

FREDA & FANNY: A PHARISAICAL FARCE

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She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness. (Prov. 31:26)

Freda Faucet nibbled on the eraser of her pencil and tapped her fingers nervously on the pad of paper in front of her. Finally, she sighed loudly and picked up the phone receiver. She'd waited on the Lord's timing and this was it. Using the eraser end of her pencil she poked out the number of Fanny Familiar on the phone pad. In a few seconds she heard the breathless voice of Fanny, "Hello?"

Freda asked Fanny about her family and friends and they chatted a while. Then there was a short pause. Freda took a deep breath and said, "Fanny, there is a subject that I've been meaning to broach with you. It's about Fred Frank. Lately I've become quite concerned about him and his spiritual condition. I've prayed about this earnestly and I must obey the Lord rather than men. There is so much heresy in the Church now, and if I do not speak out then I am letting error stand. And I sure don't want to be guilty of upholding that kind of sin."

She sighed heavily. "Contending for the faith is such a time consuming job, especially with the amount of error these days. But how do I keep silent? I will just have to depend on God to give me the strength to do this." Sighing again, "I guess this is just my cross to bear."

Fanny was confused for a minute, but said how glad she was that Freda was pointing out all these errors and teaching so many people. "But what is going on with Fred?" She asked.

"Well... Oh, this is so hard... but you did see the recipe he posted on the Internet the other day, didn't you?" Freda asked this in a controlled voice which betrayed a small amount of alarm.

Fanny acknowledged that she had been receiving Fred's weekly mailings. Her curiosity was piqued. Whatever could be the problem with Fred? He was a pleasant man who seemed strong enough in the Lord. Yet lately she had noted... well, some lapses. It wasn't anything she could put her finger on, but things just didn't seem right. She wondered if Freda had some insights about the matter. "Yes," she answered, "I received that recipe. What's the matter?"

"It's" – Freda paused in a fashion that made it seem that the matter was quite painful to discuss. "It's Fred's recipe for a dandelion salad. You knew he'd been eating dandelion greens, didn't you? In fact, if you drive by his house you will notice that his yard is overgrown with the yellow weeds. Furthermore, it seems strange to me that he would suddenly post – out of the blue – that particular recipe. It just so happened that when I was at the grocery store last weekend I picked up a copy of *New Age Womanhood* magazine, and on page 73 I found a recipe for dandelion greens salad that was almost identical to the one that Fred posted this past week." Lowering her voice to a whisper, "I can't say for sure that he has altered the recipe, but it does seem strange; the timing of this is just too coincidental."

"You aren't saying that Fred has been reading that magazine, are you?" asked Fanny, astounded at the implications of what Freda was saying.

"Well," Freda began in a long drawn out sigh, "there's more to it than that." She continued, this time with a quicker pace. "He has been letting his yard go now for the last few months. The

Scriptures tell us to 'consider the lilies of the field' and yet Fred has not considered the lilies. Instead, he has been letting his yard go — to dandelion seed! In my mind, and perhaps this is only my opinion, but anyone who lets their yard deteriorate like that — well, [again, there was a deep sigh] that can only mean that Fred's spiritual condition is deteriorating."

Shocked at the insinuations, Fanny began to counter with some mild protests. "Surely, you can't be saying that Fred is falling prey to heresy?!" she offered.

"I'm afraid that it might just be worse than that," sighed Freda. "You see, there are some other things that you don't know about Fred these days."

Fanny could feel the color drain from her face. She had held out such high hopes for Fred. He seemed like such a spiritual giant. In fact, she had truly been blessed by the letters of encouragement that he sent out weekly on the Internet. Surely, there couldn't be something seriously wrong with Fred... could there?

Freda began in earnest this time. She recounted a long litany of recent strange activities by a man whom many regarded with deep respect. "First," recounted Freda, "there's the matter of his church. No one knows for sure where they came up with that name 'Freedom in Christ Ministries' but it seems that they have been going overboard recently, taking certain doctrines to extremes."

Fanny interrupted, "I heard that their name was based on I Peter 2: 16. Wait, let me get their Sunday bulletin. Oh, yes, it says, 'As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.'"

"That might be what they say, but we are to be God's fruit inspectors. You know, you can have too much 'freedom', especially in the matter of Mr. Frazier Fountain. It seems to me that they should not have forgiven the man so easily. It's one thing for a person to apologize and ask for forgiveness, but after what he did?!"

