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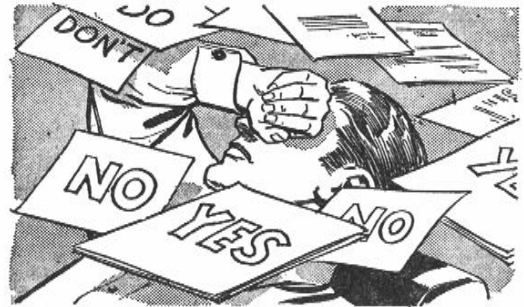
Forbidden Fruit

By Mrs. Paul E. King

From the July 23, 1972 Sunday School Beacon

Fred leaned over the desk and dropped his head on his arms. He brushed a weary hand across his tired eyes, trying desperately to dispel the fog that seemed to cloud his brain and his thinking. He felt miserable. Miserable... and a failure. A total failure at that!

He longed for tears but they refused to come. Long ago he had cried himself "out". His heart felt as heavy as the cold, gray boulder that stood tall and defiant and unmoveable at the far edge of the back parsonage lawn.



To say that he was facing a crisis and in a dilemma was putting it mildly. Only God could help now.

He arose and walked to the study window and looked out at the stalwart boulder that looked like so many others beyond the lawn on the side of Butte Hill. He felt whipped and defeated. Just when he was beginning to see visible results in his ministry, too. What should he do, he wondered miserably. What could he do? He felt like a coward to resign the church; but he seemed to have no alternative. It was his only recourse.

It was too much, having one's creditors breathing down your neck continually. This was certainly no testimony for good to the cause of Christ. On the contrary, it hurt the cause and hindered and impeded it. And Diann knew it! Ah, yes, she did. For he had told her dozens of times that she was to charge absolutely nothing more; but she had insisted upon having things like other people and when he refused to go deeper in debt she managed in her subtle way to have those things she deemed necessary added on to their already hurting and overcharged charge account. And now it had

gotten beyond the hurting stage to the critical point -- that stage and place where the bill collectors were demanding their money.

What should he do? He paced nervously back and forth across the room of the study. He couldn't possibly take on another job. There was no time for it: his full-time job, acquired three years after he and Diann were married, (when the salary his small church paid him was no longer adequate to meet the cost of the incoming bills) had already robbed him of the greater part of his calling time and duties. Certainly, he owed God and his congregation more than preaching twice on Sunday and giving a Bible study in the mid-week prayer service. There were hungry hearts in the community and town that needed a pastor's visits and prayers and encouragement. How much longer would they be patient with him, he wondered. He felt sure of their reaction when and if they found out about the unpaid bills. They would be justified in asking him to resign. He deserved nothing less, he reasoned. What a stigma it would bring upon him as pastor and upon the church as well; and what a drawback and hindrance to the cause of Christ! This last thought stung him through and through like a hot arrow.

Vividly, he recalled the day he saw her at Bible School. He purposed within himself that he would woo her and win her love and someday he would make her Mrs. Fred Walker. From the first day of courtship, the gentle Holy Spirit within him had sent repeated and varied warning messages to his heart but her lovely face and seeming winsome ways always won out. Soon they were engaged.

"Look, Fred," Diann had confessed one day shortly before they were to be married, "I always vowed I'd never marry a preacher, and I meant it; but I guess I can tolerate it because it's you. But if I can't have things I need . . . look out! I'll not be deprived, nor have my children deprived."

She laughed lightly and he had taken the remark as a joke even though he had cringed upon having heard it. He remembered how forcibly the Spirit of God had warned him to "beware." A fear so oppressive and frightening had possessed him until he told her they had better break their engagement and forget about each other. And they did. He told her he could never marry her, that God's approval was not upon it. They separated then, each going a separate way.

Fred remembered how God flooded his soul with His blessing and His presence for his obedience. He felt then that it had been worth any heartache he had.

He remembered now the many warnings and pleadings he had had from loved ones and friends who were truly interested in him and his calling from God those dear ones who had prayed fervently for him to seek and obtain only God's will and God's choice for a lifetime companion; pleading and praying with him that he would allow God to keep him victorious over Diann for all time. It stung him now!

"She'll hinder you in the ministry, old buddy," a concerned, deeply spiritual friend had said.

