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Message: Complementarianism at CCC, Pt. 1

Transcribed Message
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Genesis 1-2, 1 Timothy 2

A man by the name of Solomon Rexius is a college pastor in Ames, Iowa. He is ministering to college students and he has for at least a decade or more. He wrote an article recently entitled "Things Have Changed". In that article, he's simply reflecting on what he has observed in terms of the changing scope of college ministry. He mentions that 10 years ago his interactions with college students basically revolved around theological questions. How is it that we know we can trust the Bible? Where did this book come from and why is it that some people think that it is from God? How is it that Christianity can claim that Jesus is the only way to God? That just seems kind of extreme, doesn't it? It seems intolerant of everything else. How is it that you can talk about a loving God but in talking about a loving God you also talk about an eternal place of judgment called hell? He says largely 10 years ago most of the questions that were centered around apologetics and about the faith that Christians proclaim were theological in nature.

He says today things have changed and they're much more ethically centered. The questions now have to do a lot with the ethics of life. They have to do with things like does the Bible allow for racism and slavery. Is it possible that this whole matter of gender and sexuality is to be understood in a different way than Christians seem to be putting it forward? Then the last question he underscores is does in fact Christianity allow for the oppression of women. If you've been a Christian for very long I would suggest that you've not only probably grappled with some of those questions on your own but you've probably had other people ask you questions like that about those kinds of issues.

For about the last year, and with breaks in between and with other things that have a gained our attention, but for almost a year the elders have been looking at and discussing not does Christianity oppress women, but what is the rightful role of men and

women in a local church like ours. What is it that the Bible says is the way that we are both as men and women to model for each other and for the world at large the ministry of the gospel that God has given to us. We have deliberated and we have finally delivered and there is a position paper. You may have seen it in the foyer hopefully on the way in. There are two tables out there with blue colored copies. Grab one of those. That gives a much fuller understanding of our thinking with regard to this issue. We want you to have that. There also some copies of other articles on either side of the welcome booth in some brochure holders back there that speak to these issues as well that might be helpful for you as you contemplate this with us. You can also go online and read this same statement on our webpage. We're going to take the next two Sundays and we're going to step into this issue. We'll be asking this question and grappling with this matter of what it is that the Bible says with regard to the role of men and women in the church. Lord willing, on the 25th of this month, we'll jump back into our previous series in the book of Romans and we'll start off in that 12th chapter where we left off.

This morning and next Sunday as well, how we conduct ourselves in the church is of great importance and great concern to God. I think it's our responsibility to understand what the Bible teaches about this and to implement it and to follow it and to practice it and to do it together. I look at this issue and I see two, two, and one. I see two issues that rise to the front of this particular discussion. The first one is this. The debate over the significance of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. What is biblical masculinity supposed to look like? What is biblical femininity supposed to look like? This is the ultimate question in many ways behind what it is that we're looking at. What is it that the Bible calls for men to do and what is it that it calls for women to do? We spent time this summer in our marriage series looking at some of these issues. In some respect, for some of you that were here this summer, this will be something of a review in different parts. But our basic humanity is being discussed in our day and in our time and in our culture. It speaks to the cultural confusion of our time as we said even just a few weeks ago that people do not want to or claim that they do not know even what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. Behind the issue that we're looking at, we have to be able to define and describe and

understand what does God want for men and what does God want for women. What does biblical masculinity look like? What does biblical femininity look like?

Secondly, the debate over the unique roles that God has given to men and women. When you look at the very way that I have worded that statement, this idea that there are unique roles that God may have for us gives you some insight into how it is that the elders are approaching this and how it is that they're understanding Scripture at this point. The very idea that there are unique roles or not leads us then to two perspectives. We have two issues, two perspectives. In fairness I could've called this bullet point four perspectives because there's really four different ways that this issue is approached. We're going to spend most of our time dealing with two of them but for the sake of completeness I just want to comment on two others. They're not in your outline.

