

## “Fiddler On the Roof”

### 1 Corinthians 11

**Hymns: #527 Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated # Come to the Table of Mercy (Hosanna Int.)**

**Reading: 1 Corinthians 11**

“A fiddler on the roof. Sounds crazy, no? But in our little village of Anatevka, every one of us is a fiddler on the roof trying to scratch out a pleasant, simple tune without breaking his neck. It isn't easy. You may ask, why do we stay here if it's so dangerous? We stay because Anatevka is our home. And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word: Tradition!

Because of our traditions, we have kept our balance for many, many years. Here in Anatevka, we have traditions for everything: how to eat, how to sleep, how to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered, and always wear a little prayer-shawl. This shows our constant devotion to God. You may ask, how did this tradition start? I'll tell you. I don't know. But it's a tradition. And because of our traditions, every one of us knows who he is, and what God expects him to do.

Traditions, traditions. Without our traditions, our lives would be as shaky as... as... as a fiddler on the roof!”

These opening lines to the famous play Fiddler on the Roof provide us with a metaphor and highlight an important principle as we come to this eleventh chapter of 1 Corinthians; namely that of tradition. The village of Anatevka is like the Bible. It's our home. And though it is increasingly dangerous to one's social acceptability to continue to live from there, nevertheless, we are trying to proclaim its message from the roof tops in as attractive way as we can; being as shrewd as a serpent and as innocent as a dove...metaphorically speaking, without breaking our necks. And what is it that keeps us stable up there? What is it that clarifies our identity and calling? In a word, “Tradition”.

Tradition has been described as “the living faith of those now dead”. Traditionalism is all together different for it is “the dead faith of those now living”. Paul begins this chapter by praising the Corinthians for remembering him and holding to the **traditions** just as he passed them on to them. You see my friends, there comes a point in each of our lives where things around us are going to become foggy and shaky and we will be faced with the life and death choice of where we are going to find our stability. It is only going to be found in one of two places, within the world's ways or the Bible.

In this chapter, we're going to see three traditions that are going to be a challenge to some of us given the world's current cultural moment and the culture within many local churches. We are going to see the Biblical tradition of Headship and Women's Public Ministry; the Biblical tradition of the Agape Feast and the Biblical tradition of the Lord's Table.

Let me say at the outset that I am not unaware of the cultural and political incorrectness that swirl around the first of these. Headship, Women's roles in the Church's public ministry and in marriage, male and female distinction and order are topics best left alone unless you are surfing the current tsunami of hallucinations called “Same Sex marriage”; “gender fluidity”; or “strident independent feminism”. But my job is not to cut corners or pages out of God's Word, but to teach exactly what it says and make application to us to the best of my Spirit supported ability. This is what I plan to do today, and I trust without any unnecessary provocativeness. Finally, let me just add one more thought. Remember “Bo and Giz” from Chapter 2? Only one of them “had cable”, that is the indwelling Holy Spirit's “connection”. Here again, unless one has received the Holy Spirit and is

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listening to Him, then whatever he has to say in this chapter will only be an annoying static or else a dead silence. Let us tune in to Him now.

**1. Headship and Women’s Public Ministry V. 1-16** *“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. 2I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.*

Let’s first get the background to this section. Paul is continuing to address the issues and questions raised by the delegation letter sent to him. And once again, that famous Corinthian slogan, “Everything is permissible” seems to have been taken hold of by some of the women in the church there. It has been said that “A new movement always suffers more from its disciples than from its enemies”. Such was the case for these women. The “pendulum” of their newfound “freedom in Christ” swung way too far to the left and they were now attempting to pray and prophesy within the meeting of the gathered church while having their head’s uncovered. They were abandoning their tradition and the culturally appropriate sign of order and subordination.

Let me stop here and make sure we see a couple of things. We should observe first of all that women were not excluded from the public ministry of prayer and prophesy in the church; that is speaking to God for man and speaking to man for God. This does not mean however that they held the status or state as a teacher of men or that they exercised a firm self-assured dominance over men. Paul makes clear in 1 Tim. 2:12 (“I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man”) that both those positions are inappropriate, but rather a quiet, tranquil, meek and peaceable disposition is a woman’s public ministry posture.

