastor pro-tips for the next time the potluck comes up. You see, when I go to a potluck, before I go through the line, I'm always cruising the options. You don't want to commit early only to realize there was something better later on. You also want to crowd-source. You want to listen into, "Oh, Betty brought her famous blueberry cobbler." Alright, I know what I'm having for dessert. Or you know what other people are known for. You want to get a feel for that. But then it's also important not to over-commit right out of the gate. You go

through that line, you take small portions of the things that have potential and then you taste them. Now you know what's good and when you go back for seconds you can double-down on the good stuff. But the most important thing about any potluck is the dessert, right? And when you come to that dessert, there's always a danger that's there. Because they all have the appearance of looking incredible. And you know the kids are going to come through first and after they touch every cookie that's on the tray, they're going to take the biggest one and move on. But you've got an important decision to make. You can only probably have one of these things. What's it going to be? And what you don't know is you see it on the basis of its appearance, but you don't know if it's got all the right ingredients in the right mix. You see, when it comes to dessert, it can be destroyed in any number of ways. It can be destroyed by removing some of the ingredients. Maybe a cook forgot to put something in there. Or maybe they replace an ingredient, and no knock to those of you that are gluten free. But when you see that marker, you're just going to pass right over it. Because they've replaced the good stuff with the substitute. But one of the deepest risks for any good dessert is when they add to the dessert. Those brownies don't need nuts. Let's be honest. When you add, you're taking away. And in the same way there are dangers when it comes to dessert, there can be dangers when it comes to doctrine.

That's what Paul is going to show us this morning. That these false teachers, those that lead us astray from the gospel, can do it any number of ways. They can remove from the gospel by denying the essential aspects of the faith. They can replace aspects of the gospel by substituting shadows for reality. Or as Paul is going to show us this morning, they can add to the gospel. They can take it in its pure form and destroy it by adding to it. And what I want you to notice as we work our way through this passage is that's exactly what we see happening in the life of the Colossian church. Paul warns us about false teaching. And what he's going to do this morning is Paul is going to counter the false teachers by revealing the two keys to true Christianity. And I want you to notice the first one back in verses 16 and 17. Paul begins by showing us that true Christianity seeks the substance over the shadows. So notice what's happening there, he tell us that our central focus of our spiritual lives should not be on our rituals for Christ, but our relationship with Christ. And he does that building off of what he's already said. Do you see verse 16 begins with the word therefore? Paul is picking up on what he has just said in verses 13 through 15 and showing us what that means for us. And don't forget what he says there. He speaks about what happens on Good Friday and Easter. Of the way that in Christ, God has paid the debt we owed. He has taken that debt away and nailed it to the cross. He speaks of the way that He has defeated the rulers and authorities, He has triumphed over them in His resurrection victory. And in light of these realities, Paul calls us to seek the substance over the shadows. In other words, because Jesus has faced the judgment of the cross, one of the things he is telling us is that we should let no one judge us. We've already been through that experience of judgment. Look at what he says there. Let no one pass judgment, in verse 16. He speaks of that idea of judging or determining, even condemning. It's the exact same word as in one of the most familiar verses in the Bible in Matthew 7:1. Judge not that you be not judged. He is speaking there, let no one judge you.

And in the American society right now, we have been fixated on judgment this week. As you know, the trial for George Floyd, George Floyd, happened up in Minneapolis this week. And clear evidence led to a clear verdict in that result. But when Paul speaks here of these false teachers, of the way that they judge you, it's a different picture. They are not only prosecutor,

but judge. There is condemnation. There is accusation. And in this way, they are reflecting the reality of their father, the devil. Who seeks to accuse. Who seeks to destroy. And what is it that they are using as their evidence for judgment? Well, you're going to that there in verse 16. There are two key things; both their preferences and their practices.

