

Live Free...in Faith
Galatians 5:2-6 - June 1-2, 2013

Intro/Recap

- How many of you have heard of the Tough Mudder? PP Anyone ever participate in one? It's basically a 12 mile challenge course that is littered with obstacles and lots and lots of mud. PP The obstacles include everything from high jumps PP to live electric wires to crawls through ice water and submerged tubes to crawling through underground trenches and running through smoke and fire, among many other fun things.
- And at the end of the race you get this little orange headband...showing that you completed the challenge. PP
- The organizers of the event require you to sign a release before you can participate PP in the challenge because apparently several people have died in these courses and in every race there are broken bones and various other hospitalizations....sounds fun, right?
- So when I heard that they were having one right here in the Lehigh Valley, naturally I had to do it. Well, today/yesterday I participated in the Tough Mudder...and let me tell you, it was not fun. In fact, I'm not sure how I'm standing right now. It wasn't so much that the course itself was overly difficult or that it was 90 degrees outside and tremendously humid. No, what made it such a bear of a challenge was the fact that I didn't train at all for the event PP....I just went in with faith hoping and trusting that I would get through...
 - Now, there were some there who clearly had trained hard for the event and had worked themselves into peak condition PP, to the point that they thought they had done all that they needed to do to allow themselves to easily cross the finish line.
- As I was running the race I thought about how life is a lot like the Tough Mudder, full of obstacles and trials that can easily trip us up. We're all running the race of life, and like the participants of the Mudder, some of us approach it by faith and some approach it by works...and that's what we're going to be talking about today: what happens when we run the race by works and what happens when we run the race by faith.
- Two weeks ago we began a series called "Live Free" based on Galatians 5. We began by studying verse 1 which says "For freedom, Christ has set us free, stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." In that verse we learned three things PP 1) that freedom is the liberation *from* something, not the license *to do* something, 2) that we cannot free ourselves – only Christ can free us, and 3) that once we've accepted freedom through Jesus we must stand firm and not submit again to the things that formerly bound us.

- Today we are going to be diving a little deeper into point two – that we cannot free ourselves – as we study verses 2 through 6
- So as you turn with me in your bible to **Galatians 5:2-6**, let me pray
- **Galatians 5:2-6 PP** “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”
- So Paul has just finished making his summary statement about what it means to live free, and like any good writer, Paul is going to support his thesis statement with sound arguments and application.
- Paul starts off by grabbing his audience’s attention – he says “look” **PP**
- Any once Paul gets their attention he explains to them three things that happen when they live by works and three things that happen when they live by faith

Three things that happen when we live by works:

We must rely on ourselves

- And the first thing he tells them is that when they live by works they must rely totally on themselves **PP**
 - He says in v 2 “if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.”
- So Paul gets their attention and the first thing he lets them know is that if they depend on circumcision to save them then they are on their own, because Jesus will be no help to them.
- Remember, the false teachers were telling the Galatians that they needed to be circumcised in order to be saved.
 - Paul isn’t literally saying that the act of circumcision will keep you from eternal life, as most of the men in here would be in big trouble. He’s using circumcision as a *representation* of any human works or man-made requirements for eternal life
 - Paul confirms this a little later in verse six when he says **Galatians 5:6** “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything”
 - In the Greek, this is written in the present tense, which means that if you continuously put your faith in human works or man-made rules and obligations then the work of Christ on the cross will do you no good and you will have to rely on yourself to save you

- Now, most of us don't really believe that circumcision is actually required for salvation...so how does Paul's warning here apply to us today?
 - Well, many "religious" things can easily creep in and become a "work" in our thinking – something we think we *have* to do in order to be acceptable to God or to be a "good Christian", something that we believe absolutely must happen in order for us to climb the stairway to heaven. **PP**
 - It could be baptism, or speaking in tongues, or tithing a certain percentage, or reading your bible, or praying, or making sure that you're attending church every week, or being pro-life, or anti-gay marriage....the list goes on and on.
- Friends, none of these things will save you – in fact, all of them can become things that are a hindrance to your walk with God because they can take your eyes off of Jesus Christ
 - The only thing that can save any of us is accepting what Jesus has done for us– His living the perfect life, dying in our place on the cross, and overcoming death by rising again.
 - That's it. If we add anything to it, we are living under the law, and we have chosen to rely on ourselves to save us.
 - One writer put it this way: "Christ supplemented is Christ supplanted." **PP**
- When I was busy not training for the Tough Mudder, I heard a number of people saying – you've got to be able to run at least 8 to 10 miles before race day. And you really need to make sure that you wear worn clothes, and good broken in shoes – nothing new, and get used to running wet, and carbo load before the race, and on and on. I was told that if I didn't do these things I had no chance of finishing. If I didn't do these "works", I'd be dead.
- Would it have been wise for me to train? Sure...but was it required for someone to finish the race? No.
- You might be thinking, "Matthew, doesn't the bible say we should be baptized, and that we should study the Word and pray, and go to church, and do or not do all this other stuff?"
 - Well, yes, of course....but not a single one of those things are required for our salvation...not a single one are required for us to finish the race.
 - Only faith in Jesus can save us...period. Only Jesus Christ can set us free.
 - Jesus said, **PP John 14:6** "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