Secondly, let us not infuse and pollute the word “subordination” with false notions of inferiority or inequality. For the word itself means ordination; calling; a God given role and responsibility. The prefix “sub” simply describes the God given order; the placement; the sphere of the exercise of that ordination.

Thirdly, the combined public ministry and “sub-ordination” had a sign; a symbol. It was head covering. Head covering was not oppressive or degrading in that culture. In fact just the opposite was true. “...the preponderance of evidence points toward the public head covering of women as a universal custom in the first century in both Jewish culture and Greco-Roman culture. The nature of the covering varied considerably, but it was commonly a portion of the outer garment drawn up over the head like a hood.”<sup>1</sup> The only women in Corinth who went about publically with their heads uncovered and their hair shorn or shaved were the temple prostitutes of Aphrodite. Warren Wiersbe comments here saying: “Except for temple prostitutes, the women wore long hair and in public, wore a covering ...a shawl over her head...God had made a difference between men and women and each had a proper place in God’s economy. There were also appropriate customs that symbolized these relationships and reminded both men and women of their correct places in that divine scheme. Paul did not say or even hint that the difference meant inequality or inferiority.”<sup>2</sup>

In these next 14 verses Paul gives **Six Reasons for Culturally Recognized Subordination to God Ordained Headship:**

**1. Divine Order v.3-7** *“3Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. 4Every man who prays or prophesies*

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<sup>1</sup> David K. Lowry; *1 Corinthians; The Bible Knowledge Commentary- An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty; 1983; SP Publications (p.529)*

<sup>2</sup> Warren Wiersbe; *Be Wise- 1 Corinthians; Victor Books; 1983; p. 111*

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*with his head covered dishonors his head. 5And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head--it is just as though her head were shaved. 6If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. 7A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.”*

There is a divinely ordained order of headship in God’s universe and relationships. Between man and God; between woman and man; even between the incarnate Messiah and God the Father. A head is that part of the body which gives the directions. Our human bodies don’t take functional instruction from our big toe, but rather from our head. That’s just the way God made us. Equally, if we saw a body without a head we would say it is decapitated and subsequently dead. I’ve never seen a headless person still be alive and functioning. Also, if we saw a body with two heads, we would know that something went terribly wrong in the genetic formation of that body. So it is in God’s universe.

Having a head, therefore necessitates “headship”, that is the directing from the head and directing headship implies sub-ordination on the part of the body to that direction. We find this hierarchy of divine order in our bodies, in our relationship with Christ, within the Church, in the angelic realm and in the Millennial Kingdom. Jesus even commends the Centurion’s faith expressed in this divine order saying; “I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.” (Matt. 8:8-10). “It is God’s plan that in the home and in the local church that men should exercise headship under the authority of Jesus Christ... (and) both men and women must honor the Lord by respecting the symbols of this headship.”<sup>3</sup> For men that means an uncovered head and for women it means a covered head.

**2. Creation v.8-9** *“8For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 9neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.”*

Gen 2:18; 21-24 “The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." 21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." 24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

**3. Angels v.10** *“10For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.”*

If Paul had in mind good angels we might conclude his reasoning to be because “Even angels long to look into these things” (1 Pet. 1:12), that is the grace of salvation to fallen men and as angels exist in an order of headship and are sent to serve us who will inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14), it would shameful to them to see us in disarray to God’s order.

If Paul had in mind bad angels, perhaps he had in mind the previous corruption wrought by them in Gen. 6 and the warning in verse 4 that “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days-and **also afterward.”**

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112

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4. **Complementarity v. 11-12** *“11In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 12For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.”*

This verse alone should forever dispel the accusations that Paul was a misogynist and that headship was simply a way to secure male domination. There is interdependent, mutually equal partnership in marriage and headship. Priority of role does not infer inferiority nor does difference of role mean inequality. Men are to step up and be men; strong spiritual leaders, heads, protectors and providers. Women are to glory in these blessings provided to them and respond in complementary roles as helpmates, with strong and devoted subordination in all that the word means. The current cultural effeminization of men and the masculinization of women has no place in the church and among those who name Christ’s name.