One approach to this whole matter is through the eyes of feminism. Feminism comes to us both as secular and as Christian. Within feminism, that is secular feminism, there is obviously a disregard for the word of God. You read secular feminists. It's not only a disregard for the word of God but anything that has a reference to man or males is obviously toxic and oppressive. That's a world perspective that brings us secular feminism. But Christian feminism as it is defined and as presented to us I would charitably suggest that they have a very low view of Scripture. As a Christian feminist handles the word of God from my vantage point, they do so with not a lot of care. In fact, they're very open in their statements and in their position that there are contradictions. There are cultural manifestations within the writings of Paul especially of course but even of Jesus. They don't bring to the Scriptures the same high view of the word of God as you and I likely do. Obviously that is very significant in how they see this issue.

The other major category other than feminism is on the other side and that would be patriarchy. If you were to just look at those four on a continuum you would see on one end feminism. Next to it is egalitarianism and then complementarianism and then patriarchy on the other end. As I look at that what I see on that continuum is I see on the outside of that line both feminism and patriarchy. I see both of them over emphasizing their positions to the point that it is harmful and it distorts for us as

Christians what it is that we believe the Bible says about these things. We're going to focus on the two in the middle just in terms of the ability to deal with it in time.

The first of those two is called egalitarianism. Egalitarianism. If you want to summarize egalitarianism it is simply to say there are no unique roles related to one's gender. There are no unique roles related to one's gender. In the home and in the church, whatever a man can do a woman can do. A feminist might say she could do it better. Whatever a man can do a woman can do because there are no distinctions within God's framework. There are no distinctions and there are no restrictions. Whatever is open for a man to do, a woman has equal opportunity in that regard.

The other major position that we'll be looking at is complementarian. Complementarian, if you are just summarizing, say there are unique roles related to one's gender. There are distinctions that the Bible makes. There are restrictions that the Bible puts in place with regard to what it is that a man or a woman does in this regard. If you look at a chart it looks like this. This is not in your outline but it is in the position paper so don't feel the need to write all this down. You can get this when you pick up the paper. When you look at these two views and you think in terms of their value of men and women, they're mirrors of each other, aren't they? Men and women are of equal dignity and worth. Both of these views say this. When you step into what does it look like within the life of the church and the roles that might be available within the life of a local church? A complementarian says as we reflected that men and women have distinct roles. We're going to look a lot more at that, Lord willing, next Sunday. An egalitarian says no, that's not what the Bible teaches. What the Bible teaches us is that all of these roles are interchangeable.

Now understand, our egalitarian friends, and there may be some right here with us this morning obviously, they love Jesus. They love the gospel. They love the Bible. They're reading the same one that we are. They just have come to a different understanding of some of these verses that we'll look at as we go forward. But they see these things very differently. What does it look like in the life of a local church? One says there are distinct roles and another says no, they're totally interchangeable. Then, within the home the same thing. Men and women have distinct roles. What is it that God has charged a man to do within his home? What is it He is asking a woman to do within

the home? a complementarian looks at those in the passages of Scripture and says there are things that men have been uniquely asked in charge to do within God's economy. And there are those things that God has given to women to do. On the other side the egalitarians says no, once again they're interchangeable. It doesn't matter. Gender is not going to decide whether you get to do this or that or another thing.

Then with regard to creation, gender distinctions are in place, a complementarian says, before sin and before the fall. This is hugely important. That's why we'll go back to this passage next Sunday and dive into it a little more deeply. But we believe as complementarians, and what I believe as a complementarian, that those were things that God put in place at creation before the fall, before sin. An egalitarian looks at that and says no, those gender distinctions that you're talking about, that you seem to see in Scripture, those are the result of the fall. What we're trying to do now as people who are redeemed in Christ we're trying to remove all of those things. We're trying to remove the impacts of sin. You can see just by looking at that chart that Christians are reading the same Bible and loving the same Jesus and preaching the same gospel in many respects, and yet they're coming to very different conclusions about what that Bible teaches with regard to these matters.