Look at those preferences first. He speaks there about how they are judging you in questions of food and drink. In other words, these false teachers are appealing to the Old Testament law. These practices that were given about what to eat, what to drink for the people of God and they are holding them out. False teachers holding false standards about false things that should divide us and doing it in such a way that it brings judgment upon people. They're speaking there about these common things like food and drink. But in addition to those references, they're also judging people on the basis of their practices. Look at how it says it there in verse 16; with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. He is speaking there about all of these religious rituals. Those practices that the people of God were called to carry out. You see these develop in a place like Leviticus 23 where it speaks about the Passover and the Feast of Booths and the Feast of Weeks. There are these different times where the people of God were intended to gather together. And the judgment is coming because others in the Colossian church are not holding it to the same standard as these false teachers demand. Notice what's going on here. These are two of the primary things that set the Jewish people apart. Their diets and their dates. Their food and their festivals. And those become a point of division. A point of separation. A point of judgment. There's a danger that can come up in any gathering of the people of God where our preferences and our practices can divide us. Where we measure things by our standard of what it ought to be. What the music should sound like. What the preaching should be like. What the programs should offer. What it should feel like in the church. And we see things through the lens of our preferences and practices in a way that can overflow in judgment towards others. Paul tells the Colossian church, it ought not be that way. That instead, we are not called to seek the shadows, but the substance. And that's what is happening here. In verse 17 we're going to see that these preferences and practices are not bringing the people of God together, but dividing them because it's causing them to seek the shadows over the substance. Look at how he says it there. These are a shadow of the things to come. Now shadow is there. It's reality. It's not irrelevant. But what he is saying is when compared to the substance, the shadow is insignificant. They're a reflection of what ultimately matters. See, these foods and festivals are not the only shadows that Paul speaks of in this book. We've seen from the very beginning that he picks up on shadows cast in the Old Testament that find their fulfilment in the substance of Jesus Christ. We think about the way he speaks of the Exodus as a shadow of the substance of God's deliverance. We see him speak of the way that the shadow of the promised land points ahead to the substance of our inheritance in Christ. We see the way he speaks about how the shadow of circumcision points ahead to the substance of Christ's death. And right here he is speaking of these shadows. The way that they signal the substance of Jesus. Last night, number of us gathered out at the campfire for one of our monthly men's campfires. And if you're anything like me, you enjoy that campfire setting; it's peaceful, it's distinct, it helps you get separation from the world around you. But I noticed as the night was finishing and as I was walking away, when I took one more look back at the campfire, the first seemed small, yet the shadows seemed large. They were out of proportion to one another because that, the light that comes from that fire shines forth in a way where it can often have the appearance of magnifying the shadows and their significance. The shadows are always moving. They're often seeming larger than the substance the light that's creating them. And Paul is warning us of the same danger in the

church. That the things that divide us can seem more significant than the things that unite us. And he's calling us to set aside the shadows for the substance. To recognize that even though there are these things that seem significant, they are nothing in comparison to what God has done for us in Christ. That's why Paul elsewhere in Romans 14 says this, you'll see it up on the screen. He speaks there in Romans 14, verses 16 through 19, like this:

¹⁶So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Paul is reminding us here that the kingdom of God is not about food and drink. That's what he's speaking about here in Colossians 2. That these false teachers are saying that's exactly what it's about. But instead, he says it's about righteousness and joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. The shadows can divide, the substance unites. You can recognize false teaching when it leads us astray rather than bring us together. That's exactly why over the course of this next month as we come into May, we are launching this month-long focus on prayer. We introduced it last week in our message on prayer out of Luke 19. That's why we have those packets for you in the back on your way out so that you can have those tools for yourself and for your home. But one of the things I'm most excited about with our prayer focus in May is we've got the chance for you text the word prayer into our text line so that every morning you're going to wake up with a prayer text prompt that's going to set the day, set the course, for how you start your day. Because I don't know if you're anything like me, but when I wake up, it's not always bright and sunshine in my heart. There's darkness. The shadows seem deep. And what we want for you is the first time you pick up that phone to be prompted in prayer; to be prompted to focus on the substance and not the shadows. To be united together by what God has put at the center of our faith, rather than divided by the things that instead are secondary. You see, Paul warns us here of the danger of seeking the shadow over the substance.