5. **Natural Revelation v.13-15** *“13Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, 15but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering.”*

Here Paul appeals to natural revelation and the God given distinction between men and women. Confusing and abandoning this God given distinction is one of Satan’s major strategies at the moment to weaken and leaven the church. And as trivial as it seems to the ears of modern hearers of the Bible, the way we wear our hair is meant to be a sign that displays this distinction between men and women as well as our submission to God ordained headship, for both men and women.

Wiersbe writes: “Nowhere does the Bible tell us how long hair should be. It simply states that there ought to be a noticeable difference between the length of men’s hair and the women’s hair so that there be no confusion of the sexes. (This principle eliminates the so called “unisex” styles.) It is shameful for the man to look like a woman or the woman to look like the man.”<sup>4</sup>

J Vernon McGee observes that “Men who let their hair grow so long that you can hardly recognize them seem to be expressing a lack of purpose in life.”<sup>5</sup>

Both men and women can signal headship rebellion by the sign of their hair. Thus, “Man buns” and “shaved female heads” are NOT the cultural signs and signals of one’s respect and submission to God ordained, Biblical headship. They are signs of ignorance of purpose at best or rebellion at worst.

In v. 15 we see that “The woman’s long hair is her glory and it is given to her lit. “Instead of” a covering (Lit. a περιβολαίου- thrown around; a shawl; a noun contrasted to the verb κατακαλύπτω above). Again, Wiersbe writes, “In other words, if local custom does not dictate a head covering, her long hair can be that covering. I do not think that Paul meant for all women in every culture to wear a shawl for a head covering; but he did expect them to use their long hair as a covering and as a symbol of their submission to God’s order. This is something that every woman can do...***the basic principle of headship applies in every culture; but the means of demonstrating it differs from place to place.***”<sup>6</sup>

6. **Universal Church Tradition v.16** *“16If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice--nor do the churches of God.”*

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 113-14

<sup>5</sup> J. Vernon McGee; *1 Corinthians; Through The Bible Books*; 1977; p.121

<sup>6</sup> Wiersbe; p. 114

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Here Paul says literally, “we have no such practice”. In other words, if someone contentiously insists on approving of women abandoning the custom of head covering (or any other culturally appropriate means of demonstrating it) as a sign of respect to God ordained headship, then be warned, there is no such apostolically approved practice in any church for such an abandonment; you’re on your own with that one.

Six clear reasons for culturally recognized subordination to God ordained headship. In our Western culture, physical head coverings are not the normal sign of such respect. Apart from a few sects who are legalistic about the length of a woman’s hair or some denominations where “hats” are the norm (though most of them have now become statements more about fashion than headship) the traditional western culture expressions have dwindled and nearly vanished. For example, making the traditional marriage vows to “obey” or “submit”; wearing a wedding ring; taking the husband’s name; honouring the responsibility to make a “home” and raise God fearing and obedient children; refusing to assume the role of “teacher of men” in the church; carrying an inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit; being a strong and equal partner in marriage, speaking the truth in love and seeking God together. For many women, these expressions of subordination to God ordained headship seem so “old fashioned” if not impossible to achieve. And frankly, I can appreciate why they feel that way. Where are the MEN who are worthy of such a sub-ordained partner? So long as society and Christendom continues to produce and tolerate spineless, effeminate, “metro-sexuals” instead of MEN- God submitted MEN; Women respecting and honouring MEN; men who take headship seriously in spite of the world’s opposition, I see little hope for the testimony and order of that which the Bible sets forth as so important. Men and women...we both have a responsibility to Biblical Headship. It’s a tradition that will keep us safe and balanced as we “scratch out a pleasant, simple tune without breaking (our) neck(s)” as fiddlers on the roof.

