**Sermon 6/2/19**

**Galatians 3:1-14**

In Birmingham, Alabama, it is illegal to drive a car while blindfolded.

In Detroit, Michigan it is unlawful to tie a crocodile to a fire hydrant.

Natchez, Mississippi has a law which forbids giving an elephant beer to drink.

And if you tie your elephant to a parking meter in Orlando, Florida,

             you have to feed the meter just as if the elephant were a car.

Barbers in Waterloo, Nebraska, are not permitted to eat onions

           between 7a.m. and 7p.m.

In Hartford, Connecticut, transporting a cadaver by taxi is punishable by a $5 fine.

These are just a small sampling of unusual, archaic, and out of date laws

             which are still on the books.

But at one time, someone believed they made sense.

I suspect someone tried to drive a car blindfolded in Birmingham,

            and someone else tied their crocodile to a fire hydrant in Detroit,

            and someone in Natchez got an elephant drunk on beer.

The courts realized it wasn't against the law to do these things,

             and so somebody sat down and wrote a law.

Trying to learn all the laws, and keep them, would be impossible.

Michael and Andrea learned the hard way about trying to learn all the rules and

          regulations, and struggling to keep them.

Michael was a young family man passionately in love with Jesus Christ.

He was full of joy, he was funny, and a delight to be around.

He loved to share the gospel with others.

His love for Jesus was infectious, and many were drawn to Christ

            through his words and actions.

His wife Andrea also had a deep faith and a similar magnetic personally.

They heard about a **Christian Conference,** and wanting to walk closer to Jesus,

              they both attended.

They began to follow all the rules the Conference taught.

They wanted to be better Christians, they wanted to please God,

            and they wanted God to love them even more.

In a desperate attempt to walk closer to Jesus, Michael became judgmental of others.

His joy disappeared, and he criticized everyone, telling them

           they needed to do more, and work harder, or God would not love them.

His once enthusiastic attitude disappeared and he wasn't fun to be around anymore.

Their friends quickly grew tired of the constant criticism,

           and stopped visiting the once joyful couple.

The couple concentrated their time on learning the rules,

           and attempting to follow them all they lost their joy and enthusiasm for Jesus.

They worked hard to earn God's love and approval, but their faith

          wasn't fun anymore, it was just hard work, and it was never enough.

They forgot what they had first learned:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves,

           it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

Michael and Andrea fell into the same trap the Galatians had fallen into.

The Galatians were misled by false teachers to believe

          they could live as Christians through worldly means,

          that being a Christian was something they could do in their own power,

          if they simply kept all the Jewish laws perfectly.

Paul was upset, he was frantic, he was furious at the false preachers,

            and greatly concerned about the Galatians.

He wanted the Galatians to think about what they were doing, and how serious it was.

Did you receive the Holy Spirit by the works of the law,

             or by believing what I taught?

Typically, in his letters, Paul greeted his readers briefly,

            and then launched into warm praise of them.

But a crisis threatened the beloved Galatians, and in this letter

           he struggled to bring them back to the faith they once had.

If they continued in these false teachings, they would trust in their own efforts,

          and forget the great gift God had given them – grace and forgiveness.

They put their trust in their keeping of all the laws to gain acceptance by God.

If the Galatians continued their policies, the bedrock of the gospel would crumble.

Faith in Jesus would become just one of many steps in salvation, not the only one.

The gospel itself would be perverted.

Paul's letter to the Galatians lashed out against these subtle dangers which would

          divide the church, and lead the people away from God's great love and mercy.

The law was never intended to make possible a way to God.

It was meant to show us we could not earn God's love by what we do.

The law was given to show us how much we needed God,

          and the impossibility of gaining God's acceptance on our own.

Chris was three years old when he was invited to a birthday party.

He was so excited he could barely sit still.

Mom had bathed him, and dressed him in the cutest white sailor outfit.

Then, leaving Chris in Dad's care, she went to get herself dressed.

Finding it hard to just wait patiently, Chris wanted to go outside and play

            until Mom was ready to take him to the party.

Without thinking Dad let him go in the back yard for a few minutes to play.

Of course, Chris headed straight for a mud puddle.

By the time Dad checked on him,

        he and his white sailor outfit were covered with mud.

Dad called Chris inside saying, "Chris, I can't take you like this.

        You're covered with mud."

Thinking he was going to miss the party, Chris cried, "No, I clean."

“No, you're not. You're dirty. You've got to get cleaned up.”

“No Daddy, I clean.”

“No, you're dirty as you can be.”

Chris started to cry and kept saying, "I not dirty! I not dirty! I clean!"

So Dad took him to the bathroom and held him up before the mirror.

When he saw himself in the mirror, Chris fell silent.

There was no denying he was very, very dirty.

Dad washed off the mud, and dressed him in clean clothes for the party.

God's laws and commandments were not meant to keep us clean,

           but to show us how dirty we are.

Chris stopped saying he was clean when he saw himself in the mirror.

We stop saying we are good when we look at God's laws.

Like the mirror, they don't make us clean, but they show us wrong we are.

The mirror couldn't clean Chris. It took soap and water to accomplish that.

The law cannot cleanse us, we need God's grace and forgiveness to do that.

Before his conversion, Paul was one of the best legalists who ever lived.

A loyal Jew, he tortured Christians who stepped outside Jewish tradition

               to follow Jesus.

If a person could reach God by obeying the law, then he, the strict Pharisee,

               would have done it.

But in Galatians, he blasts the idea that God's love is conditioned

            by how many rules we obey.

Legalism is like a cage, it can only condemn people and lock them behind bars.

Paul points out no one has kept all of God's laws perfectly

All who try ultimately fail.

Paul brought up the story of Abraham.

Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

His faith brought him into a right relationship with God,

          Not his obedience to the law.

We cannot earn it, or buy it, or deserve it.

God gives us his great gift through our faith, not our efforts.

There is nothing we can do to make ourselves more worth saving,

        or to earn more of God's love.

Grace is getting much more than we deserve.

God loves us as we are now.

Yet he wants to give us even more.

He wants us to experience his love, and peace, and joy.

God invites us to stop trying harder, and start trusting more.

Salvation was never meant to be a life insurance policy at the end of life.

It is for now, today.

Our faith is the beginning of a wonderful relationship with God.

He wants us to experience the joy of trusting him, and living in his presence.

He wants us to open our eyes and see him working in the world around us.

He invites us to be part of his work.

We share the good news of God's love, not to win extra points,

              but to share his love with everyone around us.

There will be many difficulties and problems in our lives.

But God promises to be with us, and lead us through the tough times,

          not because of what we do, but simply because he loves us.

Why would we, like the Galatians, turn to a list of rules to be done –

              many not even very important,

             instead of living in his love, forgiveness, enthusiasm and joy?

AMEN