Bob: Facing temptation is a part of living on earth; and in this culture, sexual temptation is one the challenges all of us face. Christopher Yuan says, “To fight temptation, we have to realize who we really are.”

Christopher: The desire and the feelings that we get—and sometimes, we can say, even “bombarded”—sometimes, during the day, it could be like, “I’m good.” Other times of the day, or times of the week, you’re just like bombarded with these thoughts that you didn’t ask for—and these feelings and the desires. I’m going to be filtering those all through the grid of my identity in Christ.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, April 2nd. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. How does understanding your identity in Christ affect your ability to deal with temptation? That’s one of the things we’ll talk about today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. You know, we’ve already talked a little bit about this this week; but there is kind of a—feels like a little bit of a renewal among Christians today around the importance of understanding who we are as Christians—what our identity in Christ is. I’m thinking about our friends, Stephen and Alex Kendrick, who have got a movie coming out this fall that’s all about identity. There are books being written on this subject. This is a vital issue for every believer to understand: “Who am I as a Christian? What does God say is true about me?”

Dave: Yes; and I’ve seen the same thing about—there’s a—probably around the world, but definitely in our country—I’ve watched it for the last three or four years. Ann and I have talked about it many times. There’s this theme that’s rising up in literature. I’ve noticed it a lot—

Ann: —even music.

Dave: —in music—that’s what I was going to say. I ended a sermon, grabbed my guitar, and sang: “I’m no longer a slave to fear. I am a child of God.”

Bob: Right.
Dave: That sounds like we could record that right now?—[Laughter]—I don't think so!—but that very—and, you know, the church stood up and started singing, because there is something in our soul that needs to know, “Who am I?” I think God is speaking to us, in the church, and trying to remind us: “This is the core of your identity.”

Bob: I was reading an article about how adolescents/young people are really struggling with “What is their identity?” In our world today, when they are confused about their identity—or when they are insecure about their identity—and somebody comes along and says, “Well, maybe, you need a new identity,” that can be attractive just because you want something fresh and new.

Ann: I think it’s starting all over—it’s becoming someone new. Maybe, it’s because we haven’t liked the old person; so we’re trying to figure out, “Who am I?”

It’s interesting—for 33 years now, I’ve led a Bible study for the Detroit Lions’ wives. This past year, I asked them to introduce themselves in a little different way—I said, “I want you to introduce yourselves; but you can’t say what you’ve done, who you’re married to, or accomplishments that you’ve had in your life.” The room was silent.

Bob: Yes.

Ann: It took a long time; finally, someone said, “Um, I’m loving.” It’s interesting—when you think about your identity—apart from your desires/your accomplishments—it’s hard to come up with that answer.

Bob: Well, the reason we’re focused on this issue is because it’s at the heart of a book that our friend, Christopher Yuan, has written called Holy Sexuality and the Gospel. Christopher is back with us, again, today. Welcome back.

Christopher: Thanks, Bob.

Bob: We have been talking about this issue of sexuality, and identity is at the core of understanding our sexuality; isn’t it?

Christopher: Yes; it is; that’s why my book began that way. Honestly, I think in the conversation around sexuality, the concept of identity is really the missing piece that we’ve, as Christians, at least, are not getting. The world gets it—the world actually has completely embraced it.

So, when we engage with our gay neighbor or our lesbian coworker—and we’re like, “How do I talk to them about this?”—and we begin with sinful behavior—the reason why it’s so offensive is because—and I’m just going to make it personal. When I lived as a gay man: “Being gay”—as I would have said—“Being gay is not something I did. Being gay is not what I felt. Being gay was who I was,—
Bob: Yes.

Christopher: —“100 percent.”

When we come at it and say: “Homosexuality is sin. Your same-sex relationship is sin,”—they don’t hear you saying: “What you’re doing is sin,” / “Your actions are sinful.” What they hear is: “You’ve just called me—my whole being/the core of who I am as reprehensible, detestable, sinful.” That’s why it’s so offensive.

I think, before we even address the sinful behavior, we need to step back and get at the core identity, which, honestly—and I love what you said: “Who are we?”—without saying, you know: “I’m a mother,” or “I’m a wife,” or whatever. That’s hard, because this problem of identity is not something that the gay community is wrestling with—we all are.

Ann: Yes.

Christopher: We put our identity in things that we do.

Dave: Yes.