"What did he do? I've forgotten," asked Fanny. She honestly had forgotten! She was somewhat embarrassed to admit this, given the serious tone of voice that Freda was using. Oh well, Freda always talked to her in a tone of voice that implied that Fanny was a little naïve and had much to learn about life.

Freda explained, "Mr. Fountain told some ladies in his Sunday school class that he believed that dogs will go to heaven when they die. Now I know this is a common doctrinal error for a new believer — and Mr. Fountain is a new believer, after all — but it is interesting to note that he was supposedly saved out of an occult background. I mean, is it possible that his occult background still has a hold on him since this doctrine is so obviously evolutionary? And I'm just not sure how genuine his conversion is. The Bible does say that many who profess the name of Jesus do not really know Him. We all know that the occult sends operatives into churches to plant lies. I just have to wonder about this, you know. Fortunately, since I know some of the ladies Mr. Fountain told this to I was able to exhort them on what actions they should take. They went to the elders of the church and it took considerable effort to get the elders to do anything about it."

Fanny stopped her. "Oh yes, I remember that now, but I thought that Mr. Fountain had sent out a letter to the congregation apologizing for his errors. Isn't that enough?"

"It seems to me," Freda spoke more slowly and deliberately this time, "that we just can't trust the man. And, it also seems very curious that Freedom in Christ Ministries would be so quick to

forgive, without a care for how this man led people into error and deception."

Fanny had to acknowledge that even though he was a new believer, Mr. Fountain had indeed committed an egregious error of doctrine. Perhaps it *was* his background in the occult that led him to this error. And, furthermore he had once recommended that Fritz Farmer read that Gnostic gospel, the book of Fezekiah. "I see what you mean," Fanny sighed, this time feeling a deep pit growing in her stomach. She had such high hopes for Fred! And now to find out that he was attending a church that was letting people like Mr. Fountain get away with grievous sin! Why, evidence of error in the church was growing like Fred's New Age dandelions! She just didn't understand how wolves among the flock could be let into church in the first place. Somebody ought to have more discernment than that!

Freda paused — a longer pause this time.

Then she took another deep breath, which Fanny understood to mean that things could only get worse. "Then there's the matter of Fred's wife, Fortuna," she said. "Now she is someone whom we are all very concerned about."

Fanny privately wondered who the "we" was that Freda was talking about, but then quickly dismissed it. Surely Freda meant that there were many who truly cared about Fortuna!

Freda continued in slow, measured steps, laying out the scenario with precision. It seemed that hardly anyone had seen Fred's wife, Fortuna, in over a month. She had not been attending church. The last time anyone had seen her was just before the time Fred hurriedly left that meeting, right at the moment the preacher was explaining how to detect a wolf among the flock. And, just two months ago Fortuna had confided a prayer request to Freda about a family reunion planned for Niagara Falls. Fortuna admitted that she really did not feel like attending this family reunion with Fred, even though it would seriously disappoint him. Fortuna also admitted that she was not willing to go along with a plan of Fred's to re-model the garage where he stored old cars. Freda stopped and paused dramatically, "There can only be one conclusion," she asserted, "Fortuna is not being submissive to Fred, she is not attending church with him anymore and she is rebelling against his wishes."

Fanny could feel the knot tighten in her stomach. "That's too bad," she said flatly. Then, suddenly startled, she had a recollection. Fortuna *had* gone to the reunion with her husband. In fact, Fortuna had called her to ask to borrow an ice cooler that weekend. Fanny was in the middle of pondering the possible significance of this when she heard Freda continuing....

"Furthermore, have you seen how Fortuna cut her hair so severely? It looks just like a man's crew cut! You know, this really, really makes me wonder about Fortuna. Surely she can't be turning into a feminist... can she? With that new un-submissive nature towards her husband, one can only wonder! And, you know there's the matter of her name. Surely if I had a name like that I would have changed it by now. With today's emphasis on gambling, it seems like such a stumbling block to have others call her by the name 'Fortuna.' Why, it might lead someone to commit acts of immorality and indecency! It seems, well, so 'newagey.'"

Excited that she had a fresh tidbit of information to add, Fanny interrupted to tell Freda that she has just read someplace that 'Fortuna' was actually the name of a Roman goddess.

Freda was duly impressed. "Wow" was all that she could say, over and over again.

