

Parachute Faith

Have you ever jumped out of an aeroplane...with a parachute of course?! If you haven't let me tell you it is a truly exhilarating experience. In my experience there is no other feeling quite like it. If you have parachuted, then you will probably be able to relate to this message. If you have never been brave (or should that be dumb?) enough or have not had the opportunity to perform a parachute jump, then allow me to tell you a little bit about it.

Before you actually perform your parachute jump you are usually given the choice of either jumping in tandem or performing a static line jump. Tandem jumping means that you are strapped to an experienced skydiver and they control your descent back to solid ground. Static line means that the parachute is deployed automatically by a line attached from the aeroplane to the parachute rip cord. When the limit of the line is reached the cord is pulled and the parachute opens. You may have seen static line used by paratroopers in some old World War 2 movies. With static line jumping you are on your own during the descent, although you usually have a speaker in your safety helmet through which you receive directions from the jump master. The jump master is responsible for your safety and will give you instructions to ensure a safe landing in the correct location. With static line jumping you have less free fall time than a tandem jump. The free time with a static line jump is usually about three to five seconds, but I assure you it feels longer!

Before anyone is allowed to jump, no matter if it is a tandem jump or a static line, they must undergo intensive and extensive training on all sorts of useful things. Things like "how to leave the plane safely", "how to land safely" and "what to do in the unlikely event of an emergency" etc. For static line jumping this training takes several hours. Training is a lot less for tandem jumps as the skydiver you are strapped to is experienced and does all the controlling of the descent.

So where am I going with this? Please bear with me a little longer and, hopefully, it will become clear.

When I did my static line jump, I was somewhat surprised to learn that the pilot of the aeroplane was going to turn off (stall) the engine while we jumped! This is done so that when you jump the propeller wash doesn't hurl you into the tail of the plane! That situation would not be good for the jumper nor the plane! Stalling the engine also means that only a handful of people can jump out of the plane before the engine must be

restarted. As you can probably imagine stalling the engine causes all kinds of alarms to sound!

Now when you are sitting on the edge of a perfectly serviceable plane's open door with your feet dangling in midair, waiting for the signal to 'go', you seriously wonder why you are doing such a crazy thing. After all the plane got you this far and all appearances are that it would get you safely home again too. It is after all, despite the alarms, a perfectly, air-worthy, functioning aircraft. As you sit on the very brink of making that crucial decision you start to wrestle with yourself mentally. Should you trust the parachute or the plane? Do you trust the parachute and your training or the plane and the pilot? Do you jump or stay? Nobody will push you to jump, you have to make that decision for yourself. Your logical, practical and comfortable side tells you to stay where you are, your adventurous and courageous side tells you to jump. All sorts of awful "what if" scenarios flash through your mind. What if the 'chute' doesn't open? What if I forget my training? What if? What if? What if? Then, as you override those fears and doubts, you drop off the ledge of the door and into thin air. You have consciously decided to fully trust in the training you were given and place all your faith (and indeed your life) in the parachute and of course, the parachute packer! For about five seconds or so you are in free fall. Although you are still tethered to the plane, it is impossible to climb back into it. You feel a pure adrenalin rush, a kind of euphoria. Then you reach the limit of the static line and your body is suddenly jerked upwards (or seems to be) as the parachute opens and abruptly retards your plummet earthwards. There then follows several wonderful minutes of serene peace as you gently float to the ground. You really have no sense of the speed at which you are descending. The only things that matter now are that you remember your training and you listen to, and follow, the jump master's instructions spoken to you via a speaker inside your safety helmet. The plane has moved on, it is no longer a concern. Only your training and following the jump master's instructions will provide you with a safe landing. Your parachute did what it needed to do! At about 100ft from the ground you start to experience what is called 'ground rush'. Up to this point you really have had no perception of just how fast you have been falling. Every concept of your height above the ground has been somewhat skewed, just like it is when you are flying and looking out of the window of the aeroplane. Now, suddenly, once distant and indistinguishable things start to come more clearly into focus...and fast! What used to seem so distant is suddenly clearer and closer. The jump master hastily gives you any last second instructions that may be needed to ensure that your landing is safe and gentle...and in the right location. Then you are down, safe thanks to the jump master, the parachute, your training and, of course, the skill of the

parachute packer.

Becoming a Christian is pretty much like making a parachute jump!

You start off 'safe' and comfortable in the world, the aeroplane. Only we know that the aeroplane (the world) is destined to crash and burn (Rev 21:1; 2 Peter 3: 5-7). We are also told that we are not to be 'of the world' (John 17:16-19). We do not belong to the plane, we are not a part of it and we have a chance to save ourselves, and hopefully others, from the promised destruction...but how?

