

We have gains – as college students – as high school students – as middle school students – as high school graduates, as college graduates, as graduate school graduates, as citizens of the United States, as people of education, as people who enjoy a measure of wealth and power and influence – we have gains. Our calling is to lay aside the gains that we have, as the passage says, “To regard these gains as losses”, as we apply all these benefits and advantages into the service of our Lord Jesus Christ and others rather than hold them and use them solely for our own benefit

We are asked to lay aside our gains so that other people will be able to experience for themselves the reconciling work of God. With God’s reconciliation and a God-relationship present in our lives we are to get about sharing the reconciling work of God with our entire lives and in all our activities. If you need a standard, a measure, a yardstick, to help you decide if some attitude or activity or action on your part is good or right or helpful or faithful – you may find it helpful to ask yourself the following question: Is what I am about to do helping to bring about the world’s reconciliation with the loving purposes of God or not? If not, don’t do it. If yes, do it, do it with vigor, with commitment, with passion, and seek to involve as many other people as possible in what you are about!

Part of what the writer of the Letter to the Philippians asks us do is to give up imagining that the Law of Moses can make us righteous and recognize that our righteousness, our union with God and our union with God’s purposes does not come from the Law but from our faith in the grace of God. The Message version of this passage puts it this way, “I didn't want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness that comes from keeping a list of rules when I could get the robust kind that comes from trusting Christ—God's righteousness.”

This past Thursday I had the opportunity for the very first time to be at the Masters in Augusta. It was a beautiful day, in a beautiful place but inside the hallowed grounds of Augusta National there were additional Law to bear in mind. No cell phones, no coolers, and no running! Of all their extra laws this was the one I found most difficult to obey - Patrons must not run! Heck I wanted to scurry all around the course, to see very blade of grass and great shot, just in case I never get to go back. Inside the gates, this law, “Thou shalt not run!” had to be obeyed. Outside of the golf course I could run if I wanted to, I could talk on my cell phone, if I saw a player I could ask them for an autograph or take their photograph, I could talk to them like a normal person, I could hoot and holler until I was blue in the face and embarrassed Janice fully! But inside these extra rules and laws constrained my behavior, they laid out what I could do, I could not run AND I did not run! The law did not mean that I was unable to run; the law didn’t stop me thinking about running, in fact the existence of the law made me think all the more about running... the law didn’t stop me imagining where I could have gotten, how my view of the Masters would have been improved if only I had been able to run.

This is part of the problem when it comes to Law, it sets a minimum level, what we can and can’t do. Compared to minimum law abiding, true faith in God is very different. True faith, real faith, lasting faith, is not about doing the minimum, what we can get away with. Just as Jesus Christ was willing to do it all, to offer all, so we who resolve to let Jesus be Lord of our lives must realize that there is no limit to what we could, and can and should do as we live out and express and share the love and mercy and grace and goodness of God gifted to us in Jesus Christ.

Sermon: In Christ Alone

God is not inviting us to merely keep the law. God is not inviting us to be 51% or 61% Christians, to do the bare minimum to earn a passing grade – what is the minimum passing grade at Winthrop – C- or D+ or D? God is asking us to be fully and faithfully committed to expressing and sharing the breadth and length and depth of God’s love, the love that has no limits, that has no edges, smooth or rough, the love that includes all, that summons in us the courage to stand against oppression and for justice and mercy and hope.

Our calling as a community of faith, as a church, our calling as Christian people, is to live in the hope that God offers to us in Jesus Christ and so have new attitudes, new passions, a new life rooted In Christ Alone.

Today is a great day to once again say and state very clearly that this church family is ready to welcome and include everyone, of every age and background and circumstance, who desires to discover or engage with or embrace the way of Jesus Christ.

Here at Oakland Avenue we are prepared to engage both our brains and our emotions, here at OAPC we will challenge one another to a fuller, deeper, more thoughtful, most passionate trust in Jesus Christ.

Here at Oakland Avenue we desire to honor Christ in campus ministry; youth ministry; children’s ministry; adult ministry; in every form of mission– local, regional, national and global; in all we are and do and in how we do what we do.

We are determined to press on towards the goal that God has for us and we welcome the participation and commitment of everyone. We will pray, we will serve, we will walk, and yes, we will even run as we focus and expand the ministry of Jesus for us and through us. In Christ Alone we trust; in Christ Alone we live and move and have our being; in Christ Alone is our joy and our purpose; in Christ Alone is our Hope Unfolding. In Christ Alone. Amen.