Fanny then admitted that things were not okay with Fortuna. It was her turn to take a deep breath. "Well," she said, "Fortuna has been acting strangely lately. She hasn't been returning my

phone calls, she's been attending some secret meetings which she won't talk to me about, and she has a new fanaticism about health food cooking. I saw her in town wearing a turban once — isn't that a sign of some Middle Eastern cult? — and a couple of other times she was going into that natural medicine place. I heard those people were into all kinds of New Age practices! I didn't pay much attention to it since I've been so busy, but now I am concerned. Surely she couldn't be getting into that New Age stuff, do you think?"

Fanny paused and thought a moment. Then she added, "Come to think of it, Felicity Flubber talked to her the other day and said it was very strange. Seems Fortuna is slurring her speech and talking very slowly. I read that slow speech is one of the techniques those mind control people use to brainwash people without them knowing it. Felicity also told me that she saw Fortuna once at F-mart. She came up to Fortuna from behind and Fortuna would not turn her neck to look or turn her head for any other reason. She was pretty stiff and rigid."

"Whoa! Wait just a minute!" Freda jumped in. "You mean she was rude, or are you saying she wasn't turning her head?"

"She wasn't turning her head," replied Fanny. "Why do you ask?"

"Wow!" exclaimed Freda all over again. "Wow, wow, wow! I think we have an active New Ager here. Remember that stuff I was telling you about chakras and kundalini? These are demonic spirits that are supposed to settle in people's spines. I'll bet she's gotten possessed!"

Both women stopped talking for a brief moment to sigh heavily while taking in this new revelation.

Finally, Freda broke the silence. She spoke softly in a measured monotone. "I just don't know, but it certainly feels strange to me," she said. "I think Fred has gone apostate. I mean, look at all this evidence. It is staring us in the face. Here is a man whose New Ager wife is clearly in rebellion, he is posting New Age recipes on the Internet, he's attending a church which has turned freedom into license, and he's not responding to any of this! Now it is beginning to make sense why he named his daughter Sophia. You do know about that blasphemous Sophia conference don't you? And, come to think of it, Fortuna dropped out of sight the same day that New Age retreat took place at Mountain of the Yellow Light."

"He's not responding?" asked Fanny, "How do you mean?" Fanny was ignoring the Sophia material. She couldn't remember what the significance of Sophia was and she didn't want to admit it to Freda.

"Well," said Freda with a big huff, "I've sent him some messages about these things. I've written to him a number of times expressing my concerns. And, you know what? He told me that he just couldn't take the time to respond to me right now! Can you believe that? And worse, he put me off for an entire week! He told me that he needed to prayerfully consider this and that he would get back to me. It's been seven days now and I've decided that he is not going to respond to me. He's in error and he knows it! He just doesn't like being found out, that's all. I've decided to publicly post my concerns to everyone that I can locate that knows him. This way he won't be able to get away with deceiving people anymore. He's guilty and he knows it. He has an awful lot of explaining to do!"

Fanny was astonished. Her stomach was churning now. Finally, she managed to eek out a timid response. "I see," was all she could mutter. Then she haltingly spoke in a choked up voice, "I had hoped better of Fred. I really had hoped that he was a man that was full of discernment. I

really used to have respect for him. But, not now I guess —"

"Oops! That's my other line! Gotta go!" interrupted Freda.

Fanny slowly set the phone on its hook. She pondered the situation for a few minutes. Then she reached over and picked up the phone again and dialed a well-known number. "Festiva?" she asked when she heard a woman's voice answer. "Festiva Frenzy? This is Fanny Familiar. I've got some important spiritual discernment information to share with you."

She related to Festiva the long discussion she had just had with Freda Faucet. At first Festiva was skeptical, but after awhile she had to admit that things sure sounded strange with Fred, "I wonder," she mused, "his mother, Margaret Magpie Frank, was pretty eccentric, you know. I think she might have had some Moroccan blood in her lineage. I just wonder if he has those leanings. When he was a child the other kids used to make fun of his name and call him Fred 'Frankenstein'. It just makes you wonder. Maybe he's not what he says he is. Maybe he is just faking his Christianity! This would account for much of these goings on."

Fanny and Festiva spoke for a few more minutes about Fred's apostate church with the weird doctrines on forgiveness when suddenly Festiva exclaimed, "The tattoos!"

"What are you talking about?" asked Fanny, immediately curious about this outburst.

"Why, the tattoos — of course — why I should have guessed it. It is so obvious!" Festiva went on to explain that Fred had tattoos on various parts of his body. "I think he is part of an obscure Ferd Flintstone cult!" she exclaimed. "You know, Fred goes to those Ferd Flintstone movies all the time. Well, Ferd Flintstone said in *Person* magazine that he 'worshipped old cars' — that's a quote! And guess what Fred collects — old cars! And furthermore," Festiva paused for emphasis, "Ferd Flintstone said that he had a tattoo of a heart put on his chest when he filmed the movie *Faintheart*."

