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SERIES: GROWING AND GOING

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: An Interview with Christopher Yuan Pt. 2

Now, let's join Pastor Nat Crawford with special guest, Professor Christopher Yuan:

NC: Christopher, great to have you back on the program.

CY: Yeah, thanks for having me again, Pastor Nat.

NC: For those who maybe missed the last episode, and they didn't hear your story, can you kind of give us, just like a five minute version, of who you are, and how you got to be where you are?

CY: Well, not being raised in a Christian home, I wrestled with my sexuality, and I came out to my parents. Kind of through me coming out to my parents - through that crisis - my mother came to faith, and then my father came to faith. I went the opposite direction. I'm from Chicago. I was going to dental school in Louisville, Kentucky. And while I was there in graduate school, I was partying, doing all this stuff with my friends - who were all unbelievers and in the gay community. I started doing drugs, selling drugs. I was expelled from dental school, just three months before I received my doctorate. Moved to Atlanta. And this whole time, my parents were praying for me. And you know, it was just awful. I became a supplier to other dealers in over a dozen States. And so my mom just prayed for a miracle, and that miracle came with a bang on my door.

I was arrested and I found myself in jail, but it was in jail, that of all things, I found a Bible in the trash can. I began reading it, and it's funny, a lot of times people ask, you know, what ministry was it? Would someone share the Gospel? Actually it wasn't - it was really just the Word of God. [Wow.] Me, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit. And so it was just the Word of God, and I began reading it, and it began to convict me. And I realized that I put my identity in the wrong thing - that, you know, I believed that sexuality is who I am. But also I recognized this concept - which was really a frustration of what I saw Christians were communicating to me - and that this was that I had to become straight - that I had to become attracted to the opposite sex. And not to say that certainly is the right direction, but it is so broad - that it includes sinful behavior. And as I read God's Word about a Holy, Holy God, who called out sexual immorality - including opposite sex sexual immorality - I realized that I couldn't just be attracted to the opposite sex in such a broad way. I knew that I needed to be holy. *Be Holy, for I am Holy.*

And so, you know, as I was in prison of all places, I realized, "I need to pursue holiness". And so in my new book that I wrote with my mom, I introduce this concept of holy sexuality in the Gospel, and I knew I needed to flesh that out. But in prison, I actually ended up just doing three years. I was supposed to get 10 years to life. I was sentenced to six, miraculously got shortened

to three. I got out of prison. I went right from prison to Moody Bible Institute. I loved Moody, and went on to get my Master's and finally, got my Doctorate of Ministry. But yeah, so I was able to write these two books - the first one also with my mom, which was a big blessing.

NC: What motivated you to write this book? And honestly, what sets this book apart from other books on homosexuality, particularly Christian perspectives?

CY: Yeah, Nat. I mean, the last thing that an author wants to do is just to kind of throw another book among a pool of just other excellent Christian books. I didn't feel like I wanted to kind of just duplicate that - the good work that has already been done there - but what I saw kind of lacking was, kind of going the next step. So if this is God's No, what is God's Yes? And why? And you know, to really develop this beautiful, broad, robust theology of sexuality, and I didn't really find that well.

You know, it's not just doing the exegesis, which these other books have done well. It's not just kind of looking at the Bible passages, and seeing what they say, but then doing the systematic theology and the biblical theology, which is instead - and this is a good way for me, that I like to explain to my students - where biblical studies and exegesis - you're studying the trees. You're studying kind of each individual - this tree looks like that, that tree looks like that. That's kind of the exegesis- that's the biblical studies. Theology is then studying the forest, and looking at, you know, the whole forest as a whole, you know - what does the whole Bible say about this one topic of sin, or of marriage, or of singleness? And so that's the difference, because we can't lose the forest through the trees, but we also can't lose the trees through the forest - we have to do both. And we've done a lot of good work on studying the trees, but we have to now study the forest. So that's the purpose of my book.

And I think about, you know, where my first book - where I introduced this concept of holy sexuality - the first book is kind of for the heart - to help, just to break our heart for how God seeks and saves the lost. But my new book, *Holy Sexuality and The Gospel*, is for the head and for the hands. Too often, this generation, they want to just love. And I like that passion, where they want to just go and do. But unfortunately, if we just go and do without thinking right, we can end up doing wrong. If you try to do right without thinking right, you can end up doing wrong. And that's kind of the purpose of my book, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel* - to first firmly ground ourselves in truth, because we've dichotomized love and truth too often.

