

Faith Network

A Newsletter for Cooperation in the Churches of God

September/October, 2011

Proof of the Pudding

There's an old country proverb that says, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." Jesus used a similar agricultural word picture: "You can tell them by their fruits." It's a simple test, but not always easy to discern the results.

Once I bought a beautiful bag of red apples – not a blemish to be seen, but when I cut to the heart of each apple, there was nothing but rot from the core out to just shy of the skin. I have also, on purpose, bought a case of apples that were covered with blemishes of all kinds to make applesauce and pies. Those were the best eating apples I ever had. The exterior of the apples was insect bitten and they were misshapen and the color not appetizing, but the fruit was good. The proof was in the eating.

How do we apply this to people as Jesus asked us to apply it to prophets?

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Matthew 7:15-21.)"

It would be nice if it were as easy as biting a hand to find out if someone is a true prophet of God—or maybe not, depending on how clean or dirty those hands are. The test Jesus recommends is one that usually takes time to be reliable. The externals we see can fool us, but if we stay alert—as Jesus warned us all to be—the hearts, whether rotten inside or genuine, will be revealed eventually.

Too often we see the signs but we make excuses, or we ignore them because it would become too uncomfortable to deal with the changes we would have to make. The test is more than an adherence to orthodoxy, as we understand it; the true evidence of a prophet's heart is his genuine, wholehearted desire to please God. (I am using the word prophet in the sense of anyone who speaks or writes as if he is speaking the word of God, not in the narrow sense of predicting the future.)

The godly man will be practicing the words given by Micah: "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with the Lord. (Micah 6:8)" His personal life will reflect the holiness of God, not perfectly, but with the integrity that God requires.

Prophecy (teaching) that comes from God will have a positive effect on those who love God: "But everyone



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who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort (I Corinthians 14:3.)”

The letter from Jude reveals more ways to recognize “godless men.”

“For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord... Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam’s error; they have been destroyed in Korah’s rebellion. These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm--shepherds who feed only themselves (Jude 4, 11-12.)”

The way they live will be a denial of Jesus as “our only Sovereign and Lord.” They work for profit for themselves with no regard for the needs of the people who are looking to them for spiritual guidance. They rebel against God by claiming authority they were never given by God. Like Diotrefes, they love to have the pre-eminence (III John 9 KJV.)

The apostle Paul wrote:

“So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God (I Corinthians 4:1-5.)”

We cannot always see the motives of men’s hearts, but we can look at the results of what they do. We should be able to see them as servants. What they do will reveal whose servant they really are. Paul went on to talk about how he and other apostles suffered to preach the word of God (I Corinthians 4:5-21.) Their work and their willingness to suffer for Christ was proof of their credentials. The whip in verse 21 is likely a reference to Jesus using a whip to drive the moneychangers out of his Father’s house. The power is the power given by the Holy Spirit. Anyone can boast, but does the power and fruit of the Holy Spirit back up the claims?

Jesus commended the church at Ephesus:

“I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you can not tolerate wicked men, that you tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary (Revelation 2:2-3.)”

Jesus expects us to be alert, to be on guard, and not accept just anybody who claims to speak for him. We are to be like the Bereans and search the Scriptures, not just the ones the teachers quote, but all of it (Acts 17:11.)

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me--just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep (John 10:14.)”

How do we get to know Jesus? We read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John for the account of his life. We read the Old Testament, which foretells his coming, and the writings of the Apostles that tell us the Gospel they preached. We follow the lead of the Holy Spirit in living a holy

Faith Network is a voluntary effort by a group of individuals interested in promoting cooperation among the Churches of God and encouraging healthy relationships both within congregations and between them. Resources have been made available for the initial stages of Faith Network by members of the Church of God Cincinnati.

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life according to the word of God. We do not rely on men to tell us what God says or what to believe. Genuine and gifted men and women from God can help us understand what we read as Philip helped the Ethiopian and as Priscilla and Aquila helped Apollos (Acts 8:26-40; 18:26.) But their job is to teach and help, not be dictators or abusers (Matthew 23:8-12; 24:48-51.)

Listen to what God said through the prophet Ezekiel:

“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them... I will search for the lost, and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice (Ezekiel 34:11, 16.)”