Christopher: I teach at Moody: “I’m a teacher, but is that really who I am?—because If I retire and I don’t teach, am I still a teacher? I mean, I don’t know—I guess you could say that—but I think many of the things that we then label ourselves or say, ‘That’s who we are,’—that might be more about what we do or even what we feel.”

I kind of develop that and I say: “So, if that is not who we are, but I say, ‘Sexuality is not who we are,’ it’s how we are. Then, if that’s not who we are, then, ‘Who are we?’ That’s a very important question that I think all Christians—we need to ask ourselves that.”

Dave: Keep it personal for a minute. You said your own identity—

Christopher: Yes.

Dave: —you know, “This is who I am,”—you don’t believe that anymore.

Christopher: Don’t.

Dave: So, talk to me: “Who are you?”

Christopher: My whole life—this was 20 years ago—was gay. All my friends were gay. I lived in an apartment complex in Midtown Atlanta that was, probably, 95 percent gay men. I worked at a gay gym. I—everything around me was gay. The world was telling me: “I am gay.” All my friends were confirming that.
Then, when I became a Christian—and God began to peel away the layers of my wrong identity—I did have an identity crisis all over again, like I did when I was a teenager. I’m Chinese; so I dealt with identity: “Who am I? Am I Chinese? Am I an American? Am I Chinese-American? Am I American-Chinese? Who am I?”

I had this identity crisis, as a new-found Christian; and I needed to study that for myself. I came across all of these passages in the New Testament: “We are in Christ,” “We are in Him.” Over—there are hundreds of these statements, and I needed to fully understand what that meant. Even going back to Genesis—that God created us in His own image. No other created being has that honor—to be created in His image.

Bob: And that’s an important place to start; because you might say, “My identity today is: ‘I am a child of God’”; but we need to back up and say: “Well, every human being has, as an identity marker, the image of God.

Christopher: Yes.

Bob: “We are all created in His image, whether you know Christ or not.” There is a nobility to that, that often gets ignored or minimized, when we’re talking about behavior that we find inappropriate.

Christopher: That’s right. Every one of us has in us the very image of God; but yet, the story doesn’t end there. You know, Genesis 1 doesn’t end—you know, the Bible just doesn’t end at Genesis 1 or Genesis 2. Unfortunately, we get Genesis 3; and that’s an important part for us to understand as well. It does not take away the image of God—it distorts it, but the image of God is never lost.

Bob: Right.

Christopher: That, then, compels us forward to, then—I mean, all the Old Testament: dealing with their sin, and rebelling against God, but then pointing toward the Messiah, who is Jesus Christ—redemption. We all know Christ came so that we have faith in Him/our sins are forgiven, but we also need to realize Christ is the perfect image of God. When we put our faith in Him, He is, in a sense, restoring that image of God in us.

Anyway, it’s all about identity. So, yes, we are created in the image of God that’s been distorted; but then, as people of faith, who now believe in Christ by grace, we then are being restored every day into the image of Christ, who is the perfect image of God. So, our identity—now, I realize: “Who am I? My identity is in Christ—I’m a Christ-follower.”

I mean, hence—actually, my name—which is so ironic—my mother named me Christopher, as a non-Christian. She didn’t know what that name meant. All of my life, I went by Chris. In my testimony—having become a Christian in prison—when I had to sign my name on the dotted line to get out of prison, I had to sign my full name, Christopher. It was—I remember Thursday—I looked at that, and I knew what that name
meant. [Emotion in voice] As I was walking out of prison, I knew that I went into prison my old man; and I walked out of prison a new man.

Actually, now, I kind of insist people call me Christopher. It’s a daily reminder for me that I’m on this earth for a reason, and that’s to bear Christ—not accidentally but purposefully—that’s who I am. When I walk into a room, I don’t want people to say, “Wow, that’s a nice Chinese man,” “That’s a…”—whatever. I want that person to, hopefully, walk away and say: “Man! That guy is different. You know what? I see Christ in Him,”—that’s what I want.

I don’t even identify as a same-sex-attracted Christian. Yes, that might be something that I might wrestle with; but actually, that’s—the fact that I might still experience same-sex attraction isn’t really the real issue. The real issue: I still wrestle with my sin nature. But in Christ, God has given me the ability to put to death my sin nature—put to death and be victorious over my indwelling sin that kind of continues and wants to haunt me on this side of glory; but that’s who I am. So, yes; I might wrestle with sinful temptations; but you know what?—so do we all.

Bob: Right.

Christopher: And that puts us on the same level playing field—all, daily, in need of more of Christ.

Ann: I was going to say—I think every single person wrestles with that identity piece—wrestles with who we are in Christ.