Over the years as I have taught on this subject, as we've come to it as we have numerous times just in the exposition of God's word, here is what I have observed. Some of you are thinking you just made up some new words. I've never even heard of these words. I can remember 15 or 20 years ago when we were going through the book of Genesis and we talked about this. I did have a guy come up and say you made up that word this morning, didn't you? No, I did not. People a lot smarter than me came up with these descriptions of these positions: complementarianism and egalitarianism. I understand that there are some of you that you're a bit this morning like I didn't even know that these words were out there. I didn't even know this was happening in this way as you've described it. I understand that. Some of you are hearing this teaching and looking at this chart and listening to what little bit I have said just to this point and you're like – wow. You and the elders need to know that it's the 21st century, dude. I mean, come on. Get with it. It sounds like we're going down a bad path here and we haven't

even heard all that you have to say. The world has changed and you need to be changing with it.

If you're relatively new to Covenant and if this is your first Sunday you might say this is my last Sunday as well. But I hope you come back and hear at least a little more of what we have to say next week. Some of you are here this morning and you're leaning towards patriarchy. You're leaning towards a position that to me over emphasizes in some respects what God has charged men and women to do within the structures of the home and the church. You might very well be sitting here for these Sundays and saying they're going liberal. I knew it. I know they're going liberal. The next thing you know we'll have a woman pastor and we'll have woman elders. I understand that in a group this size and with this many different kinds of backgrounds that some of you are not familiar with some of these things and some of you are deciding and trying to decide which way do they think the elders are leaning in this.

Understand this. There isn't any particular issue that has driven our discussion of this with regard to why now, other than we believe this is an issue that the church is increasingly facing and will so going forward. There wasn't an event or something that happened or some issue that has arisen. It's more our wanting to bring to you as the people of Covenant what we believe the Bible teaches about something that clearly is a big part of the culture that we find ourselves living in. We have formalized this paper and I would say it this way. If you've been at Covenant for 43 years, then you're going to think this is the way we've always done it. What they've written in this paper is basically how we have done church for 43 years. That's exactly right. We're not introducing something brand-new and something different. We're not changing something old. We're simply bringing before you what this church has believed and taught for its 40+ years of existence and doing so hopefully in a timely manner.

What we are saying is simply this. The reason we're committed to the things that we have written in this position paper simply comes back then to this one unchanging word. We have these two issues. We have these two perspectives. But behind it, we have this one unchanging word. We have what we believe is the inerrant, all sufficient word of God. A number of years ago we did a little miniseries in the fall called People of the Book. We are People of the Book. It's not what I think. It's not how I feel. It certainly

can't be what does the world have to say about this. It's not a time for us to put forward our personal opinions. No, we want to be people of the book. We want to come constantly to the word of God and say what does the Bible teach about this. That's what we want to submit ourselves to.

We know what the world is going to say. I mean, if the world were giving commentary on these two Sundays, we know the disdain. We see glimpses of it at times. When there's a complementarian issue that rises for whatever reason in the national scope of news, it's mocked. It's belittled. It's treated with disdain. It's almost as if people would say how backwards can you people be. This literally is the 21st century. We're not living in the 18th or the 19th or the 20th century. We know what the world looks at us like. They see us as being bigoted and chauvinistic and misogynistic and all of those things.

But here's the thing. Even within the church, there are those who are increasingly moving away from what appears to many of us as what has been the Orthodox teaching of the word of God for hundreds and thousands of years. Do you realize that Orthodox Christianity has traditionally held to what it is that we're going to be looking at and teaching in these two Sundays. This has been the position of the church by and large, not every element of the church, but by and large the Orthodox Church of Protestant Christianity has presented a position that is relatively close to complementarianism. When Paul says in Romans 12:2 don't let the world pour you into its mold, I can't help but think that one of the reasons that churches all across this land are dealing with this issue now in a new and different way is in fact because of the culture wanting to pour us into its mold. We have to decide what are we going to stand on. What are we going to stand for? We are living in a world of egalitarianism, feminism, and rejection of God's word and God's truth as it relates to the redefinition of marriage. The United States Senate is going to be debating this week and in the coming weeks codifying into federal law the redefinition of marriage. We talked about that this summer. The whole LBGTQ movement is pressuring churches and Christians to change their position and their stand and their understanding of these things. The role of women both within the home, the family and in the church, ours is a minority position. I've just said it. What the elders of Covenant Community Church have put forward in this blue paper is a minority even in

the evangelical church today. Frankly, we're totally comfortable with that. We believe that this is in fact the teaching of God's word even though increasingly in churches like ours positions are being changed.