We are not an agricultural people for the most part in the United States of America so this comparison doesn't mean as much to us as it did to those people who lived this kind of life. Proud as we are, we do not like to be compared to an animal that we see as stupid and helpless on its own. Compared to God, we are stupid and helpless. But he isn't calling us stupid and helpless. He is using poetry to illustrate his concern for us and his provision for those who yield to his sovereignty. He is also warning that he is just and will separate out those who mistreat others:

“As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats (Ezekiel 34:17.)”

Please read the entire chapter of Ezekiel 34. Please read the entire book of Ezekiel. Remember that God is the judge of the whole world, not just one particular nation. He is the judge of all peoples, not just one particular group of people. If we are in need of the Good Shepherd, Jesus will go looking for us and be that shepherd for us. If we are mistreating or neglecting others, watch out—because he is also our Judge. 





Seminars • Team Sports • Kid's Games • Gymnastics • Skating • Bible Studies • Music

Don't miss the Winter Family Weekend!

Lexington, Kentucky December 23 - 27, 2011

Activities begin on Friday evening December 23rd with warm fellowship and music. Several excellent speakers, many well known within the Sabbatarian community, have committed to present seminars. Youth Sabbath classes, teen seminar, and church services on Saturday December 24th.

Location

The Marriott is located at I-75 and Newtown Pike in Lexington, Kentucky just minutes from the most beautiful and celebrated horse farms in the world.

Housing

The host hotel is the fabulous Griffin Gate Marriott Resort. This outstanding resort carries a Mobil four-star rating and normally charges over \$179 per night for these rooms. But it's only \$54 at the Winter Family Tournament beginning December 23rd if you mention the Church of God. To reserve your room call the Marriott at 800-391-6690. Free shuttle service is available from the Lexington airport.

Activity Entry Fees

Entry fees for sports and other activities are \$10.00 per person or a maximum of \$40.00 per family. Registration forms are available at: www.cogcincinnati.org.

Volunteers?

If you would like to assist in activities, planning, or sponsoring, please contact Jim O'Brien at jimobri@gmail.com or (513) 755-0040.

**Go to www.cogcincinnati.org
for full schedule
of events.**

The Trumpet is Sounding

A TIME OF RESURRECTION

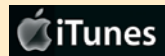
It's *time*
to
announce
the
resurrection.

Hear what the Scriptures tell us about the resurrection from the dead at the return of Jesus Christ through this powerful and inspiring song by Hugh and Boni Buchanan.

NEW SINGLE

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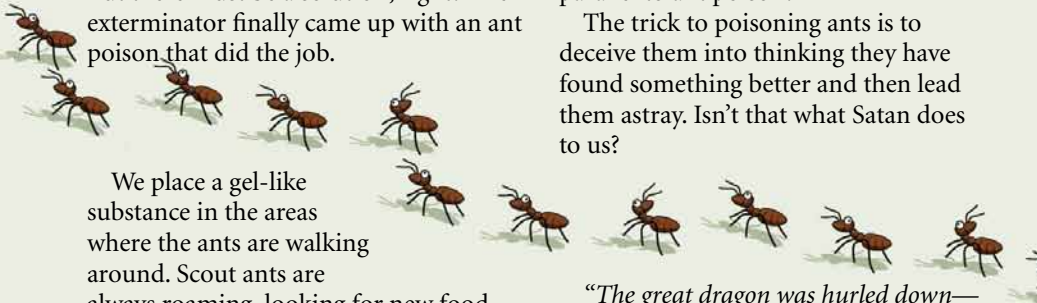


Ant Poison



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Our family has had a problem with ants invading our kitchen every spring. They appear suddenly, coming out of winter hibernation, and remain for months. We've tried various poisons, all to no avail. The ants seem to thrive on it. We called an exterminator who sprayed the inside and outside of our home, but after a few days the ants were back. The ants were living in the walls and were not reached by the exterminator's sprays. But there must be a solution, right? The exterminator finally came up with an ant poison that did the job.