**2. Selfishness at the Agape Feast V. 17-22** *“17In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. 18In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. 19No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval. 20When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, 21for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. 22Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!”*

Another tradition of the early church when it gathered, was to gather around a corporate meal first, a “pot luck” if you will which was then immediately followed by celebrating the Lord’s Table or Eucharist. Acts 2:42-46 describes both the sacramental “breaking of bread” as well as the organic sharing of food from house to house with gladness and simplicity of heart. This first meal together was known as an “Agape” or Love Feast. The rich, the poor, the Jew, Gentile came together in fellowship and ate together. It was a beautiful sign of unity.

But in Corinth, this meal had deteriorated into a sectarian and selfish display of gluttony and drunkenness. There was no mutual respect. Some came early and didn’t wait for others, so the late arrivals went home hungry. Some of the early arrivals appear to have been the rich who ended up getting drunk and humiliated those who were poor.

The scene was like the mother who was preparing pancakes for her sons, Jack who was 5, and Ryan who was 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw this as an opportunity for a moral lesson to the two of them. She said to them, "If Jesus were sitting here,

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He would say, ‘Let my brother have the first pancake; I can wait.’ At this, Jack turned to his younger brother and said, "Ok, Ryan, you be Jesus!"

They were then drunkenly and dividedly stumbling into a time to celebrate the Lord’s Table. No wonder Paul said their meetings did more harm than good, for as we shall see this approach was literally killing them.

When Paul speaks of there having “to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval” he is probably referring to those who were obediently following the command in Ch. 5:11 “With such a man do not even eat.” This not eating with the disobedient was a clear sign among them as to who was approved and who by contrast would be disapproved and in danger of being “disqualified”. David Lowry observes, “Instead the Corinthians had turned the memorial of selflessness into an experience of selfishness and had made the rite of unity a riotous disunity.”<sup>7</sup>

The traditional “pot luck” and sharing of a meal together among Christians is in fact a good and balancing aspect for fiddlers on the roof, provided we do so in mutual respect and as a genuine display of our unity.

**3. Unworthiness at The Lord’s Table V. 23-34** *“23For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” 25In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. 27Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. 31But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. 32When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. 33So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. 34If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.”*

Here we come our most sacred and mysterious tradition, the sacrament of the Lord’s Table. It is indeed a “Holy Mystery” as it has been historically referred to. The Greek word mystery is translated into Latin as sacramentum, the word from which we get our English word “sacrament”.

Just how sacred and important this tradition is from God’s perspective is seen in the fact that three of the four Gospels contain the words of instruction, and the Apostle Paul who wasn’t even in the upper room that night was given the exact same words by direct revelation from God, presumably while he was in the Arabian desert. We are given no command to celebrate Christ’s birth day, but we are commanded to celebrate his death day. Why? Because the Cross is the climax of the incarnation and the resurrection is proof of what the cross accomplished for us...the forgiveness of our sins and our reconciliation to God.

What happens in this sacred mystery has largely been defined by three different views:

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<sup>7</sup> Lowry; p. 531

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1. Roman Catholic Church – Transubstantiation, the bread and wine actually become the flesh and blood of Jesus. In other words at a molecular and DNA level if you were to examine it you find human flesh DNA not wheat or grape.
2. Lutheran- Consubstantiation, the actual DNA flesh and blood of Jesus is contained in, by, with, through and under the bread and wine.
3. Reformed- Symbol only; nothing “mysterious” about it at all. It’s simply a symbolic reminder to us.
4. There is fourth view, and one that I think is more worthy of merit and that is “Real Presence.” Without backing ourselves into a “DNA corner” or denying the real “sacramental-mystery” we acknowledge that He Himself is in fact “in” the Bread and Wine. Jesus said clearly in the upper room, “This IS my body...this IS my blood”. If He is truly “present” even among two or three gathered in His name, He is surely “present” in Bread and Wine at the Lord’s Table. It must be so for as Paul said in the previous chapter, we do indeed “participate in Him”; in real, present and spiritual communion. As one theologian and friend of mine once said, “If not...what’s the point?”