"She may have a pretty face," a fellow minister had warned and pleaded tearfully, "but her tongue is filled with poison. She can't even be saved, Fred. She lies like a hardened sinner. Don't ever bother with her. She'll give you trouble! She's a shrewd one. Subtle, too. Let her alone. Forever!"

And he had. For awhile. But only for awhile. Diann went to the altar during one of the revivals at the school. He thought she had dug deep and gone to the bottom. Again the courtship resumed and, in spite of pleadings and prayers and warnings from those concerned and unfooled, he had soon led her down to the altar and made her Mrs. Fred Walker. He had high hopes of helping Diann and loving her with all the love that a man can give the woman he loves until she would be a perfect preacher's wife in spite of what everybody said and thought. What a fool he had been!

Fred remembered, with a keen remorse of mind now, (as he had opportunity to do so many times the past few years) that God's voice need speak to a man only once. But that Voice . . . in the first warning -- is just as settled and unchanged as though it were repeated over again and again. His "touch not the unclean thing," and His "be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" was not merely for time nor a small period of time but for all of time and eternity. This is what hurt so badly and cut so deeply. He had overridden the checks of the Spirit after all.

He dropped to the floor on his knees, begging God's forgiveness for his disobedience, nor did he remove from the spot until the peace and joy he had once known was flooding his soul again. Then he arose and sat in the chair behind the desk. Darkness had long since draped her coverlet of deep blue around mother earth, tucking her in bed and pinning the coverlet securely with a myriad of shimmering, shiny stars, so he sat in the dark thankful for the peace and quiet.

Diann, feigning one of her numerous nervous spells because he had told her in profound finality that he was, as of today, notifying the stores in town that nothing more was to be charged to his credit, had taken the children and gone home to her mother some two hundred miles distant on one of many such visits. So he sat, unmindful of the fact that he hadn't eaten since early morning. He thought and reasoned and prayed.

To say that he was facing a crisis and in a dilemma was putting it mildly. Only God could help him. And he knew he wasn't worthy of That help -- not when he had gone over God's "Thou shalt not!"

What could a minister do when he had a wife who professed but whose life bore nothing other than the fruit of an unregenerate heart? When, because of his wife, tales were told about church members and church leaders which were all untrue and

were fabrications of her own carnal mind and carnal thinking but which made the district leaders wary of her and felt, therefore, it would be unsafe and unwise to have any local church call him as pastor? He was in a corner. And all because he had committed an act of disobedience. No wonder the Word proclaimed, "Obedience is better than sacrifice."

He saw it plainly now. Painfully so. He had obtained that which he had wanted and desired, and in getting, he had missed and by-passed the will of God for his life. Like the rebellious children of Israel, he, too would pay a full price for his disobedience. Perhaps for the rest of his life., unless Diann got soundly converted and sanctified. What a terrible price, he thought forlornly. And how costly! That which he had fancifully visualized as a blessing and a joy for life had turned about face and, in turning, it was proving to be a curse and a hindrance. It had been forbidden fruit to him. But he had gone ahead heedlessly -- after Diann's trip to the altar -- had embraced that which he had been warned about.

One needed more than a beautiful and trim figure to make life lovely and pleasant and beautiful. These were not enough. God's pattern of the beautiful woman . . . the Godly woman was far from what he had beholden when he allowed himself to fall in love with Diann. But that was in the past. The future stretched before him in an unending pattern of heartache and heartbreak but he would make the best of it by God's grace and help. "Till death do you part" was a long time; but he would fulfill his end of it and his part of the marriage vow and sacred contract until his earthly race was run.

Fred arose and walked quickly to the parsonage. He knew what he must do. Of a certainty, the "gifts and the callings of God are without repentance." For him it was either preach or burn. He would continue to preach. Not as pastor of any church but, rather, he would remove to a community in a distant state, secure employment to pay his debts and make himself available for weekend meetings. And he would continue to pray earnestly for Diann that someday soon she would see herself as God saw her and would truly repent and make full and complete restitution of all her past and would become a model wife and mother one after God's pattern.

Slowly he prepared for bed. He would have long, trying, painful days ahead of him. He needed rest of body and mind to face them. But he would face them like a man., with God!

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THE END