But he doesn't stop in verse 17. He goes on to speak further about these false teachers beginning in verse 18. And what you're going to see is that there is a second mark of true Christianity that he unpacks for us. He tells us that true Christianity holds fast to Jesus instead of our experiences. Look at the way he says it there. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels. Going on in details about visions, puffed up without reason by a sensuous mind and not holding fast to the head from whom the whole body nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments grows with the growth that is from God. Look at what Paul's unpacking. He says that true Christianity doesn't just elevate the substance over the shadows, it also holds fast to Jesus over our experiences. That's why Paul moves from the warning, let no one judge you, to now look at how verse 18 starts. Another warning. Let no one disqualify you. This is the only time this word disqualify is used in this way in the New Testament. And it has this picture of condemnation, of a ruling against. It's like the judge in a contest who disqualifies you from the race. And Paul is warning us that when false teachers come, they're going to seek us to distract us from holding onto Christ and instead to hold onto our experiences. And that if we fall short of the experiences that they say are markers of genuine faith, then we stand disqualified.

Now as you know, in just a couple of months, the summer Olympics will finally happen, we hope. And one of the things that happens each year is there are qualified competitors who end

up being disqualified from the competition that they're in. As a matter of fact, if you rewind the clock to the London Olympics in 2012, there were over 130 athletes who competed that were later disqualified for the use of performance enhancing drugs, performance enhancing drugs. They're trying to get that edge. They're trying to get the advantage. The one that baffled me the most is one of the people disqualified from a prior Olympics was an equestrian rider. She's riding on a horse and yet she, herself, not the horse, was caught using performance enhancing drugs. What's the performance she's enhancing there? I don't understand that one. But there is someone who is in the race that because of their failures are now disqualified. Paul is telling these Colossian believers that there are people in the church who are going to seek to do the same thing to you. And the way that the false teachers do it is they feed us lies. Lies that have the appearance of truth that actually lead to destruction. And I want you to see three of those lies right here in verses 18 and 19. The first lie is that I am what I do. The first lie is that I am what I do. So notice how he says it there. Insisting on asceticism and the worship of angels. Now you may not be familiar with that word, asceticism, but it is the idea of fasting or harsh treatment of your body, extreme discipline for the purpose of rigorous efforts. That's the image that's there. He says, there are some who practice in that way. There are others who are worshiping the angels. So in that culture, that might have showed up through a fasting or a harsh treatment of the body. Or if you were to go back into Colossians, in that time period, you would see in that region that there were some who practiced religion who would depend on angels. They would seek them out for protection from evil rather than looking to God Himself. And he is warning us that when you take these things and you focus on what you do over what God has done in Christ, that can lead you astray. Now let's be clear. There is nothing wrong with recognizing that God works through angels. There is nothing wrong with recognizing that part of the Christian life is to walk out our faith in an obedience, even to the point of picking up and carrying our own cross. The danger that Paul is speaking of here is when we begin to find our identity in what we do. What a temptation for us today, isn't it? That we can seek the approval of God through our works rather than in the finished work of Jesus. You see these false teachers were telling them that Jesus was essential and yet not enough. That instead, they needed to celebrate, worship and depend on these false angels, these angels. They needed to celebrate and depend on their works. There is this temptation for each one of us in every generation to seek to prove ourselves to God on the basis of what we've done. And Paul speaks here to this lie, this deception, this way that the false teachers lead us astray. And he does it in a way that brings a warning to us that your spiritual health is not seen in what you do for God. Your spiritual health at its foundation is seen in what you believe about God. And when you follow Christ in salvation, it will overflow in living in a way that pleases God. Where you will do things for Him, not in order to earn His favor, but because you've already received that favor in Christ. He warns us about the danger of an identity in which I am what I do.