The Lord’s Table or Eucharist is a **Commemoration** that looks back...“do this in remembrance of me”; it is a **Communion** in the present tense with the living Christ; and it is **Commitment** to the future aspect for He is coming again. We express all three of these with in words of the Eucharistic liturgy when we say “Let us proclaim the mystery of faith, ‘Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again’.”

Paul warns in v. 30-31 that the many of the Corinthians were weak, sick and even died as a result of the divine discipline of disqualification because of how they were making a hash of the Agape Feast and then coming to this sacred mystery in an unprepared, divided and in some cases drunken state. Paul says we should we should judge ourselves first. If we don’t, the Lord will chasten us...even severely, possibly even to death if we continue on carelessly and resist His lesser chastening.

So what then must we do if the Lord’s Table Supper is to bring us blessing and not chastening?” There are four “looks” we must make.

1. **Look Back:** We must look back and remember His death because everything we have as Christians is centred in His death. The Cross is the climax of the incarnation and the resurrection is proof of what the cross accomplished for us. We remember:
  - **THAT** he died- The Gospel Message; the Eucharist is a visible sermon and declaration of the Good News
  - **WHY** he died- He died in our place as our substitute and as our “Vicarious Man”; to provide propitiation for the Father; to make atonement for us; to redeem us from the Devil; to reconcile our alienated mind; to give us eternal life.
  - **HOW** he died- He died willingly; no one took His life; He gave it freely.
  - Remembering is not simply the recalling of historical facts. It is a real participation in real spiritual realities.
2. **Look ahead-** We proclaim the Lord’s death in every Eucharist until he comes; he is coming back for us first to take us to the Father’s House and then He is coming back with us to establish His Kingdom and will on earth just as it is in heaven. His coming is our blessed hope and it is imminent. Maybe even this very day. Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!

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3. **Look within**- We look within not to see if we be worthy of the Lord’s Table; but if we participate in a worthy manner. Wiersbe writes, “We must judge our sins and confess them to the Lord. To come to the Table with unconfessed sin in our lives is to be guilty of Christ’s Body and Blood, for it was sin that nailed Him to the Cross. If we will not judge our own sins, then God will judge and chasten us until we do...Chastening is God’s loving way of dealing with His sons and daughters to encourage them to mature (Heb. 12:1-11). It is not a judge condemning a criminal, but a loving Father punishing his disobedient (and perhaps stubborn) children. Chastening proves God’s love for us, and chastening can, if we cooperate perfect God’s life in us.”<sup>8</sup>

The story is told of the famous Scottish theologian John Duncan, of New College in Edinburgh. At communion one Sunday, when the elements came to a sixteen year old girl, she suddenly turned her head aside. She motioned for the elder to take the cup away, that she couldn’t drink it. John Duncan reached his long arm over, touched her shoulder, and said tenderly, “Take it, lassie, it’s for sinners”.<sup>9</sup> “It is for sinners”.

4. **Look around**: This means to discern the Body of Christ in its dual meaning in both the Eucharistic bread, but also the individual members of the body of Christ in the Church. We should discern each other as members of one another and of Christ’s own Body. It should be a demonstration of our unity. No unbeliever should come to the Lords Table nor should anyone whose heart is not right with God and fellow Christians.

“The Eucharist is not supposed to be a time of “spiritual autopsy” and grief, even though confession of sin is important. It should be a time of thanksgiving and joyful anticipation of seeing the Lord! Jesus gave thanks even though he was about to suffer and die. Let us give thanks also.”<sup>10</sup>

Paul closes this chapter by saying that the other less serious aberrations related to the Lord’s Supper- he would attend to when he returned to Corinth.

Ah the tradition of Headship; the tradition of the saints in fellowship feasting; the tradition of the Lord’s Table...may they keep us “Gospel fiddlers on the roof” balanced while we proclaim His death until He comes.

Father we ask you to bless your word which has gone forward and may it not return to you void. And we pray Holy Spirit that you would seal your word upon our hearts and minds, all to the Glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Wiersbe; p. 118

<sup>9</sup> Michael P. Green; *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*; Baker Books; 1982; p. 75

<sup>10</sup> Wiersbe; p. 120