- You might be saying to yourself, ‘I can’t accept that...it’s too narrow minded, it’s not fair, there just have to be other ways!’
- Friends, if there was any other way do you really think God the Father would have sent His Son to die in our place?
 - If we could earn salvation don’t you think scripture would tell us how to do so?
- All scripture actually tells us is that we have no shot, that we are hopelessly dead in our sin, and that God knows that. Which is why Jesus came to die for us.
 - So if you are sitting here thinking that there must be more ways to heaven than faith in Jesus, then you have bought into the lie of the enemy and are disregarding the clear truth of the bible...I’m not just making this stuff up here...it’s all in scripture.
 - And Satan would like nothing more than for you to disregard scripture and to go on thinking that there are more ways to heaven than faith in Jesus Christ...that your good deeds...your circumcision...your Tough Mudder training can assure you that you will cross the finish line. And that is a lie.
- When we live by our works, we rely on ourselves and Christ’s death is of no advantage to us.

We are required to keep the whole law

- But Paul continues on and says that when we live by works, we are required to keep the whole law. **PP**
- **Galatians 5:3** “I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.”
- And when it says you are “obligated to keep the whole law”, that doesn’t mean you have to observe the whole law as in you acknowledge that it applies to you and you try to live by it
 - it means that you have to perfectly live by all of the rules set forth by the Lord and never, ever mess up....not once. In fact, you can’t even think about messing up because then you’ve probably already messed up.
- Jesus said to those who were trying to live by the law in the sermon the mount
 - **Matthew 5:20, 48 PP** ““For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven....You therefore must be *perfect*, as your heavenly Father is *perfect*.”
- Perfection is the standard, and if we mess up once, we can’t finish the race.
 - **James 2:10 PP** “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”

- I'm not trying to be a downer here, but there is no such thing as a "good person" going to heaven...only perfect people go to heaven....and no one runs the race perfectly.
 - And failure to meet that standard has clear consequences: eternal death **PP**
 - **Romans 6:23** "For the wages of sin is death", **Ezekiel 18:4** "the soul who sins shall die."
- So how does anyone go to heaven then? The only answer is the one who lived perfectly, Jesus. Scripture says that when we put our faith in Him, his perfection covers us and God no longer sees our sin. **PP**
 - It would be like me, in the middle of the Tough Mudder, realizing that I had no gas left...I was running on empty and I have the sick realization that I can't finish the race. But then all of a sudden this guy who hasn't even broken a sweat comes sprinting up to me and says, "Hey I want to help you out. I'm going to finish this race for you and all you have to do is accept that I'll run it for you and it'll count for you finishing as well." So I kind of tag his hand. And off he goes. He sprints through the mud that had been weighing me down, quickly scales the walls, walks right through the electricity and fire without even flinching and then walks right over the water before jumping across this amazingly wide chasm that I never in a million tries could have made on my own. And when he gets across the finish line, he goes up to the judge of the race and says, "Hey, I just finished the race, and Matthew back there gets credit to because He made the decision to let me run the race for Him."
- But here's the thing, if I didn't let Jesus run the race for me, no matter how hard I trained, I wouldn't have been good enough to finish.
- The NKJV version of this verse says that if we live by works we are a *debtor* to keep the whole law.
 - What that means is that the law creates a debt that none of us can pay, which is why scripture says we are slaves to sin if we haven't been set free by Christ.
- But sometimes, even after we allow Jesus to run the race for us, even after we put our faith in Him, we keep trying to repay the debt or think that there is something more that has to be done.
 - We know that Christ has saved us...but instead of allowing Jesus to freely run the race for us, we think we owe Jesus something...so we try to live a life to please God because we feel obligated to repay Him for what He has done.
 - Friends, that is still living in debt and living under the law...that isn't living in freedom.

- That would be like me going up to Jesus after He finished the race for me and trying to pay him for what He did, or maybe in the middle of the race offering Him water or trying to tie His shoe for Him, or doing anything I could to “help” Him along His way.
- Friends, Jesus doesn’t need our help and Jesus doesn’t want our payment, He ran the race for us free of charge and we do not have to live thinking we are obligated to repay Him for what He’s done.
- When we live by works, we are required to keep the whole law, and that is something that none of us can ever do, nor can we ever repay Jesus for fulfilling the law for us.
 - All we can do is joyfully, thankfully, accept the free gift that He has given us through His grace.

