

Date: April 16, 2023

Title: *Parting Words*

Scripture: Colossians 3:15-17

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As some of you know, when Brian Connor, my predecessor, left back in 1995, we hired an amazing interim pastor, Dr. Charles Bugg. He was with us nearly two years and his messages were perfect for a church dealing with the departure of a long-time pastor. One thing I admired about Dr. Bugg was the benediction he used every week. It was a weekly reminder of important Biblical truth. So, when I became pastor, I decided I wanted to do the same thing. Of course, I couldn't plagiarize Dr. Bugg---so after a lot of Bible reading and prayer, I plagiarized God.

As you should know, my benediction is an abbreviated version of Colossians 3:15-17. And every Sunday for the past twenty-five plus years, I've used the same benediction with you over and over and over and over and over again.

I remember selecting these 53 words back in 1997 because in my mind they conveyed Biblical truth, things I didn't want us to ever forget as a church family. Of course, your next pastor can change the benediction---or he may have some other creative way to conclude a worship service. That's totally okay by me. But my prayer is that not just you---but the Christians who worship and study here in years to come---after we are all gone---will never forget the principles of this text---for they are essential for church health and growth.

So as my parting words to you---let's review this benediction we have said together approximately 1,382 times.

Look at verse 15. Say it with me: ***“Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.”*** Why is that something important to remember? We need only look a little further in the verse to find answer. It reads, ***“since as members of one body---you were---ARE---will continue to be---CALLED to peace.”*** So, we show that we are honoring Jesus' RULE in our hearts and lives by doing all we can to be at peace with one another.

Now this Greek word that we translate as “rule” literally means “umpire.” It's a word that was used in Jesus' day in the athletic arena. It described the official who settled disputes on the field, like our soccer refs who say when the ball is out of bounds---or when a basketball ref calls a technical on a coach. Umpires and refs deal with stuff like that.

Paul is saying the peace of Christ is to be the “umpire” in our relationships as Christians. When disputes come in a church family---and they will---the peace of Christ is to rule, because He is Lord---and He has made it clear in His Word God as to how His children are to interact and behave---we are to love one another and settle disputes in a way that honors our Lord and keeps this church family bound together. In a healthy church family Jesus doesn't have to throw yellow flags or wave red cards.

And we must never forget this “*benediction principle*” for two basic reasons.

A. First, we each NEED to get along.

We are created, built---designed such that we require healthy friendships with others. As our Creator teaches us in Genesis, ***“It is not good for man [or woman] to be alone.”*** The fact is God wired each of us with a desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, to serve and be served. We all have an inborn need for deep friendships with other people

You may remember my telling you early on that back in 1995 newspaper columnist, Marla Paul was brave enough to admit this need in her popular column in *The Chicago Tribune*. She wrote, *“The loneliness I feel every day saddens me. How did it happen that I could be forty-two years old and not have enough friends? I recently read my daughter Hans Christian Andersen's The Ugly Duckling. I felt an immediate kinship with this bird who flies from place to place looking for the creatures with whom he belongs. He eventually finds them. I hope I do too.”*

Well, the day after Marla's column appeared, the switchboard at *The Tribune* was flooded with calls from people who said they wrestled with the same loneliness. People even stopped Marla on the street and at her daughter's school to

say that they understood exactly what she was saying and that they empathized with her. They said they too hungered for close friends. Letters poured in from all over the country. In fact, her *"I NEED FRIENDS"* column generated seven times more mail than usual---all from women who said in essence that they felt the same inner loneliness.

And, by the way, this problem is not unique to women. Jim Conway, author of several books dealing with men's issues writes, *"The American male is lonely and friendless, but he tries to maintain his macho image at all costs, even if it means isolation from people."*

Thankfully, when Christ came, He founded a group of people that He specially gifted to meet our inborn relational needs. And of course, the group I am referring to is the church, a church family like we have here at Redland, a group of Christians who acknowledge Jesus as head---and relate to each other in a way that reflects Jesus' sacrificial love for us all.