"Oh my!" exclaimed Fanny. This was far worse than she had ever expected. It seemed obvious to her that Fred was now worshipping motor vehicles and quite possibly a believer in physical maiming as a method of spiritual cleansing. The two women both sighed deep breaths and decided that there was just no more that either one of them could say at this point. It was just too much. Their pain was just too great to bear. They agreed to talk again later when both had regained their composure.

In the meantime, across town Freda was busy. She penned a lengthy letter to Fred which detailed each and everyone of his failings. She carefully picked a select list of friends to send it to, including some new ones she had only recently come to know: Fonda Flapjack, Ferocity Foot, Fleeting Fraternity and Fibber Flanders. In her letter she stated that Fred had obviously failed to get back to her, which meant that he was using stalling and delaying tactics, signifying his guilt in the matter. She flatly stated that he had gone apostate and that he was guilty of leading others into his new heresies. She warned the others not to associate with Fred anymore. She hastily sent off the letter, glad to have that matter off her back and feeling satisfied that once again, she'd done all she could do to stand. It was Fred's responsibility now. He was the one who had to stand before the throne of God and be accountable for his sins.

Unbeknownst to Freda, her letter crossed Fred's in the Internet mail. Fred finally had penned a response to Freda's original charges. His letter read as follows:

Dear Freda,

Please forgive my delay in getting back to you. The last few months have been very difficult for me and I have not been able to respond to matters in a timely fashion.

I posted the recipe for dandelion greens on the Internet because I found it to be delicious. My wife obtained this recipe in a packet of recipes she received from the Fontana Medical Clinic. My wife, as you may know, has been fighting a number of medical problems these last few months and she needed to change her diet. I had no idea that the *New Age Womanhood* magazine published a similar recipe! Certainly it wasn't my intention to lead others astray with that posting. Please accept my forgiveness for any trouble this may have caused you.

I am sorry that you do not agree with the doctrinal positions of the church I attend, Freedom in Christ. We are founded upon I Peter 2: 16: 'As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.' We believe that if someone repents of their sin that they are to be forgiven and no longer condemned, based on the verse 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' (1 John 1 :9) The case of Mr. Fountain, which unfortunately became a well-known one in the community, is a good example. He has publicly repented of his doctrinal errors and has taken every possible step towards restitution. We believe we can hold him to no standard higher than that which is spelled out in Scripture. To do anything else would be to fall into legalism.

Again, please forgive the slight delay in responding to your concerns.

Sincerely in Christ,
Fred Frank

Neither woman was aware of Fred's response when Fanny gingerly picked up the phone once again. She knew she possessed certain important information which a dear, close friend of hers would not have. This was her big opportunity to prove her discernment and her own spiritual maturity. Fumbling because of nervousness, Fanny punched the buttons for Faith Finster. Speaking slowly and carefully, she began to lay the groundwork. She told Faith how she had been given certain verses from the Lord that confirmed her conclusions and how God had also confirmed that the time to expose this blasphemy was now. But before Faith had a chance to respond, Fanny quickly launched into the latest revelations about Fred Frank and his wife Fortuna.

There was silence for a brief moment at the end of the line. It seemed like an eternity. Fanny heard herself breathing. "Calm down" she said to herself.

Finally, Faith spoke. "There is a small matter which you have forgotten here," she said in a quiet voice.

"Forgotten?" asked Fanny querulously. "Yes, you have failed to consider all of the facts," stated Faith forthrightly. "You have not considered all of the details."

"Oh!" exclaimed Fanny, excited about the prospect that Faith might have new information to give her. "What are these 'facts' and 'details' which you are talking about? I'd like to know!"

Faith began narrating a long story. She explained that she had been helping out at the Frank residence for the past two months. Her services were needed; Fred could not do it alone. He was very stressed, she said, due to a brain aneurysm that Fortuna experienced one day. This was the reason Fred had hurriedly left the meeting that night at church. A deacon had delivered

a note to Fred stating that Fortuna had just been air-lifted out to have the surgery. During this life-threatening surgery, Fortuna had begged for Faith's assistance because she did not want to alert her elderly parents, Sylvester and Sophia Settles, about her condition and unnecessarily worry them.