We place a gel-like substance in the areas where the ants are walking around. Scout ants are always roaming, looking for new food sources, and those ants find the gel that must taste very good to them. I have watched as ants then bump into other ants and communicate with them about having found a new food supply. Soon the ants are swarming the gel. They continue to swarm, carrying the poison gel back to their colony where all the ants in the colony eat the gel, and in so doing, they seal their own fate. An effective ant gel, such as the one we are now using, will take about 24 hours to kill the colony. Some gels take weeks or months to work, which makes them worthless.

Before they found the gel the ants were searching for and eating foods that were nourishing them and keeping them alive. The trick is to deceive the ants by offering them something that

seems better but will actually result in their deaths. It must not kill them immediately or only a few ants will die rather than the entire colony; and it must be something that appeals to all the ants, so that when they take it home every ant is infected.

Do you begin to notice a spiritual parallel to ant poison?

The trick to poisoning ants is to deceive them into thinking they have found something better and then lead them astray. Isn't that what Satan does to us?

“The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him (Revelation 12:9).”

Satan deceives us by holding out something that looks good. He makes the way of sin look more appealing than God's ways. Remember what happened to Adam and Eve?

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’ The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Genesis 3:1-6)

Notice how similar this is to our ant poison story. Adam and Eve did have nourishing food but Satan offered something that had quite an appeal, both in the way it looked and in the opportunity for Adam and Eve to be something more than what they were. When Eve ate the forbidden fruit she did not die immediately, so Adam ate of it too. The human race had now sinned and, if it were not for a future redeemer, would never recover.



People today consider God’s instructions for living to be impractical. Satan has offered an environment that appeals to the flesh, and fulfillment in the here-and-now. Why do whole industries like porn and illegal drugs exist? Sinful desires have an appeal, but they kill in the long-term.

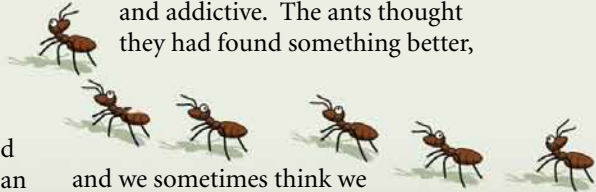
“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” (1 John 2:15-17)

Many of the common sins of society, such as sex sins, are practiced by Christians, but are done in secret; however, there are other more subtle ways that Satan uses to spread his ant poison and some of them are religious.

One way Christians are often led astray is into what I call junk doctrines. This includes disputes over prophecy. Some look at the news and try to feed it into what they think prophecy says. They become very impassioned about it and try to spread it around. It does appeal to pride and lifts the person up, but even when such views of prophecy come out differently they rarely see the basic error of their ways.

Others like to debate calendar issues, sacred names, and other doctrines. Many a congregation has been split by such arguments. Is that a good fruit? Why is it not as appealing to discuss how God works in our lives, or how to enrich our prayer time? Junk doctrines are another form of spiritual ant poison.

There are many, many ways we can be led astray. Sin is pervasive, infecting, and addictive. The ants thought they had found something better,



and we sometimes think we have found something better than the “weightier matters of the law,” but we must examine the fruit of those ways.

We are told in Galatians that the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. Matthew 7 illustrates that trees that are not bearing good fruit are cut down and cast into the fire. As with the ants, a christian’s spiritual diet is a matter of life and death. Don’t get caught by poison! **FN**

Be Grateful

As sons of God, one of the most important attitudes we must have in our behavior and prayers is the attitude of being grateful to God and to everybody else. This attitude, nowadays, as in all times, makes a great difference in people. This is due to the fact that the society of human beings, throughout the centuries, has manifested itself as an ungrateful society that thanks nobody for anything.

Let's start by considering people who are not grateful, who are like the unthankful and anonymous chief butler, who after coming out of prison forgot Joseph, who had been his companion in misfortune (Genesis 40:23). A similar attitude can be perceived from the Israelites whom our almighty God helped through Gideon. After Gideon died, the Israelites again became idolaters as they had been before (Judges 8:33-35). We can read that the Israelites were neither thankful with Moses nor with Aaron when they were physically guided out of Egypt. They were not thankful when they wandered in the desert; neither were they thankful for their blessings under the leadership of Joshua,

the Judges, Nehemiah, or Ezra. In the New Testament, nine of the ten leprous men who were healed by Jesus Christ were not thankful to him (Luke 17:11-19).