But notice how he goes on there later in the verse. He, second, tells us that there is a lie that I am what I experience. So he says it there, going on in detail about visions. How did this work back in that day and age? Well, there were mystery cults in that region near Colossae. Where in order to be initiated, in order to become part of it, you would go through severe treatment of the body and then you would enter into the temple of that god and your true religious began when you encountered this false god through the experience of a vision. Where now your personal experience defines who you are in relation to the god that you're seeking to worship. In other words, your experience of God, your relationship with God, becomes based on personal experience rather than objective truth. Rather than on what has been made manifest for all

people at all times. And what happens here in this time period is that when the false teachers speak about these visions, they're going on in details about the significance of them, what's happening in that moment is they are elevating experience over the reality of the gospel. Unless you have experienced these things, unless you have tasted of these deeper things; then you don't know God. It may not show up in that same way today, but we also have that same pull, even in 21st century America. Where we can jump from experience to experience in life. Whether that's someone chasing the next promotion or the next vacation or the next pleasure through a screen, whatever it might be. Or even in the church where we move from Bible study to prayer meeting to service project to mission trip. From one thing to the next because unless I'm going deeper in my experiences, then it may mean that I am not fulfilling all that God has called us to. Do we want to study the Bible? Yes. Do we want to pray? Yes. Do we want to serve God? Yes. But the problem with these false teachers, is that the experiences define their identity. They weren't an expression of their identity in Christ. But this is only one of the problems that he lays out here. You're going to see the final one there in verse 18 when he moves to tell us one that particularly hits close to home today.

When he says there is a lie fed to us from false teachers that I am what I feel. And you'll see it there in verse 18. He says these false teachers are puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind. Now that word, puffed up, is giving us this mental picture of this pride, this arrogance, this appearance of significance. And in the original language it captures the word picture of the use of a bellows. Do you know what a bellows is? It's that thing that can help to fuel a fire. It helps to pump air into it. It fills up with that air. It puffs up in order to be pressed out, to fuel the fire. He says, in the same way these men, these false teachers are puffed up in their significance. In other words, their identity is bound up in how they feel about their performance for God. To them it is pride that is, as he says there, without reason on the basis of their fleshly mind. And what's interesting is he goes in both directions. At the beginning he is warning us of a false humility that shows up in intense religious practices that are of no value and asceticism. Now he warns us of a false pride that is puffed up without reason, not on any basis. And why would these false teachers be puffed up? Why would these false teachers be puffed up? Why would they be driven by these feelings of spiritual pride? Well, when they look at those that are around them, there's a sense of superiority on the basis of what they do. On the basis of what they experience. It inflates their view of themselves instead of giving them a right view of God. Let me tell you something. There is an ongoing danger of finding your identity in your feelings. Sometimes that can be dangerous when we have the highest highs that show up in a pride like he speaks of here. Sometimes that can show up in the lowest of lows when we are in despair or even depression and our feelings of define us. You know what seems like the defining feeling of 2021 is right now? It's what one scholar I read about this week called languishing. And here's how he described languishing. Languishing is a sense of stagnation and emptiness. It feels as if you're muddling through your days looking at your life through a foggy windshield. It's the most dominant emotion of 2021. Part of the danger is that when you're languishing, you might not notice the dulling of delight or the dwindling of drive. You don't catch yourself slipping slowly into solitude because you're indifferent to your indifference. Has anybody been there this year? Where that feeling of languishing begins to define you? It shapes you. It dulls you to the things around you. Paul gives us this warning that if we are seeking Christ in true Christianity, it's not our feelings that should define us. That instead it is our faith that should define us. And that's why he goes on here in this passage to say, these are the three lies that they will tell you that you must believe in order to be following God. But what they're missing in the midst of their lies is the fundamental truth that