The hardest part of our decision to obey God and retire is the fact that it means leaving you---who have been our church family for a long time. To show you what I mean, let me pull a "Kenn Owen" and give you some numbers and you guess what they refer to:

- 75---that's the percentage of our 43 years as husband and wife that Sue and I have celebrated while at Redland.
- 3---that's how many of our kids had chickenpox when we first got here---and not at the same time---they took turns so Sue wasn't able to come for a couple months.
- 22---that's the approximate day in December when we first moved here. That same night the entire staff came to the house we had rented to welcome us and carol us.
- 3 ---that's the number of Magruder High School graduations Sue and I have attended---one for each of our kids.
- 80---that's the number of tuition checks I've written while here.
- Another 3---that's how many of my children have been married here on this campus.
- 7---that's how many grandkids have arrived since we've been here.
- 4---that's the number of parents Sue and I have buried during our time with you.

I could go on and on---but my point is like a family you have shared all this and so much more with us. My sibs are PK's---two of my brothers-in-law are a pastors---so both sides of our biological family understand this principle of churchdom. They know what I mean when I say that YOU---REDLAND---You are FAMILY---and it's hard to leave family. We have needed you so many times over the years and you've always been there for us. You have brought joy into our lives---and have also been there to bear our burdens when hard times came, and we were SHORT on joy.

My prayer is that you continue to feel that way about each other---that you always share a love that is greater than that of a brother or sister---because you NEED that kind of love.

But Jesus didn't command us to get along for OUR benefit.

B. He also issued this command because the world around us needs to see us as a loving, unified church family. And the sad fact is to many church families forget this. They forget how truly foolish, and I think selfish, it is for them to fight over trivial things. They forget that this kind of childish, sinful behavior often drives lost people from Jesus. And it does! More than anything else, disunity costs us our credibility as Christians. Think of it. There's no reason for the world to believe Christians are from God if they act like the devil when they are together.

Over the decades Satan has attacked us several times here at Redland. In fact, I have learned I can almost set my watch by his regularity at showing up around Christmas and Easter to do his evil divisive work. Sadly, these past three "covid years" our adversary has been especially busy causing disputes in church families like ours---disputes over politics, the Covid vaccine---masks---and even racism. But God has kept us one. Thanks to His Spirit in us---pulling us back together after the lock-down---we are pretty much back to where we were before Covid hit.

Listen family---I want to caution you---warn you. In the coming year as you go through the process to find God's will for a new pastor---you can count on our adversary attacking your unity. Don't let him win. Don't give him a foothold. Put on the whole armor of God so you can stand against his wicked schemes. Pray TOGETHER for your search committee. PRAY

NOW for whoever your next pastor will be. Ask God to help you KEEP your grace-driven sweet, sweet, spirit STRONG. If you don't rely on God to do this---your next pastor will have a hard time---and the lost people in this world won't listen to what you say. You MUST let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts!

Okay, look at verse 16 because it reminds us of another essential---something we must never forget. Paul writes, ***“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...”*** What is the ***“WORD of CHRIST?”*** The Bible---this book is HIS WORD---and as such it is our soul source of authority in life! We are to live by its teachings, not the fickle feelings of experience, not the flawed tenets of human intellect, not the easily forgotten rationales behind tradition---not by the teachings of podcasts or news networks or political parties or denominations---not by our culture's failing morals. No---THIS BOOK---God's Word---must be the basis of all we teach---and the basis of how we live our lives.