The apostle Paul knew very well about this conduct and attitude of the ancient "wise men." That is why he wrote in the letter to the Romans that "they, having met God, didn't glorify him as God, neither did they give thanks to him..." In fact, the apostle prophesied that the days we are living in right now were going to be dangerous, (2 Timothy 3:2) and one of those dangers we, as sons of God, were going to face was ungratefulness—which means to be unthankful.

In contrast, gratefulness is an attitude that consists of a deep disposition of the heart. It is a manifestation of a genuine Christian who knows how to appreciate what he or she has. Gratitude is living expressly every new day as a gift from a wonderful God, an experience that no money in the world could ever buy.



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Gratefulness is what we need to fill our lives with, just as the apostle Paul taught the members of the church in Colossae. (Colossians 2:6-7)

Now, we cannot be grateful about something we are not aware of, or that we do not enjoy. It is necessary that we stop and take delight in seeing the beauty and simplicity of the majesty of God in his creation. We need to consciously think about this every time we contemplate the immensity of the sky with its playful clouds, admire the greatness of the mountains or the greenery of trees in the spring. We need to think of our majestic God and thank him when we see the beautiful colors of the diversity of flowers in the gardens,

when we gratefully enjoy the murmuring of water when it flows down the streams, or when we feel the freshness of the first raindrops on our hands, or see the whiteness of the first snow flakes. We need to remember to be grateful to him for our parents, grandparents, and children that are a great part of our happiness, and for our friends and brethren of the church who motivate us to thank God for the blessing of being parts in the body of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, gratefulness is the virtue we can demonstrate through words that can be written or spoken, or it can just be shown through our actions. (Ephesians 5:20, I Thessalonians 5:18) Let's be grateful! (Colossians 3:15) [FN](#)

American Czars

Two thousand years after Julius Caesar walked the earth his imprint is still with us. The calendar we use today was created by him. Pope Gregory made minor changes but it is Caesar's calendar.

Politicians ever since have used his name, which evolved into a title. Rome had twelve Caesars including Augustus, Caligula, and Nero. But the fascination with Caesar carried on through the

centuries into other countries which changed the spelling while emulating the man. In Russia leaders were given the title Tsar, and Germany called them Kaiser. Both of these titles came from the word Caesar which meant Emperor in the European medieval sense of the term. He was a ruler who has the same rank as a Roman or Byzantine emperor or, according to Byzantine ideology, the most elevated position adjacent to the one held by the Byzantine monarch.

In the 20th Century the term Czar was used for an appointee of Woodrow Wilson and then picked up by Franklin Roosevelt. He had 11. Harry Truman reduced that number to six. But it was an informal political term used by the



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media to designate a high-level political official.

The title waned during the terms of Presidents Eisenhower and Reagan but there was always at least one Czar, and President George W. Bush increased the number to 33. He even had a Bird-flu Czar. Now President Barack Obama has upped the ante to 37. In fact, the joke in Washington was that President Obama had more Czars than the Romanovs.

There seem to be a lot of Czars joining American government.

Now America will have a new Czar. The Wall Street Journal said a new “White House level position” is being considered. “The wrangle over the creation of a high-level energy council or climate “czar” could...have the biggest impact on energy and climate policy.”

Something doesn't seem right about having a Czar in America. We don't need an Emperor. And it's troubling that we accept it without complaint.

President Richard Nixon appointed a Czar in 1973 in an effort to solve another energy crisis. His attempt to “control” the crisis caused a fuel shortage which led to long gas lines. In 1975 Donna and I were traveling north from our home in Florida to visit family in Kentucky. Many of the gas stations in Florida were closed and those open would only sell five gallons at a time. That meant we had to stop every fifty miles to refuel. It was hot. And our concerns weren't lessened by having a one-year-old in the car. Motorists were short-tempered and a little frightened. Stranded cars on the side of the expressway were mute warning not to pass a gas station.

William Simon the first “energy czar” tells a story of his title. “President Nixon announced to the cabinet that I was to have ‘absolute authority’ and compared

the job he was giving me with the role that Albert Speer played in the Third Reich when he was put in charge of German armaments.” Simon confessed to being a bit uncomfortable about being likened to the Nazi Minister of Armaments and War Production.