Many people are like, well, you know, love is one side, truth is on the other. And no, that's not true. Actually, there is no love apart from truth. First Corinthians 13: *love rejoices in truth*. That's so key. They're not dichotomized - our love has to be first firmly grounded in truth. And so that was my hope, is to give this firm solid foundation of God's Word in biblical systematic theology, in a way that's understandable. Because I know right away, people are like, "Whoa, that's too much". Those are too big words. So I'm trying to take the cookie from the top shelves, and bring them down a little bit so we can reach, and just in a readable way - but stretch us as well - but to then go forth. And so my last four or five, six chapters are really practical things, of how do we love, how do we minister to those who are same sex attracted, and also those in the gay community?

NC: Well, one of the things you talk about is identity - you know, who we are - and in your book, you relate identity with an important theological term, and it's theological anthropology.

Now I don't even know what that means, and I've read the book. So you're going to have to remind me, or help me understand. And so can you unpack that for us? [Yeah, sure.] And honestly, what are the negative consequences for getting this wrong?

CY: Well, you know, if we want to understand our gay friends, or gay loved ones, you know, we want to get a better understanding of human sexuality. But we can't understand human sexuality, unless we begin with theological anthropology. And what in the world does that mean? Well, theological anthropology is - anthropology's a study of humanity. Theological anthropology is the study of humanity through God's eyes. In other words, anthropology, it's a discipline that is quite - I would say godless - it's humanist based - that is, essentially atheist. It begins kind of with this premise that there is no God - we're not created. And therefore, anthropology is oftentimes just studying how human beings have evolved over time, and studying all these different cultures, and stuff like that. So it's more of a sociological adventure. But theological anthropology, we must begin at the very beginning - human beings were created by God. And if we're going to try to understand human beings, we need to understand their Creator first. And we need to understand human beings through God's eyes.

First of all, we're created in the image of God at Genesis One. That means that every person - even if they don't know Christ yet - has dignity and value. Second thing that we can't ignore, comes after being created in God's image. Two chapters later, in Genesis Chapter Three, every person - we have been impacted by The Fall. And that means, that we all have a sin nature. That means even, that we are guilty of Adam's sin - that we actually sinned *in Adam*, as Paul talks about it. And those are huge implications, to help us better understand human sexuality. Because when we understand it in that way, when people say, "Well, I didn't choose this" - right, we hear that a lot - "Well, I didn't choose this", or they'll say, "I've been this way for as long as I remember." If you're a Christian - well you already - that doesn't surprise you, because just because you didn't choose something doesn't make it right. Just because you've been this, a certain way, for as long as you remember, or even born a certain way - which of course, science has not proven - but that does not make it right. Because we are all born of the sin nature, that does not make sin right. We didn't choose to have a sin nature - that does not make sinful behavior right.

So beginning there is so important, because an understanding that sexuality is not an essential aspect of who we are. The world today says, "This is who I am". When I lived as a gay man, that's what I said. "I am gay" - that "this is who I am", but as I became a follower of Christ, I recognized that sexuality is not *who* I am, but *how* I am.

NC: That term, "holy sexuality" is not something I remember hearing in seminary. And I think it's a fascinating topic, but talk about that, unpack that for us. And how does this help us understand sexuality?

CY: Yeah. You know, it came out of, like I said before, my frustration that - as I saw what I felt Christians were calling people, who have same sex attractions, or people out of the gay community - what was their goal? You know, well, if homosexuality, you need to become heterosexual. And that seemed quite logical. And even, you know, we look through the Bible, and say, well the Bible, you know, God made Adam and Eve, and marriage is between a man

and a woman. So obviously, that's heterosexual. What we don't recognize is several things. First of all, heterosexuality is a secular concept. Let me say it again: Heterosexuality is a secular concept. It's not actually a biblical concept. And again, people are going to think, "No, the Bible says Adam and Eve". Yes, but Adam and Eve, that's one man, one woman. Heterosexuality is not one man: one woman, in marriage. Heterosexuality is just a man and any woman; several men and one woman; several women and one man. I mean, it could be anything. You know, I often give the example - I could be a man and I'm, you know, in a sexual relationship, or having sexual relationships with half a dozen women - that's heterosexual. I could be a married man, cheating on my wife with another woman - that's also a heterosexual relationship. I could be an unmarried man, but I'm dating a girl, and we even live together, and have a couple of children together, out of wedlock. That's another heterosexual relationship. All are sinful in God's eyes. God would never hold up a concept that included sinful behavior. That's not God's way.

