

February 2016

Dear Brethren:

For this month, I would like to start by asking you some questions. Are you committed? What does it mean to be truly committed as followers of Jesus Christ? Is there a point of no return in our salvation process?

In traveling to the Feast of Tabernacles in Yachats, Oregon, this last year, my wife and I decided to fly. So, after setting up things in Townsend for the Feast, we hurried to the airport, checked our luggage and hurried to our departing gate. But our flight was delayed in taking off. They said they had to first refuel the plane, so for safety reasons we could not board until the fueling was complete. Finally, we were allowed to board, but the waiting was still not over. They said the refueling process was taking longer than usual so we waited some more. Finally, after waiting for more than an hour, the plane began to slowly back away from the gate, and a few minutes later the pilot announced that we were next in line for takeoff.

So I sat back in my seat, closed my eyes and began to relax, allowing the tension of the day to fade away. I could feel my seat begin to vibrate as the plane began moving down the runway. Having flown a time or two before, I paid little attention as we gained speed for takeoff. But after a few seconds I began to think, "Why is it taking so long?" Was it only my imagination, or was it really taking longer than usual to get off the ground? So I opened my eyes and looked out the window. The white stripes along the runway were whizzing by very fast now. Another few seconds passed, but the airplane was still not getting into the air. Then I began to think, "Have we passed the point of no return, or will the pilot still have time to hit the brakes and throw all engines into full reverse to stop before crashing off the end of the runway?"

The Point of No Return

Over the many years that large airliners have been flying, more than one pilot has faced this very important decision. Do I hit the brakes or do I step on the gas? Some have tried to stop their planes only to realize too late that there was not enough room left on the runway to stop. The result was not good! They crashed and burned! Pilots of large, heavily-loaded passenger airplanes know that on all runways there is a point of no return during takeoff. They realize there is a point at which they must be committed to liftoff, which means there can be no stopping after that point is reached. The same is true in the life of the called people of God.

No Turning Back

I believe there is a striking parallel between a pilot's commitment during takeoff and the commitment we all make at baptism. The Apostle Peter, after he had made known to the people that they had crucified the Son of God, was asked by those who were cut to the heart, "What shall we do?" Then Peter said to them: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

To repent means to turn from our old, evil ways of thinking and begin to act by living a new way of life. But which ways are we to change? The ways of sin that lead to death! And what is sin? It is the transgression of God's laws (1 John 3:4). This means baptism of itself is not enough. We must begin to obey God's laws that lead to life.

A rich young man once asked Jesus: "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" Christ's response was: "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:16–17). Then Christ went on to point out a number of the commandments listed in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, including loving neighbor as self. The young man's response was that he had kept these commandments from his youth: "What do I still lack?" he asked. Jesus said to him: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matthew 19:19–22). In other words, begin to live what you claim to know, do not just speak it. To follow Christ means we must follow in His footsteps.

We read in 1 Peter 2:21: "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps."

Recall, at baptism God's minister asks: "Have you repented of your sins and accepted Jesus Christ as your personal savior?" After you answer "yes," he goes on to state: "Because you have repented of your sins, [which is the transgression of God's holy, righteous and perfect law], I now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ (which means by His authority) for the remission of all your sins, Amen." Then follows the laying on of hands to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:6), and God begets you as His own child into a salvation process. At this point you are committed. There is no turning back.

No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62).

Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him (Hebrews 10:38).

Why? Because turning back at this critical time will cause you to crash and burn.

The Critical Moment

I remember reading somewhere that a fully-loaded Boeing 747 weighs about 375 tons. So picture, if you can, such an aircraft ready to depart from the end of an 11,000 foot runway. The pilot obtains permission to take off. So he pushes the throttles all the way forward. This we did at baptism, brethren! The four huge engines begin to roar into action, each producing nearly 50,000 pounds of thrust. The giant aircraft begins to move slowly at first down the runway. It reaches 50 miles per hour, then 60, then 70, then 80—faster and faster. When it finally reaches the speed of 180 miles per hour and has traveled about 9,000 feet down the runway, it is ready for liftoff.

At this point, the pilot has come to a critical moment in the takeoff procedure: he has totally committed the aircraft to take off, no matter what! This is the critical moment where there can be no turning back. Nothing can now stop this 375-ton aircraft traveling at more than 180 miles per hour. The speed is too great now, and there is too little runway remaining to stop safely. Any pilot who attempts to abort takeoff after this point will plunge off the end of the runway, crash and burn. At baptism we also, as those God has called, face this same kind of total commitment. Trying to stop after this point in our salvation process—meaning any departure from that revealed Truth—means spiritual disaster for us. Our eternal life is at stake!

How to Avoid Crashing Spiritually

What can cause the called of God to crash spiritually?

1) Loving this world more than God.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [And what does that include?] . . . the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes [to view things we should avoid], and the pride of life [which is acquiring things in life that puff us up against our spiritual calling]—is not of the Father [who called us to a better way of life] but is of the world (1 John 2:15–16).

Satan is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2). He uses every means possible to distract us from fulfilling our calling to prepare for God's coming Kingdom. Satan entices us with wrong forms of entertainment, excessive television watching, too much time on the computer and smartphone, overuse of alcohol, sexual temptations, and coveting as many physical possessions as possible. This is what the Bible calls the "pride of life," which can become a great stumbling stone in our salvation process. But the Bible also says that Satan will flee from us if we steadfastly resist him and draw near to God (James 4:7–8). This involves cleansing our hands and purifying our hearts from these activities lest God accuse us of being double-minded in following Him.

2) Succumbing to the cares of this world.

Because of the pressures to earn a living, get through school or just to please our family and friends, we can sometimes lose sight of the most important thing in life—our commitment to the Creator God. For example, we can begin to compromise by cheating on our tithe, or maybe by fellowshiping too much with the unconverted of the world, or by "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together [on Sabbath], as is the manner of some" (Hebrews 10:25).