We refuse grace

- Unfortunately, Paul says that the third thing that happens when we live by works is that we refuse God’s grace. **PP**
- **Galatians 5:4** “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.”
- Now, this verse can be confusing because it might sound like someone can lose their salvation if they don’t live right before God...but this verse is not talking about losing your salvation if you don’t live a good life.
 - Scripture is clear that once you have genuinely put your faith in Christ, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and your salvation is forever secured, nothing can separate you from that.
 - **Ephesians 1:13-14 PP** “When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit *guaranteeing* our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.”
- Of course, if you haven’t been sealed, then God’s grace is useless to you.
- The Greek word for severed here means “to be made useless, of no benefit” **PP**
 - So when we live by works, we render Christ of no benefit to us.
- But the key to understanding the verse is in the meaning of the words “you who would be justified by the law”
 - I’m not going to break this down word by word, but in the Greek it basically means “you who continue trying to be saved through your own works”
- So Paul is saying here that if you choose to try to save yourself, to justify yourself before God by trying to live a good life, then Jesus Christ is worthless to you and you have chosen to remove yourself from the benefit of the free grace offered by God.
- So the picture here is of Jesus coming up to me in the Mudder as I am struggling along to get through this impossible race, and He says “Hey I’ll finish for you...no questions

asked, no payment required. I love you so much that I'll run this thing for you. I just want to give you some grace, even though you have done nothing to earn it."

- And I look at Him and I say, "No thanks...I'm going to do this on my own." He pleads with me to let Him run the race in my place, to accept His free offer of grace. Insisting that I won't be able to finish on my own, but that He will run in my place. Yet, I continue to refuse. Whether it's my pride, or I just don't believe Him, or whatever else I might think, I choose not to accept Jesus' grace. Therefore, I am cut off from His grace and it is useless to me.
- But those of us who call ourselves children of God need to know that we can just as easily fall into this trap of refusing God's grace, even if our eternal security is not in question.
 - You see, a believer in Jesus Christ can be saved by grace but not be growing in grace – which we are commanded to do by scripture.
 - **2 Peter 3:18 PP** "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."
 - So what does this look like? Well, growing in grace is all about maturing in our faith and understanding that without God's continued help, we are nothing. Growing in grace means that we recognize that but for God's ongoing intervention in our lives we would fall right back into our old patterns of thinking and acting.
 - So believer, don't relax just because you've let Jesus Christ run the race for you. Though your salvation is secure, you can make the rest of the journey a rough ride by forgetting God's refining grace in our lives...and make your way through the rest of the race as if earning the prize depended on you...putting yourself back in slavery and not living free.
- When we choose to live by our works, we refuse God's grace and are left to wither and die under our own inadequate strength.

Three things that happen when we live by faith:

We rely on the Spirit

- Thankfully, Paul doesn't leave us hanging there because that would be a pretty bleak picture. Instead, he reminds us of what happens when we let go of our own works and live by faith.
- **Galatians 5:5** "For through the Spirit, *by faith*, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness."
- Paul says, look, all that outward stuff doesn't mean squat...faith is all that matters and here's what happens when you live by faith.
- **PP** First off, instead of relying on ourselves we can rely on the Holy Spirit.

- He says that “through the Spirit”, we can live by faith. We don’t have to rely on our own strength. When we face those trials, when the race feels unbearably difficult, we don’t need to go it alone.
- So let’s say you’re running in the Tough Mudder and your knee deep in muck and there’s an obstacle your about to go through that your pretty sure is going to finish you off. But Jesus comes along and you accept His offer of running the race for you. But before He leaves He says, listen I’m going to finish this race, but you need to keep running it so that you can tell other people about me and let them know that I’ll run the race for them too. But don’t worry, I’m not gonna leave you hanging by yourself. Here is the best friend and personal trainer you’ll ever have His name is the holy Spirit and He is going to give you the strength, the agility, the speed, the endurance, the wisdom, the compassion, the love, and the toughness to get through any obstacle that you’ll have to face. He’s here with you no matter what you come across and you can always rely on Him to get you through.
- Jesus said in **PP John 14:16-17** “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you *forever*, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”
 - So when you’re continuing on the race, knowing that Jesus has already crossed the finish line for you, you’ll be able to get through the struggles because you have the greatest Helper carry you on His back.
 - And people are going to look at you and say, “How are you able to handle that?” and right then and there you’ll have the opportunity to tell people not only about the guy who has finished the race for you but about the Helper who’ve you’ve also received that helps you along the way.
- When we live by faith, we no longer need to rely on ourselves to get through the race. God will give us all we need to overcome any obstacle that we face
 - Whether that obstacle is some specific temptation to sin like an addiction or anger, or maybe a state of mind like discouragement, fear, or shame, or a physical trial like sickness, unemployment, or a broken relationship....we can rely on God to get us through it
 - **PP 1 Corinthians 10:13** “No temptation [trial] has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”
 - When we live by faith we have the privilege and the right to rely fully on the Spirit to get us through anything.