Let's do this for the rest of our time. Let's go back to the beginning. Of course, when you say let's go back to the beginning, you can only mean one thing. You go back to Genesis. So let's go back to Genesis. What I want to do this morning is to lay the foundation for what we'll do next Sunday. Next Sunday will be largely dependent on what we're laying this morning by way of this foundation. When I look at Genesis 1, 2, and 3 (We're just barely going to touch on three. We'll save that for next Sunday) this is what I see. Man and woman are created equal and yet different in God's image. What I've listed for you on your outline are 10 observations that are just taken right out of the text of Genesis. We're not going to be able to spend a lot of time on each of these. We did some of this just this last summer when we were talking about marriage.

But look at Genesis chapter 1. We'll begin reading at verse 26: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His own image. In the image of God He created him. Male and female He created them. And God blessed them and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" Notice with me 10 things taken right out of the text of Scripture.

Number one. God created the human race and He created them male and female. God created the human race and He created them male and female. He did not have to do that. I'm going to say that probably more than once when we go through these. God created two sexually distinct human people. He didn't have to do that. He could've created two men and they could've had reproductive capacity. He could've created two women and given them reproductive capacity. He didn't do that. He created a man and He created a woman. He created them distinctive and He created them different. I just want to say at the beginning of this that it seems to me that when you come to the subject it's almost like you're laying one foundation block after another upon

which you're going to build in the progress of revelation what God is going to say later on in for instance the epistles to the New Testament churches. But it is important for us to see this foundational truth. It's not two-men. It's not two women. It's not one who is a clone of the other. It's two who are distinct and who are different.

Secondly, God created both the man and the woman in His image. We have underscored this and we have spoken to this repeatedly. They both share the same dignity. They both share the same value. They both share the same worth. They both share in the same glorious destiny through the gospel. They are unlike the animals in that they are stamped as image bearers of God. It makes them totally unique and different from all of the rest of God's creation. But as God looks at the man and as He looks at the woman, he sees that they are equal in every way in terms of value, dignity, worth, destiny. All of that is exactly the same.

Thirdly, God gave the divine mandate to both the man and the woman. He gave the divine mandate to both the man and the woman. He said to both of them be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and rule it. They were literally king and queen. Within God's economy under the sovereign rule and Lordship of God there is King Adam and there is Queen Eve. God puts them in this place to fill the earth and to subdue it. This is not a man's world. This is not a woman's world. This is God's world. We function best when we understand that and find the place that He has for us within that world.

Number four. God named the human race man. He did not name the human race woman. When you look at 1:26, God said let us make man in our image after our likeness. When God named the human race, He named the human race man. We rightfully understand that's the generic term. That is the generic word for mankind. That's what God named the human race. But look at chapter 5 and verses 1 and 2. The same thing is emphasized again. This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man He made him in the likeness of God. Male and female He created them and He blessed them and named them man when they were created. It is perfectly proper and right to speak of mankind in that way. The significance of that is going to be further developed in just a moment when we step into the second chapter. and it seems to me that what we have in these statements in 1:26 and 5:1-2 is a hint of what is to come in terms of God's created order.

Number five. God created Adam first and then He created Eve. Chapter 2 and verse 7: "Then the Lord God formed man of the dust from the ground and He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living creature." Paul is going to emphasize this. We're going to see this next week in 1 Timothy 2. He's going to speak of it in 1 Corinthians 11. Here's the point. Again, God didn't have to do it the way that He did. We believe that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. We believe that every word of Scripture is breathed out by God. We believe there's a weightiness to every word. What God has given to us here is a picture of the fact that He created Adam first and then Eve. He could have created them simultaneously. He could have just spoken as He did in so much of the other creative work. He didn't do that. He didn't create them by just speaking. He took dirt from the ground and formed Adam. He didn't create them simultaneously. He created Adam first.