"Fortuna appeared to have a crewcut," explained Faith, "because she had her head shaved before surgery. This is why she had to wear a turban." Faith further explained that the doctors had placed Fortuna on a very strict diet, high in certain minerals in order to help alleviate the possibility of a stroke. This accounted for the family's new interest in health food. Not to mention the fact that the hospital bills had so severely drained their resources that growing their own food seemed to be good stewardship of their money.

As Fanny listened, she began to feel the room swirling around her. Could Faith have also fallen into heresy? She could feel herself getting angrier and angrier. Righteous anger — the proper, wholesome kind of anger. "Well, there's still the matter of those tattoos!" she said when Faith ended her story. For emphasis she almost shouted, "And those old cars he keeps!"

"Tattoos? Oh those?!" At this point Faith laughed, which disconcerted Fanny a bit. "He got those back in his Vietnam War days before he got saved. He's always meant to have them removed, but with all of the other responsibilities he's had - well, he's just never gotten around to it. And those cars are something he inherited from his uncle, Farren Flounder, who died a few years back."

"But what about the secret meetings? There's still quite a bit of explaining to do," challenged Fanny. She was caught off guard by the easy responses that Faith was providing for Fred's activities. Was she covering up for Fred? Fanny secretly wondered.

"Those were support group meetings for people who have had head trauma," explained Faith. "You see, people who experience a trauma to the brain sometimes have trouble with short and long term memory. Fortuna still has serious motor difficulties in her upper body and is having to undergo intensive physical therapy. She was practically paralyzed! The speech center of her brain was damaged and it is hard for her to speak. She is lucky she can talk at all. As for why she did not turn her neck, she was ordered by her doctor not to turn her head so the muscle tissue in her neck had time to heal."

Fanny interrupted accusingly. She wasn't about to let Fred and Fortuna off the hook, even with this sentimental sob story. "Why on earth does Fortuna need a support group? Isn't our sufficiency supposed to be in Christ alone? She should be relying on God for her strength! We are not to grow weary in well doing, you know. Besides, this still doesn't explain why she has been so standoffish in not returning phone calls."

Realizing that most of Fanny's questions were rather hard-hearted, Faith limited her explanation of Fortuna's behavior to high doses of pain medication and sleeping a lot, both which were necessary to manage the severe headaches that often result from an aneurysm. Hoping to elicit some kindness from Fanny she explained that full recovery was many months down the road. However, she could sense that her explanations were insufficient and hollow-sounding to Fanny. Faith began to worry that she had said too much already.

"Well," harrumphed Fanny. "There's still the matter of Fred's church. I find it a bit more than coincidental that Fortuna's illness occurred right on the heels of Mr. Fountain's heretical utterings at that church. Makes you wonder if perhaps God wasn't sending a warning. For all we know, this was God's way of getting him out of that church."

Faith patiently explained in a pleading tone of voice how Frazier Fountain used to be a well-known anti-Christian zealot who frequently penned vitriolic letters to the editor of the county paper, the *Fremont Flier*. However, Faith and her family had begun inviting him to dinner and eventually led him to the Lord. Now he was an eager young believer, and in his zeal to learn and help others he stumbled into some error.

"You shouldn't have been associating with him," countered Fanny. "The Scriptures warn us to not be mismatched with unbelievers."

"What?!" exclaimed Faith. She was incredulous, hardly believing the distortion in application of 2 Corinthians 6: 14. She decided she had to speak out. "Fanny," she pronounced, "you are a fool. Proverbs 18:2 says 'A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.' You obviously have no regard for the facts in this situation, only your own faulty fabrications. Furthermore, Proverbs 14:7 commands me to 'Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge.'" With that, Faith abruptly hung up.

Fanny slammed down the receiver and folded her arms in disgust. It was clear in her mind that Faith had been taken in by Fred's error. She was grieved that Faith would become part of such treachery against the Body.

She picked up the phone and dialed Freda. Quickly she described how Faith had actually been defending Fred, Fortuna and Mr. Fountain. This confirmed to both Freda and Fanny that the apostasy in that church was far deeper than they knew. They realized that anyone who defended Fred or Mr. Fountain had also believed Satan's lies. They felt more alone than they'd ever felt before. It hurt that people could reject them this way. Considering that Faith had hung up on Fanny, they comforted themselves with the words of Jesus in John 15:18: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."

Later that night, Fanny sat down at her computer. She began to pen a letter ... "Dear Internet Friends of the Remnant of the True Body of Christ, It is with grief and sorrow that I must warn you of wolves among the sheep...."