So we have to actually first recognize, it's a secular concept. It's actually - it's a concept that Freud made popular - but not only that, but Freud and all the other German psychologists at that time - in the mid-1800s - that kind of popularized and created this term - they were not just creating a term to describe the experience of same sex attractions, or even the behavior. What they were actually doing was creating a new category of personhood, which as Christians, we need to reject. Sexuality is not *who* we are, but *how* we are.

And so that's why I came up with this term, holy sexuality. This is the way I define it: And it's to juxtapose, not just against heterosexuality, but actually is juxtaposing it against the entire framework - heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality - that I think that we need to kind of reject, because it is not precise enough - heterosexuality isn't. What is much more precise, as I read through the full counsel of God, there's only two paths that God lays out for us. And it is first, if you are single, which we all start out as, and we all end up as - Matthew Chapter 22 - if you are single, not married, how do you live, regarding your sexuality? You live sexually abstinent. However, most people do get married. And then when I'm talking about marriage, I'm using only the Bible's definition of marriage. I'm only using Jesus' definition of marriage, which comes out of Matthew 19 and Mark Chapter 10, which I believe is the strongest apologetic for man:woman in marriage - Jesus' own words. And if you are married, biblically married, how do you live faithful to God, in regard to your sexuality? You are going to be faithful to your spouse of the opposite sex. So holy sexuality, quite simply is this: chastity in singleness, or faithfulness in marriage - and that is good news for all. And I recognized there was no one term for that. So I kind of had to create a term. That's why I call it holy sexuality. It's just a brand new term, but I think then, it helps us to more fully explain what God is calling us to. He is calling us to be set apart - what holiness means - from the world. But also, He's calling us to purity and holiness and perfection, regarding our sexuality. And it's two paths - not two choices - but two paths, because God puts us on either one of those paths.

NC: So I'm curious, you know, there's a lot of passion behind the topic of sexuality. [Yeah]. There's a lot of topic - if I'll be honest -anger I think at times - from the evangelical community, towards homosexuals, or bisexuals or transgender. The reality is, all sin is offensive to God. All of it is disruptive for our relationship with Him, but it's also disruptive for the community that we live in. So I'm curious, how do you coach people to see it that way - to love people regardless of their actions, but to not just say, "Well, homosexuality is up here, and, you know, petty thievery is here," but rather, seeing people as they are - sinners in need of a Savior, and those of us who

are saved, we're saved by grace. So can you speak into that a little bit?

CY: Yeah. Well, I think it's recognizing that sometimes, sins that are a bit unfamiliar to us seem less aesthetic. And when I say aesthetic, I mean not just pretty, but kind of gross, you know. It's kind of the "ick" factor. So when we think, because if like, if I don't struggle with this particular sin, I'm like, "I don't know why people do that." Well, of course I wouldn't, because that's not my struggle, you know. Like, I don't know, let's say gambling or smoking - I just don't like either one. And I can just get into the whole, "I just have no idea". Well, because I'm not in their shoes. But the same could happen to the gambler, and look at me, but like, "Oh, I just don't understand, you know, why that guy would have done that in the past." Well, but he wasn't in my shoes.

So I think we need to be really careful when we look at other people's sins that may be unfamiliar to us - that then we treat it just because it's unfamiliar, and it may be unaesthetic, and very unappealing to us - then we judge that as being more heinous of a sin. But also I think, again, kind of going back to that, you know, where we began with a question of theological anthropology. When we begin there, when we read the Word of God, and recognize how the Word of God diagnoses this particular sin struggle of same sex attraction - that the Bible does not call it, and diagnose it, as a psychological disease, or developmental disorder. But it clearly calls it sin. And when we begin there, we realize, well that just leveled the entire playing field. All of us are unfortunately born into sin: Psalm 51 - we all have a sin nature. Paul calls it, the flesh, *sarx*, that we all have this flesh: *I do what I don't want to do*. That's just the struggle that I have, even as a follower of Christ, but praise be to God, you know, I've been set free. But set free doesn't mean that you're not going to struggle. [Right]. It's really important that we differentiate, you know, between temptations and desires. Temptations - Jesus was tempted in every way. And temptations in and of itself are not sinful, but desire is, so we need to avoid the desire. But when we're tempted, like that brief temptation, we resist it, but we don't fall into temptation. So recognizing it through the lens of God's Word, then makes me realize, "Well, if this is sin - man, I'm a sinner as well." The only difference between my neighbor, who, you know, doesn't know God - he's in a relationship with a man; whatever it is; you know, who identifies as gay - really, the only difference is grace. It's not on me. So that just brings a lot of humility and actually, just grieving for those who have yet to know Christ, you know, because they are just how we all were before we knew Christ.

