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### **FAITH IS.....**

(Quoted from Frederick Buechner)

“Faith is homesickness. Faith is a lump in the throat.

Faith is a fairy tale that happens to be true. The fairy tale has pain and danger, goodness is pitted against evil, people are transformed, and in the end all the characters are revealed for who they really are. To live within this fairy tale is to experience joy and beauty and holiness beyond the walls of this world.

Faith is less an established position than a movement toward.”

Note from Glenn:

I love this quotation. It is beautiful and meaningful. But we need to remember that the Gospel is not a fairy tale, not a myth, but an amazing revelation of God founded on real history and confirmed by a multitude of witnesses.

What Mr. Buechner’s words say to me is that the only question worth asking about this life is: Are you moving toward Jesus, toward God, or away from him?

### **LISTEN AND OBEY**

Robby Dawkins tells about a businessman in Chicago who heard a sermon about hearing and obeying God and was trying to put it into practice. One day between meetings he got really hungry and ran by McDonald’s to pick up a hamburger. As he was waiting in line he had an impression to buy five hamburgers instead. He thought, “Could that idea be from God? But it doesn’t make sense.” But since he had just been thinking about hearing and obeying God, he decided to go ahead and do it.

As he walked out of McDonald’s feeling foolish, he saw a group of homeless teenagers sitting on the curb. He felt as if God said, “Those hamburgers are for them.”

He walked over and asked if the teens were hungry. As he started handing out burgers from the bag, four more teenagers walked up. He kept handing out the burgers. Then he thought, “Wait a minute!” He counted the kids and he had passed out nine hamburgers. He shook his head and looked in the bottom of the bag. There was still one hamburger left for him.

### **PRONE TO WANDER**

The chorus to an old Gospel song goes like this:

“Prone to wander, Lord I feel it,  
Prone to leave the Lord I love.  
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,  
Seal it for thy courts above.”

Are you prone to wander? If not, you are certainly a remarkable person, for wandering has been the tendency of God’s people from the beginning. Adam and Eve had it made, but they wandered away from God. Those knuckleheads! Immediately, they were filled with shame and hid in the garden, as if they could hide from their Creator. Have you ever tried to hide from God, pushed him out of your mind and pretended he does not exist?

God gave Abraham’s family the highest honor imaginable, to represent him and bless all the people on earth. Were they prone to wander? Over and over and over and over. Moses described their pattern in Deuteronomy 32: *But Israel soon became fat and unruly; the people grew heavy, plump and stuffed.* (This reminds me of the people walking around in Walmart.) *Then they abandoned the God who made them...They stirred up his jealousy by worshiping foreign gods...They offered sacrifices to demons, which are not*

*God....They provoked his anger with their useless idols.*

The book of Judges summarizes the early history of God's people (3:7): *The Israelites did evil in the Lord's sight. They forgot about the Lord their God, and they served the images of Baal and the Asherah poles.* Good night! They were so prone to wander that they literally forgot about God.

The prophet Isaiah describes how they lived in Chapter 2: *Israel is full of silver and gold; there is no end to its treasures* (gated communities, Porsches, stocks, bonds, 401(k)'s); *the land is full of warhorses and chariots* (Sherman tanks, B-1 bombers, nuclear missiles); *their land is full of idols* (theatres, sports arenas, Las Vegas, Wall Street, smart phones).

God warns his forgetful people what he will do: *I will destroy their great trading ships. Human pride will be humbled and their arrogance will be brought down. Only the Lord will be exalted on that day of judgment.*

**IF.....IF.....IF.....IF**

Oh, but we Christians don't have to worry about those scary warnings in the Old Testament. Right? We have been born-again and have eternal security.

But remember Jesus' warning at the end of the Sermon on the Mount: *Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter.*

And the Apostle Paul also makes it clear: *It is this Good News that saves you if (IF) you continue to believe...(1 Cor. 15:2)* And the author of Hebrews: *We are God's house, if (IF) we keep our courage and remain confident in our hope in Christ.* (Heb. 3:6) *You must warn each other every day so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. For if (IF) we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ.* (3:13)

**POWER AND AUTHORITY ARE DANGEROUS!**

The leaders of all kinds of human organizations - families, tribes, businesses, governments - have power and authority, and

that is a terribly dangerous thing. My concern is with Christian groups.

Books have been written about how Christian organizations, churches and denominations, started out on fire for God but slowly drifted into coldness and even apostasy. The Roman Catholic church descended to the Crusades and to torturing Christians to death in the Inquisition. The Lutherans (who came after Martin Luther) and the Presbyterians (who came after John Knox), and the Baptists (following after John Calvin), and the Church of England, etc., all did some violent and ungodly things to their enemies. Christian denominations and churches seem to follow the pattern of the Jews and to wander away from the teachings and example of our Lord.