Paul lays out at the end of this passage. That what happens is, when you follow the lies of false teachers, you miss the truth that Paul lays out here last. He says, if we want to follow God in true Christianity, then we need to hold fast to Jesus and not our experiences. That's why verse 19 tell us they are not holding fast to the Head. That word holding fast means to take control of or to seize. It's the same word used in the gospel accounts that when the Roman soldiers show up with Judas to arrest Jesus, it uses this word to describe that arrest, that capture. He says, they are not holding fast to the Head, but instead, we must do that if we want to walk in Christ. We must cling to Him. Seize Him. Arrest Him. Depend on Him. That's the picture that Paul is laying out for us. And when that happens, it changes our experience as believers and as a church. I want Central to be known as the kind of church that clings to Christ who is the head of the body. And if that's going to be the case, look at what's going to happen. When we hold fast to Jesus, Paul tells us that several things happen there. He tells us first that when we hold fast to Jesus together, we unite together. That's why he says there, from whom the whole body nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments. He speaks there of all the people of God, the whole body of Christ, the way that we're nourished and knit together. That God supplies and sustains us. He feeds and He fixes. He gives us all that we need to stand united, to be brought together as one through the joints and ligaments that hold the body together. When you look around a church like this, some of those joins, some of those ligaments that help us hold ourselves together, happen in the weekly rhythms of our church. So each Sunday when we gather to worship the Lord, He is knitting our hearts together in love. Each Sunday when you gather with your life group for fellowship and for Bible study, He is knitting our hearts together in love. Each week when we serve our community, share the gospel with our community, pray on behalf of our community, He is binding us together, nourishing us and knitting us together by the power that only He will provide by His Spirit. That's why we are committed to this month of prayer coming up in May. There is no better way to hold fast to Jesus together than to pray together. That's why we're asking you to walk this journey with us. That's why I can't wait for our first Wednesday night in May when we're going to come together during our normal 6:00 P.M. time. But instead of doing our weekly equip class, we're going to be engaging in the national day of prayer. And we're going to spend time walking around this church praying for our church, for our community, for our nation. We're going to gather in this room to cry out to God to meet our needs and to seek His face through prayer. And the reason we're doing that is because of what Paul says here. That the church that holds fast to Jesus together will be united together.

Notice how he finishes this text. He says, when we hold fast to Jesus together, it doesn't just unite us together. He also shows us that we grow together. That's why he says there that what happens is when we hold fast, we grow with a growth that is from God. It's a growth that we can't produce on our own. It's a growth that we can't produce through our practices, through what we do, through what we experience, through how we feel. It comes only by the work of the Spirit. That God waters the seed of the gospel. Sets down roots of faith in our hearts. And helps us to grow as brothers and sisters in Christ so that we might be nourished and knit together to fill up all that is lacking in our lives by the power of His Spirit. There's a lady named Bianca up in Waco back a few months ago who was coming off the night shift. She's been working hard, she was coming home to go to bed, and she'd been trying to keep her distance from her family over that period of time because they had just come down with COVID. She was the last one standing. So she went into her room. She attempted to head off to sleep. And as she was laying in her bed, began to smell something unusual. And as she began to think about more what it was, she could tell it smelled as if something was burning. And it turned out, she was the first one to recognize that

there was a fire that had caught in the electrical wires in her home. So she immediately sprung up, recognizing the danger, ready to flee from the home in order to protect herself, in order to save herself. And then it dawned on her. She may be the only one in that home who even knows there is a fire because everyone else that was there had lost their sense of smell because of COVID. And so at great risk to herself, she went through the rest of the house in order to wake up and explain what was happening to those that were there who couldn't sense the danger themselves. And she helped to bring them out of that danger and to move them into the outdoors to a safe place of rescue. When Paul speaks here of the danger of false teaching, of the risk that is all around us as we seek to live out our faith, he is giving us a similar calling. That those of us who have been awakened to the gospel, who have a sense for what God is doing, who have a sense for the danger around us, are called to a particular mission. To seek and to rescue those that are lost by the power of the Spirit. Those that cannot anticipate or see the danger that is around them. We are to run to them in order to share the good news of the gospel with them so that they may experience the marks of true Christianity that Paul has spoken about to us today. That's our mission, Central. And the way that we do it is by being united and growing by holding fast to our Head, Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together.