The answer is that you do so in pretty much the same way that you safely exit and land from an aeroplane, you need some vital training and a parachute. You accomplish this by reading, receiving and being obedient to God's Instructions, the Gospel (1 Cor 15:1-2). As you begin to understand the Gospel you soon realize that you must also obey the instructions given to you by it (2 Thes 1:8), much like you must obey the instructions you receive before you can safely parachute. One of the vital instructions in the Gospel is to put on Christ (the life saving parachute) in Baptism (Act 2:38); Gal 3:27-29). Only by doing so can you hope to be saved. In the same way being taught all the parachute safety instructions is not going to do you any good if you never actually put on the parachute!

But putting on Christ on its own really isn't sufficient just as putting on a parachute isn't sufficient in and of itself to ensure a safe landing. You still must remember and perform the instructions you were given in the Gospel.

So now you, hopefully, have put on your parachute (Christ) but you are still flying along in the world (plane). Then you remember that the plane (the world) is doomed and you have a choice to make; to either stay in the world, or to take a leap of faith and trust in the parachute (Christ) and the parachute packer and the jump master (God). Only you can make that choice. Notice that like parachuting you can't do both; stay in the world and jump. If you try to do both then you are going to fail. So eventually you must decide whether to ride in the world and certain death or jump to your salvation and life with Jesus as your Savior. Once you have decided to jump you have to completely trust your parachute (Jesus) (Jer 17:7). Remember that you are never alone. You will receive instructions for adjusting your journey to salvation through the voice in your safety helmet (the Holy Spirit) speaking through God's word. He will encourage you, guide you and help to correct any errors you may be making in order to ensure you have a safe landing at your desired

destination (Heaven). Of course, just hearing the instructions, even from the jump master, is still not sufficient if you don't actually do them! You must still do the things that you were taught and told to do in order to land safely. In the same way faith (to decide to trust in the Lord) is not sufficient, you still have work to do (James 2:26). Faith is beautifully described in Hebrews 11:1 but faith must also inspire works or it is of little value. Faith should produce doers and will display itself through works just as a safe landing will show that you faithfully followed your instructions and did everything that you were supposed to do. Our faith should produce a full separation from the worldly and full submission to the spiritual. Faith believes, Faith trusts and Faith obeys.

Of course, many are going to jump and try and rely on their own opinions and thinking. I don't recommend this for parachuting nor for salvation. Some are not going to want to jump period. Some will put on Christ but still trust in the world. They have put on the parachute (Christ) but they refuse or are unwilling to trust it.

We are expected to try and encourage others to put on, and trust, a parachute. The instructions tell us that in (Matt 28:19-20). We can lead others to the Way of Salvation, but we can't force them to take that critical leap of faith. The leap that sees us fully trust in God's salvation parachute, that is Jesus. The only way to safety and salvation and the Way we must take with all our heart, body, soul and mind, (John 14:6). We simply can't hold onto the world and say that we trust the Lord.

So, if you haven't decided to put on Christ through baptism (Gal 3:27) you should really consider doing so before you leave the world. If you have already put on our Lord and Savior are you ready, really ready, and fully committed to the faith and to fully put your trust in Christ, or are you still trusting in the world?

Obviously putting on the parachute (Christ) also requires that you put it on correctly. The only way you can correctly put it on is to follow the instructions (Acts 2:38). The only way to put on Christ is by belief (John 8:24), confession (Romans 10:4-10), repentance (Acts 2:38) and baptism (Mark 16:16).

The instructions are very clear, very specific and very important for a safe arrival at our landing place (Heaven). After all this has been done then to prepare for the landing safely one must complete the instructions given by the jump master for the touchdown (2 Peter 1:1-11). Only by obeying these instructions can one be assured of their safety. If you fail to follow all the directions or simply refuse to take that vital step of

showing your faith and trust in Christ is complete, by leaving the ways of the world behind, then you may as well not have a parachute on. You are still trusting in the plane and the pilot and remember the pilot of the plane is Satan (1 John 5:19, Rev 12:9)! So, pick up the instruction book (the Bible) and read the life saving instructions of God's Word. Read it. Learn it. Live it!

To recap.

- You have to put on your parachute by following the instruction manual (the Bible). To correctly put on your life saving parachute you have to confess that you believe that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of the Living God. If you need to know where that is declared in the Bible, it is in (Matt 3:16-17; Matt 17:5; Mark 1:9-11; Mark 9:7; Luke 3:21-22; Luke 9:34-35).
- You must confess your sins (Prov 28:13; 1 John 1:9; Psalm 32:5).
- You have to repent of your sins (2 Pet 3:9; Acts 17:30; Rev 2:5; Rev 3:3; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 13:3-4; Luke 24:45-47; Acts 2:38) Repentance isn't just saying 'Sorry', it is making a determined and conscious decision to turn away from your previous errant ways.
- Finally, you **must** be baptized (Acts 2:38; John 3:5; Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:16) in order to start the Christian life, a life lived not for self but in obedience to God in order to be assured of safe landing in heaven (2 Peter 1:1-11).

Are you fully ready to jump or are you still racking up Air Miles?

Happy Landing,
Kevin E Ferguson 9/13/2014