What is true of denominations is also true of Christian leaders. I recently read in Charisma Magazine that a leader known all over the world, a man that I have admired for over 20 years, fell into sin (women, of course) and lost his ministry. It made me kind of sick inside and I thought, "What the heck! Can't anybody be faithful till the end of their life?" But of course my record has been a mite short of perfection since after I was a pastor I wandered back into my addictions for 7 or 8 years. (Thank God for his mercy!)

This is the point I want to make. (Please shake yourself, go splash cold water on your face and pay attention because I think this is really important):

The Bible is the Word of God. It is addressed to the people of God. (Unbelievers are certainly not going to pay any attention to it.) And from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation, God warns his people about the danger of falling away from him. It is one of the central themes of the whole Bible. Who warned us about falling away? Moses, the prophets, the Psalmists, Jesus, Paul, Peter, and John. Read what Jesus said about it in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). Read what Jesus said about it to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. I could fill up this Newsletter with Scriptural warnings about falling away.

I know you are prone to wander because you are human. But this is the question:

**HAVE YOU FALLEN AWAY? ARE YOU JUST GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS? HAVE YOU LOST YOUR FIRST LOVE?**

If so, you are in terrible danger.

Some suggestions:

1. Sit quietly and reflect honestly on your life.
2. Have you allowed some questionable things to slip back into your life, things that you had said no to a few years ago?
3. Have prayer and Bible and church become boring to you?
4. Have you become fixated on money, or facebook, or entertainment, or sports, or sex.....and rarely think about Jesus?
5. Ask, "Lord, are you pleased with where I am right now?"
6. Repent as needed.
7. Reflect on how patient God has been with you.
8. Write on a sheet of paper 8 or 10 things you are thankful for.
9. Decide to spend 20 or 30 minutes each day in the Word.

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## **THE RETURN OF THE GODS**

by Jonathan Cahn

"Is it possible that the ancient entities known as "gods" are more than fiction and possess an independent reality? Is it possible that what is happening to America is connected somehow to these "gods?" Could they lie unseen behind what we see on our television screens and computer monitors, what our children are taught in their classrooms, what we see happening in Congress, what we see on the news?"

Could there be a mystery behind the sign of the rainbow that goes back to ancient Mesopotamia? Could these gods or beings actually be the unseen catalysts of modern culture?

**The gods have returned.** They have penetrated our culture. They have mastered our civilization.

They haunted the ancient world. For most of recorded history the gods were in every land and in control of every major culture and civilization - from the god Enlil of Sumer, to Ra of Egypt,

Amarok of the Arctic, Kukulcan of Central America, Wotan of northern Europe, Dionysis of Greece, Obatala of Africa, Tiamat of Babylon, Dagda of Ireland, Bixia of China, Juno of Rome, Shiva of India, and a multitude of others.

Wherever there were people there were gods. They reigned over nations, cities, nature, the underworld, and the heavenlies. The people were bound to them. They became a near universal part of human life, which is a strange and peculiar phenomenon. This seems to modern man simply ignorance and superstition. But what if there is more to it?

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses speaks of his people departing from God and turning elsewhere:

*They sacrificed to daimonios, not to God, but to gods they did not know, to new gods that had come to them. (Deut. 32:17)*

And Psalm 10:36 says - *They served their idols, which became a trap for them. They even sacrificed their sons and daughters to daimonios.*

And in the New Testament, Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers (10:20) about what the pagans were doing: *The things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to daimonia and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with daimonia."*

NOTE from Glenn: Behind every idol, behind every "god," lurks a demon!

This is a profound revelation. The gods to which the Israelites were sacrificing, which were the gods of the Canaanites, were not simply figments of imagination but were actual spiritual entities. And the gods that the Romans worshiped, Jupiter, Apollo, Zeus, and Bacchus, were not invented characters of pagan mythology - but were connected to spiritual entities, the daimonia, demonic spirits.

If the gods are demonic spirits, then what happens when people or nations are given to them? Is it possible for entire peoples, nations, or civilizations to become possessed? (Think of Nazi Germany and Communist Russia.)

Jonathan teaches that Jesus' parable in Matthew 12:43 - *When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, "I will return to my house from which I came."* - is not about individual possession but collective or mass possession of a culture or a

civilization, for Jesus added: “ *So shall it also be with this wicked generation.*”

Germany and Russia were Christian civilizations that turned away from God...and Hitler and Stalin happened. America was a Christian civilization that has turned away from God. What is coming our way?

(More next month.)

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