Man has long been fascinated by titles that imply power. Those chosen by madmen often reflect a desire for status. Hitler picked “Mein Fuhrer” which means “My Leader.” It was modeled after Benito Mussolini's chosen nickname “il Duce,” Italian for “the Leader.” True to form, the greatest problems, whether in state or church, have been caused by those who seek to be master over others.

But man has a legitimate desire for good leaders. And people need training to become good at leading. Businesses pay lots of money for employees to attend leadership training sessions.

Jesus once gave a workshop on leadership. He chastised men for sitting at the head table or wearing clothes that demonstrated authority. “They love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to have people call them ‘Teacher.’ You must not be called ‘Teacher,’ because you are all equal and have only one Teacher.”

That is the key. We have one teacher. All the rest of us are fellow students.

Jesus goes on. “Nor should you be called ‘Leader,’ because your one and only leader is the Messiah.” (Matt. 23:5-10 GNB)

But what about a person who wants to be great? What should he do? If a man truly desires to be great Jesus gave great advice in verse 11, “The greatest among you must be your servant.”

It was undoubtedly the best workshop on leadership ever taught. [FN](#)

“If the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us.” (Judges 6:13 NIV)


One of the most difficult theological questions to address is this very question: If the Lord is for us, then why has all this happened to us? Clearly there is not an easy answer to this question, nor does any one answer address every situation. We know that in Gideon’s case, the nation had drifted from God and for that reason God gradually withdrew his protection from the nation’s enemies, and we also know that God responded when they cried out for deliverance. But we also know that the righteous really do suffer, and sometimes in the very presence of the wicked who are prospering. Scripture itself acknowledges this conundrum (Psalm 73 and the Book of Job).

The question of why the righteous suffer can be addressed in many ways, including that classic passage from Paul in II Corinthians 1:1-7, where we learn that the trials we face sometimes come our way so that we can better comfort others when they face such trials. Sometimes we suffer because of the natural order of this sin-laden and decaying world. Sometimes we suffer because we are reaping consequences of our own or others’ mistakes.

Regardless of the cause of our suffering, Gideon’s comments intrigue me. The man was open enough to be honest about his doubts, even expressing those doubts and frustrations to God’s direct messenger.

Are you confident enough in your relationship with God to be this open and direct? “If the Lord is with me, then why is my wife perpetually sick? Why am I always running behind on my bills, and why is it so hard to find work? If the Lord is with me, why does the car break down at the most inopportune times? Why do we have family troubles? I know it rains on both the just and the unjust, but sometimes I get too much rain and sometimes not enough, while old Joe across the street who cusses up a storm and has no interest in his God whatsoever seems to be doing just fine.”

Would you have the nerve to question God in this way? Gideon did. And God didn’t condemn him for it. Instead he walked Gideon through his doubts and discouragement, showing that the Lord really was with him, and that he really was a mighty man of valor.

If life is handing you circumstances that cause doubt, ask the question. Persevere in your asking until you have the answer (Luke 11:8-13). You will learn something about yourself that you didn’t know, but more importantly, you’ll learn that God is who he says he is. 

“. . . that we may be able to encourage those who are in any tribulation whatever, through the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged of God. Because, even as the sufferings of the Christ abound towards us, so through the Christ does our encouragement also abound.”

(2 Cor. 1:4-5 Darby Translation)

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The Lord Is With You

The nation of Israel was going through one of those calamities that struck them from time to time. Marauding tribes invaded the land, stealing crops and livestock, terrorizing the people, and impoverishing the nation to the point of despair. It didn't help that they had not only ignored their God, but had blatantly taken to serving other gods.



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That's why it sounded like an odd comment when the Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!" (Judges 6:12).

I know many people, faithful people, who are living through trials that are hard to endure. Many of these involve serious health problems. Others are dire financial problems. Some are having difficulties finding employment, or are being abused by their present employers. Family difficulties sometimes are a part of the mix. I even know some who are afflicted by all of these trials at the same time. If the Angel of the Lord were to approach them and say, "The Lord is with you", as he did with Gideon, one could forgive them if they were to answer as Gideon did:

The Lord... Continued on page 11