Before Eve was created, Adam was created. Before Eve was created, Adam was in the garden. Before Eve was created, Adam was charged with the naming of the animals. Before Eve was created, God had a conversation with Adam. He said Adam, in this garden that I have blessed you with, there's a tree and of that tree of knowledge of good and evil you are not to eat. Nowhere in the text of Genesis is that command to not eat of that tree repeated after Eve was created. What do we take from that? We take from that that it was Adam's responsibility, God charged him with communicating that to Eve and to his family. That's significant. We don't have to wonder about that significance because in 1 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 13 Paul, in developing his argument, which again we'll step into next week, says "for Adam was formed first, then Eve." There must be something significant about that for God to repeat it three different times in Scripture.

Number six. God formed the woman out of man. God formed the woman out of man. When you stop and think about this creative work that God did, the creation of Adam and the creation of Eve, the creation of the man and the creation of the woman are done in amazingly different ways. God purposefully tells us that He took from the dust of the ground and formed man. Woman however is taken from the side of man. Again, a picture of equality of their closeness to each other, of their connectedness. Again, there are distinctions but there is equality. There are differences. There are

distinctions. Paul speaks of it in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 8 when he repeats this very same thing – that God created Adam from the dust, but Eve He created from Adam.

Point number seven. God created the woman for the man. God created the woman for the man. Now, if I haven't offended you to this point, if the other points that Scripture puts before us haven't offended our modern sensibilities, than just reading that sentence all by itself does, doesn't it? Just the idea that the text of Scripture would say that God created the woman for the man just seems to go against all of our modern sensibilities. And yet that's exactly what we read in chapter 2 verse 18. We're so familiar with this verse: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.'" I will make him a helper suitable for him. God said it's not good that man is alone. I'll make him one who is like him but who isn't like him. Remember when we looked at that earlier this summer. One who is similar to him. One who corresponds to him but one who is different from him.

Now again, I want to just stop and step back and say that phrase that the woman was created for the man should not bring a negative connotation immediately to mind. Step back and let the text of Scripture speak to us its truth. What is it saying? It is saying that this is God's evaluation when he looks at Adam. Adam wasn't the guy who came up with the idea that it's not good to be alone. He didn't even know. It was God's evaluation of him. Adam, this isn't a good situation for you to be alone. It was God who said that. It was God who stepped into that. It was God who said he lacked. It was God who said he was incomplete. And it was God who said I know how to meet that need. The need that I will meet in his life is I will create someone for him who is like him but also at the same time different from him. It is God's solution to man's need that is to be understood and underscored.

Number eight. Adam named Eve. Adam named Eve. Chapter 2 and verse 23: "Then the man said, 'This is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.'" This, I remind you, is before the fall. This is before the fall that God gave the responsibility to Adam to name the woman. This was his new companion. Woman obviously, just like man, is generic. Adam called his wife Eve after the fall. He renamed her Eve after the fall. And why did he do that? He

did it in response to the promise of God. Adam believed that when God said the woman that I have given to you from her will come a Redeemer, from her will come life. Adam names her Eve, which is the giver of life, after the fall in to sin. But within God's framework, within God's economy to name someone or something was a picture of authority. That's the authority that God had given to Adam.

Number nine. Adam is the representative head of the human race. Adam is the representative head of the human race. It is not Eve. It's not the woman. It's man. We saw that back in Romans 5. For by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, so death has come upon all men for all have sinned. But Paul says at the beginning of that 12th verse that it is by one man, Adam, that sin came into the world. Why? Because Adam was the representative head of the human race just as Christ is the last Adam and the Redeemer that was promised. Adam is the representative head of the human race.