We are renewed by hope

- But secondly Paul says that when we live by faith we are also renewed by hope. PP
- **Galatians 5:5** “For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.”
- In the Greek, the words “eagerly wait” PP mean an intense yearning with an unshakable expectation for something...in this case the hope of righteousness we all have as children of God
 - And notice, that the word “hope” here isn’t a verb – it’s a noun PP
 - In other words, it’s not a question of *if* something will happen – like, “I hope it’s gonna be a nice day today”. Instead, it’s a deep conviction and firm belief that something *will* happen and so you’re waiting with delight until it actually comes to pass
- When I was running the race today/yesterday, there were several times when it would have been easy to give up and step out. In the midst of being frozen, drowned, shocked, burned, and beaten, the easy thing to do would have been to give up. But one of the things that kept me going was that I had the hope that it would be over soon – that the race would be complete and I could go home and rest.
 - Friends, once we allow Jesus Christ to run the race for us we have that exact same hope here on Earth; we can know – beyond a shadow of a doubt – that our race will end with us having an eternal rest in heaven.
 - And that thought, that knowledge, that eager expectation, will help us to continue to run the race to the end
 - Of course, if you live by works, the sad reality is that you cannot have that hope, that eager expectation of crossing the finish line, because you can never know if you’ve done enough. Your kind of hope will always be a verb; “I sure hope I get to heaven one day.” And you will live in bondage of the fear that your hope will not come to pass
- But when we live by faith – when we live free in the knowledge of our eternal salvation –our hope will be a noun; “I have the hope of heaven because of what Jesus Christ has done for me.”
- **PP Romans 15:13** “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”
 - Jesus is the God of Hope, and when we live by faith in Him we are renewed by His hope

We result in love as we run together

- Finally, notice that when we live by faith our lives aren’t just about ourselves. No, when we live by faith our lives result in love as we run the race together. PP

- **Galatians 5:6** “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”
- The chief way our faith expresses itself is through love; first and foremost as a love for the God who saved us, and flowing out of that a love for those who we are running the race with
 - Now, we’re not talking about the emotional, sappy, feelings-driven love that the world spews forth.
 - The love scripture describes here is that which proceeds from an intentional choice to devote yourself to someone and love them no matter what, whether they deserve it or not
 - The same sort of love that Jesus Christ has shown us when He decided to run the race for us.
 - I mean, after you accepted Jesus’ offer to finish the impossible race in your place, and you saw Him finish it and open the way for you to receive the prize, wouldn’t you want to devote yourself to Him? I mean, who else is worthy of your love and devotion? No one else can do what He’s done.
- And once that love takes root for Christ, it will pour out of us as we share it with others. And that’s exactly what Jesus expects. He says, **PP John 13:34** “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”
- That’s why the pronouns change here in verse 5 and 6...notice in verses 2 through 4 that Paul uses the word ‘you’ throughout. But in 5 it changes to ‘we’. When we live by faith our lives result in love and we run the race together
 - It’s not about me, it’s about we, and it’s about us and the love that we have for one another.
 - Because the reality is that every one of us is going to stumble and fall as we run this race, and we can’t pick ourselves back up. We need each other.
- When I was running today/yesterday, apart from the hope of finishing, the other thing that kept me going were those who were running with me. I had a physical therapist on one side of, a sports psychologist on the other side of me, a crazy German encouraging me the whole way and whole team of people running through the race together.
- And you know what, when I got to the last obstacle, with the finish line just on the other side, I saw that the last obstacle was a huge wall that was impossible for me, or anyone else to get over, by themselves. It required the help of others to get through. And that is exactly how it is sometimes on this marathon of life.
- If we try to handle things on our own, we’ll inevitably fail. But if we can accept the love of those around us and rely on the Spirit to get us through, we will prevail.

Conclusion

- Friends, don't live by works, you won't finish the race. No matter how tough you think you are, you will collapse short of the finish line and end up in despair.
- The Tough Mudder gives you a headband when you finish, but Jesus is waiting to give us the crown of eternal life. **PP**
- Let's accept the outstretched hands of Jesus Christ waiting to give us the crown and help us along our way to receiving it.
- Let's not live in the bondage of works. **PP** Let's live free, by faith. Amen. Amen.