It is especially important that we parents not only teach this book to our children and grands but show by our example---that life works best when lived according to the principles and precepts found in the Bible. Four or five days ago our Chronological Bible Reading group was in the book of Judges---chapter 2 verse 10 where it says that after Joshua and his peers died, ***“...another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals.”***

Why did that next generation NOT know the LORD---NOT know what He had done for them? Because their parents and grandparents didn't do a good job TELLING and SHOWING them and so they did evil in the eyes of the Lord. This is Biblical proof that the old saying is true, ***“We are only one generation away from a culture that turns its back on our faith---because all it takes is the failure of one generation of parents to tell their children about God.”***

So, we MUST do as verse 16 says---we MUST let the WORD of Christ dwell in us and our families richly! One reason behind many of the problems when it comes to Christian unity these past years is too many Christians have let things OTHER than the WORD of Christ dwell in them richly. The point is---we must not just listen to sermons---we must study the Bible ourselves relying on Jesus' promise that: ***“...when the Holy Spirit comes---AND HE HAS---He will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*** (John 14:26)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it this way, ***“Because I am a Christian, therefore, every day in which I do not penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of God's Word in Holy Scripture is a lost day for me. I can only move forward with certainty upon the firm ground of the Word of God.”***

This book is the basis of our unity. With the Spirit of Christ in us---helping us understand and live by this truth---well, that is the key to our experiencing UNITY in the essentials, FREEDOM in the non-essentials, and LOVE in all things.

Okay---I'm almost done.

I want to use my parting words to encourage you to do one more thing and it's found in verse 17: ***“Whatever you do in word or deed do it all in the name of Christ.”*** God wasn't using Paul here to address only pastors. So, what important principle is here? It's this---ALL OF YOU ARE IN FULL-TIME MINISTRY. All of YOUR words and deeds are to be done in the name of Christ. MY full-time ministry as a pastor for all these years has been to do my best with the help of God to equip you for YOUR full-time ***“word and deed”*** ministry. MY mission field has been primarily here behind this pulpit---yours is OUT THERE in your families and neighborhoods and schools and workplaces.

Pardon me for touching on a touchy subject---but in my opinion, this recent SBC controversy about whether or not women can be ordained is ridiculous for many reasons. I've explained why I believe that God calls men and women many times in the past, so I won't lead you through all the Scriptures that show this. But I will point out one very important passage of Scripture---well-known verses that have a well-known name---words make it clear Jesus has called ALL of us to FULL TIME ministry. Quoting Rick Warren, ***“The Great Commission is for all Christians.”*** ALL are to Go---sharing the Gospel. ALL are to baptize. ALL are to teach or disciple.

All of us, men women, boys and girls---all of us are under this, ***“whatever you do in word or deed do it all in the name of Christ”*** full-time ministry umbrella.

The main point I want to make here is that thriving churches are full of members who acknowledge this fact. If Redland is to continue grow as a church, every day every one of us must do our part in our full-time call to ministry. In my memory the BEST TIMES for Redland---the truly EXCITING TIMES these past decades have been those times when we did things TOGETHER---everyone pitching in---everyone ministering---everyone ***“wording and deeding.”***

I’m thinking of RBC Camps and mission trips and Upward basketball and Trunk or Treats and church workdays. These kinds of ***“everyone on board”*** events have shown us beyond a shadow of a doubt that the more members who are involved---the more members who are ministering---the healthier that church will be.

Here at Redland we have come to understand that the driving force behind our remembering and doing all we have learned in this benediction---is our experience of the extravagant grace of God. As I have said in the past, our theme verse is 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:14-15 where it says, ***“Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.”***

Grace drives us ALL to do ALL we do. It drives us to make every effort to preserve our unity. It drives us to study and rightly divide and live by God’s infallible Word---and that same GRACE leads us all into full-time ministry.

With that grace in mind, let’s celebrate the Lord’s Supper together once more. I know we have a lot of visitors today so remember all Christians are encouraged to join us---even if you are not a member of this church. If you are His this is Yours.

#### THE ORDINANCE OF COMMUNION

##### THE BREAD

Philippians 2:1-4

***“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”***

##### THE CUP

Galatians 3:28ff

***“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”***