Number ten. The curse brought a distortion of their roles, not the introduction of new ones. This is what we'll pick up on next Sunday. But men and women of God, I say to you that the roles that God has established for us within the home, within the family, within marriage, and within the church are under assault today from Satan himself as never before. When you look back at the historical record – Genesis 1, Genesis 2, the creative work of God – you don't wait very long until Genesis 3 and Satan comes and attacks Adam and Eve, the man and the woman. We'll see, Lord willing, next Sunday is his attack is strategically and specifically at the point of their understanding of the defined roles and responsibilities that God had assigned to them. Very instructive. Satan saw God's design for the family. He saw God's design for marriage. He even no doubt saw that this was going to play out in some respect in other ways. It is to this point that he centers his attack in Genesis 3.

What about the rest then of the Old Testament? What about the Gospels? What about the book of Acts? What can we say just in a brief couple of sentences about that? What you can say is that as you read the Old Testament, as you read the Gospels, as you read the book of Acts you see something that is certainly countercultural. When you look at these aspects of the storyline of the Bible, you see that the rights of women are elevated. The rights of the women are elevated. You have people like Miriam and Hulda

and Deborah and Esther. You have the incredible picture in Proverbs 31 of this virtuous woman that went against much of the culture of that time in terms of how it is that she lived her life. You think of Jesus in His treatment of women. It was revolutionary. Just think of who was at the cross. It was primarily the women. The gospel writers tell us that it was the women who were boldly standing at the cross watching their Savior. The men had fled. They were hiding. They were out of public view. It's to Mary that Jesus first presents Himself as the resurrected Lord. A woman not even having legal standing in the judicial court room in that system at that time is the one that the Holy Spirit of God has the writers of Scripture say is the very first person to see the resurrected Christ. I say to you that the Old Testament and New Testament, the Gospels, the book of Acts, the spearhead of the gospel going out into the world includes with major impact and major part the role of women in the spread of that gospel.

With all of that I say secondly elevated, yes. Elevated, yes. All distinctions erased, no. I think that's what we want to focus on next Sunday. I'll say two things. For all that the women did in the Old Testament, for all of the ways that they served within Israel, for all of the ways that the Bible presents them as countercultural in some respects to their time, you never see a woman serving as a priest in the Old Testament. Now again that is significant. There was a role that was reserved for men alone and that was that of the priesthood.

The second thing I would suggest is that for all that Jesus did, as radical as He was, He chose 12 men to be His apostles. Our egalitarian friends push back on that and say that was just cultural accommodation. He knew that culturally it would be difficult to pick a woman to be an apostle and so He didn't do that at that particular time. I say that is simply nonsense. Jesus insulted sensibilities – religious, cultural, otherwise – all of the time. He had no regard for those traditions of men when they were opposed to the traditions of God. I simply reject that as a possible answer. I think the answer lies, as we'll see next week, much more broadly in terms of God's plan for men and women and their role in the home and in the church. My friends, how we conduct ourselves in the church of God, how we conduct ourselves in our homes, in our families, in our marriages is of great importance to God. It is of great significance, and I trust that we will have a heart to hear what it is that God says in that regard and follow it.

What do we take away? What do we take into our daily life this morning? Men and women are not to be seen as rivals. They're to be seen as partners. The world wants us to be rivals. The world wants us to be rivals against everybody and everything. God wants us not to be viewing each other as rivals. He wants us to see each other as partners. We're distinct, but we're dependent. We're different, but we're dependent. Together we're called to carry out the great commission. Together we're called to take the beauty and the glory of the gospel to display it in our marriages, just as Paul says in Ephesians 5. That's the beauty of the gospel that is on display in our lives and in our families.

That gospel is what says to all of us that all of us need a Savior. All of us stand at an equal footing at the cross. For all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. God has made a way. He has made a way back to Himself. That way of course is through believing and trusting that what Jesus did on the cross is all that needed to be done. If you believe that this morning, you enter in to this gospel ministry with us by simply expressing your faith and trust that what Jesus did is all that needed to be done.

Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for the cross. We thank you for our Savior. We thank you for your word, Father. We thank you for the hope of the gospel. Father, I pray that we will with a humility of heart that we will with a steadfastness come to your word every day asking you to teach us and show us how best to bear witness to a world desperately in need of a Savior. Let us put on full display the glory of the gospel as we your people live out your calling upon our lives. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.