Father, there are so many things that seek to pull us away from You, to distract us, to lead us astray, cause us to take our eyes off Jesus, Lord. And I'm asking in this moment that You will fix our eyes on Him. That You will set us free from the lies that satan plants in our heart that might lead us astray from Your Gospel. Lord, and I pray for our church that as Your Spirit works in our midst that You would unite us together, You would grow us together, that You would use this next month as we pour ourselves out to You in prayer together as a body, strengthen our faith, fuel our hunger for You, and to equip us to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. We may not see false teachers that show up as clearly as they did in Paul's day, but we know that the lies of the enemy are always lurking around us and we are pleading with You by the power of Your Spirit to help us stand firm against them. We ask all these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, in just a moment we're going to stand and sing in response to these realities. We're going to celebrate the true gospel that we have in Jesus. And as we do that, I want you to know that we'll have ministers here at the front that can walk you through what it looks like to follow Jesus in salvation or to step into membership here at our church, or even to pray for you as you battle these lies that satan seeks to plant in our hearts. In whatever way God is leading you in this time, let's stand together and respond as the Spirit leads us in this moment.

Well, as we move to a close this morning, we've had a number responding during this response time. I want to introduce them to you now. So several have come forward for membership. So let me ask y'all to stand up as I read your names and then we'll welcome them all at once at the end. Brian Richardson. Spencer and Jen Sterritt. Michael and Diane Seabolt. Caroline Curry and Ashley Nguyen are all ready to start the membership process. Will you let them know you're excited about that? In addition to that, we have one coming forward this morning to let you know he met Jesus two week ago and he wants to be baptized. This is Robert Phillips. If you'll stand up so we can tell you how excited we are for you, buddy.

As we wrap today, I want to remind you next week's our New Member Workshop where we're going to talk about being united together at lunchtime. And then a few hours later we're going to

get together for our church-wide dodgeball tournament and throw dangerous objects at each other. Because that's what people who are united do. Now I hope you'll come and play with me, just take it easy on your pastor when we're out there on the court. And then as we look ahead into May, I want to encourage you to keep taking steps to commit with us to this month of prayer and grab those packets on the back on your way out. Pick up one of these bracelets that's designed to help to remind you to have a heart of prayer. And also to text the word "prayer" to our text line so you can get those daily prompts in order to fight the shadows. I also can't wait because coming up in just a few weeks in Central, on May 12th, will be our next Central Family Celebration where we get to look back at all that God has been doing over these last few months and look ahead to what He's going to do. And one of the things that He has done over these last few months is brought us through an incredible season of Awana. And I want to invite Brandon Franke up here with me because we've got several award winners today, our Timothy Award winners, if they want to start walking up here to the front. Brandon's going to walk us through what happens at Awana and why these boys and girls are going to be receiving these awards today. So, Brandon, tell us about it.

Hello.

Hi, I'm Brandon Franke, I'm the Awana Commander. Up here I have four, come over here guys, I have our four Timothy Award winning students this year. This is an award given to 3rd and 5th grade, excuse me, students who have been in Truth & Training, 3rd through 5th grade. They've memorized 96, at a minimum, verses/sections and way more than that when you include gold and silver sections. And these verses are focused on, they focus on understanding and not merely repetition of the Bible verses. So the students getting the awards today are Zeke Dorman, Emma Howell, Savannah Lednicki, and Gracie Pike.

Way to go, y'all. So, you know we normally end our service with a benediction. And I thought, rather than hearing me do it, they've spent the year hiding God's word in their heart, maybe they can help us with the benediction today. What do you think? Alright. So y'all lead us in our benediction as we close out our time.

In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. Through Him all things were made. Without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome.

Isn't that great? Central family, let's keep pressing on this week, knowing that the darkness cannot overcome the light. You are sent.