In the parable of the sower, Christ likened the seed sown among thorns to those who would become unfruitful because the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things enter in and choke the word (Mark 4:19). This is how Satan can take away the seed of God's Word from our hearts. This can cause us to become lukewarm toward the things of God and begin to drift away.

3) Drifting into laxity.

To prevent this, we must put forth maximum effort to succeed. God expects nothing less. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). What this means is that we have only one life that will soon be past, but only that which is done for Christ will last. How do we do this? We must pray daily for God's help and guidance in overcoming our sins. We must diligently study His Word or we may forget after a while. We also need to regularly meditate on what we are reading so it will take root in our minds. To do this, we need to fast (preferably away from the cares of this world) to grow closer to God. If we do not do this, brethren, and we instead grow lukewarm in the things of God, He will spew us right out of His mouth (Revelation 3:16).

It takes hard work to make our "calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). But if we put forth the effort now, we cannot fail with God's Spirit in us. If we rely on God, we can claim the promise of Psalm 37:4–5: "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass."

4) Becoming discouraged.

Sickness, distress, persecution or other problems can discourage us and cause us to lose heart. Discouragement can also lead to depression, which can cause us to forget the promises of God. Yet, Acts 14:22 tells us: "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." Neither does He promise us a life free of troubles.

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy (1 Peter 4:12–13).

We can experience this joy in our trials if we do not forget that we, as the anointed of God, will be the kings and priests of tomorrow (Revelation 5:10). David never forgot this as he fled from Saul, who had become his worst enemy. David had the anointing of God to be the next king of Israel, so what did he have to fear? (1 Samuel 16:13)

As the anointed of God, we need not become discouraged while experiencing those trials if we can remember His love and promises. Fear can cause us to forget His promise to save us, but if we have the perfect love of God, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, it will cast out fear that involves torment (1 John 4:18).

In Romans 8:35–36, Paul asked this question: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." That old man within us must die for Christ's sake if we are to be the true conquerors. Paul was quoting from Psalm 44:22, and it goes on to say in verses 23–26: "Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise! Do not cast us off forever. Why do You hide Your face, And forget our affliction and our oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust; Our body clings to the ground. Arise for our help, And redeem us for Your mercies' sake."

What the psalmist is saying is that many times because of our calling to follow Christ, we suffer for righteousness' sake. It is for His sake that many suffer, enduring a living death, abused, like sheep for the slaughterhouse.

Centuries later the Apostle Paul found himself in the same situation with the Romans, and that is why he quoted Psalm 44:22 to describe the sufferings of God's called people as they commit themselves to following Christ in a salvation process. Can we be conquerors through Christ who loved us enough to die for us? Note Paul's answer:

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers [speaking of Satan and his demons], nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:37–39).

In the end, God does allow us to experience many difficulties in life to help us build the character and patience of Jesus Christ.

. . . In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world [We can actually rejoice in trials because we know that good will come out of them.] (John 16:33).

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various [diverse] trials, knowing that the testing [or trying] of your faith produces [worketh] patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete [or entire], lacking nothing (James 1:2–4).

This means we need to wait on God and allow Him to complete His perfect work in us. If we can do this, God's promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13 is for us: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted [or tested] beyond what you are able, but with the temptation [or trial] will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

Serious Consequences Involved

If the pilot of the plane I was on had not been committed for takeoff, but had hit the brakes instead, the plane could have plunged off the end of the runway at more than 150 mph. More than 30,000 pounds of flammable fuel would have engulfed the plane in an enormous fireball, killing me and everyone on board.

In the same way, once we have been called and have committed ourselves to following in the path of Christ, if we are tempted to turn back or give up, if we fail to

remain faithful to our spiritual calling and commitment to the revealed Truth of God, we may well experience a fiery consequence for our actions.

For if we sin willfully [not out of weakness, but willfully turning back] after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries (Hebrews 10:26–27).

This is a serious warning to all the called people of God who are not sufficiently committed. The sad thing also is that the good we did before turning back will not be remembered by God.

When I [the Eternal] say to the righteous that he shall surely live [because of the righteousness of God in him], but he trusts [or turns] in his own righteousness [away from the revealed Truth] and commits iniquity, none of his righteous works shall be remembered; but because of the iniquity that he has committed, he shall die (Ezekiel 33:13).

We must continue to move forward in that revealed Truth that was once given in the beginning by an end-time servant (Jude 3). We must endure to the end to be saved (Matthew 24:13). If we do this, we are promised to rise again in a resurrection to eternal life.

Rising in the First Resurrection

Just as pilots who do not turn back on their commitment to takeoff, so each called individual who remains committed to his/her calling will rise, resurrected, to meet their Savior in the air at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. These that will be gathered will then manifest the glory that will be revealed when Christ returns to set up His Kingdom.

Then the sign of the Son of Man [Jesus Christ] will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:30–31).

We who have not turned back, but are committed, will be raised incorruptible (1 Corinthians 15:51–53). We will be changed to immortal spirit and become part of the

God family. None of us have any reason to turn back from our commitment to follow God's way that leads to eternal life. No person or circumstance can force us to fail if we will always remember God's commitment to us. Paul said of us: "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). This can only be true if we are fully committed in our salvation process.

When we are baptized, brethren, we make an irreversible commitment to God. We must carry through until the end if we intend to rise—take off—and meet Christ in the air at His return! The reward is great—sonship in the God family—if we can remain committed to our calling.

May the committed, loving Lord give *us* the strength to remain committed as we walk without fear in that revealed Truth to which we were called.

Sincerely, your committed servant,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Richard W. Litz". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Richard W. Litz