NC: Yeah. I think there's a posture of humility that we all need to really embrace as Christians. And also remembering who we were apart from Christ, and that grace that transforms us, and it saves us. But speaking of the Gospel, there's a lot of confusion about the Gospel. I mean, part of your title is *The Gospel*. So let's talk about that, because some people are saying, look, the Gospel, it's great. It's a one way ticket to Heaven, but don't worry about it changing your life. You don't need to - you can live however you want - gay, thief, whatever. So talk about the true Gospel, will you?

CY: We think that the Gospel is only about salvation. It's not. The Gospel is also about the now daily struggle, and daily crucifying, and bearing our cross, that we must do on this road to sanctification. Sanctification is not an easy road. It is hard, it is difficult, but God empowers us through the Holy Spirit to do that. And that is what the Gospel is about. So I think that's really important, that we need to recognize, that we cannot just oversimplify the Gospel, simply to a salvific moment, or for the effect of salvation. It is also for the ongoing work of sanctification.

So I think that's really key for us to really grasp and understand.

NC: I want to talk about the local church, because I think the local church has really struggled with this area, of people who have same sex attractions. So why has it been neglected? Why is it so important to begin to minister to people, and how do they do it right? How do we as individuals do it right?

CY: Well, the Bible, again, calls this not a developmental disorder, it calls it sin. So we have to begin there - if sin is a problem, Christ is the answer. And if Christ is the answer, that means that the vehicle from which healing, and change, and transformation - when I say healing, I'm not saying, get it straight; I'm saying, you know, a sinner to a saint; that's what I'm talking about - the vehicle from which that happens - the community in which that happens - is the body of Christ.

I wrote a whole chapter toward the end about that, and I call it, "Spiritual Family". A lot of times we hear a lot of talk about, you know, what people need, who have same sex attraction - what they need most are friends. Yes, we need friends, but I think it falls short, because if all we need are friends, then who needs Christ? And who needs the body of Christ?

So what I see is, I want to kind of bring a correction, and bring us back in line with what God is calling us to. As important as friends are, there's actually something that is elevated even higher than friendship. We are family, and that's how the Bible, in the New Testament, talks about it. If you look at how many times the Bible talks about, in the New Testament, brother and sister, it is tons of times. You can't even get out any book in the New Testament that doesn't mention that numerous times. *How will they know us? By our love.* First Corinthians 13, the great love chapter - Paul, when he wrote that, he didn't write First Corinthians 13 for weddings. I mean, of course that's how husbands and wives should love one another, but what Paul was writing that for was for the church. And I challenge people, when you walk into church, recite First Corinthians 13: *love is patient, love is kind.* That's how we're called to love one another. And that's so key for individuals who have same sex attractions. What I need most is not a best friend for life - What I need most is Christ and the body of Christ. I need that community to shape me. I need spiritual leaders, and pastors, and elders, to speak into my life, speak words of encouragement, to speak words of rebuke. All of that is what the body of Christ is for. Friendships, they don't have that, but the body of Christ - the spiritual family - does. And that's why it's so key that we need to actually bring the church back into the conversation - that we've left the church often to the side for awhile.

NC: Well, I'm sad because our time is up. Our prayer is that you will go, and open up your heart, and your lives, to those of all walks of life, to help people from all different backgrounds, regardless of what their sin struggle is. Because the reality is, the only difference between those of us listening today, probably, and those who are out there, is Christ. That's it - it's Christ. And what do they need more than anything else? That lifesaving Gospel - that love of Christ - and God, He has by privilege, invited us into it, and to go out and open our hearts, and lives, and share that Gospel.