Christopher: Yes.

Ann: Even, as a mom, a mom can think: “I’m a bad mom,” “I’m a terrible wife, and my husband is a bad husband.” You know, we can go through all these things: “I’m fat,” or “I’m ugly,” or “I’m stupid.” I think people—the more you think that, that can become part of our identity.

Christopher: Yes.

Bob: Well, we’re saying, “Do I have worth and value?”

Ann: Exactly.

Bob: “Where do I find my worth and value?”

Ann: Yes.

Christopher: Yes.
Bob: Apart from Christ, people are running around, all over the place, trying to say, “I think I’m going to find it here,” “I think I’m going to find it there.”

Christopher: Yes.

Bob: When you find worth and value, you go, “Ah, this feels really good.”

Christopher: Yes.

Ann: Yes.

Bob: And everybody is looking for that; but apart from Christ, it’s all counterfeit worth and value.

Christopher: It is; it is the easy thing to do. You know, this is: “I’m a baseball player,” “I’m a mom”; and honestly, you know, I would say there are many Christian moms out there that have made that the core of who they are. They put everything—and when things go wrong with their child, their whole world—that was my mom. She was your typical tiger mom. You know, her whole—she—honestly, she gave up everything for her family.

She came here to the U.S. on a full-ride scholarship for graduate school and gave it up because, her whole life, she wanted to be a mom and a wife—and a good wife. That was her dream. She gave that all up; and then, here I am—you know, I rebelled—so her world was crushed. She wanted to end her life—and it wasn’t just me; my parents’ marriage—they were going to get a divorce. It was just a combination of things that seemed to kind of snowball, but God used that. Instead of her taking her life, God gave her life. I mean, she says in her testimony, she wanted to end her life. In reality, she did—because one of her favorite verses is Galatians 2:20: “For I’ve been crucified with Christ, but Christ now lives in me,”—that’s a key thing.

Unfortunately, I think with many—even parents who have gay children—they beat themselves up because: “What did I do wrong?”

Bob: Right.

Christopher: “If I just went to all his soccer games,”—or whatever it is—“then, she” or “…he”—whatever—“wouldn’t…” Here’s the reality: “Perfect parenting doesn’t guarantee perfect children.”

Bob: Right.

Christopher: I actually tell many parents: “It’s not your fault.” We look at Adam and Eve in the Garden: “Did they not have a perfect Father?”
Bob: Right.

Christopher: “Were they not raised in the perfect environment? They still rebelled. So, what makes us think—or what makes parents think they can do any better?”

What that tells me is: “Parents, you’re not God. No parent can turn a heart to Jesus. Only God can do that.

Bob: That’s right.

Christopher: “Point your kid to Christ, but you can’t turn them—you can’t make them believe in Christ.”

I think that’s so important—it ties into this identity—because then, it puts it back upon who we are: “Parents, your main focus is to love Christ—be more transformed into Christ—and not put your whole world around other things that aren’t really who we are.”

Dave: So, here you are. You know, as you think about your mom, who is praying for you and begging God for what you’ve become—but at this point, you’re not; so you go back to that prison cell—you walk out, and you’re a new man. I mean, you get emotional, thinking about it.

Christopher: Yes.

Dave: So, it’s this cool identity moment. Your mom didn’t change you.

We started talking about identity—let’s make sure we close the loop there. How does your new identity in Christ—which is so cool; it’s literally in your name—

Ann: Yes.

Christopher: Yes.

Dave: —in Christ is Christopher—so how does that apply, now, to the identity of who you are?—and especially, even to your sexuality? Walk us through that.

Christopher: Yes; I think so. When we talk about identity in Christ/union with Christ, it really is—I mean, if we’re just going to make a practical, layman, everyday talk, I think the easiest way to think about it is: “What is like the main priority in our life? What is it that we dwell on?”

If you’re a teenager in high school and you kind of have this new puppy love, you know—and all you think about is that person—that can be really consuming. You know, are we making Christ—His Kingdom/the body of Christ—like the forefront of what we do throughout the day? While we’re working, am I doing what I’m doing—whether I’m
answering the phone at an office—am I doing that for the glory of God?—am I doing it, Christ-like? If I'm an accountant, am I crunching numbers for—and I can be meditating on that: “How can I be doing this for the glory of God?” I think these are all things that we need to think about, throughout the day, whether you’re on a break—

Paul says, “Pray without ceasing.” Pray doesn’t mean you need to close your eyes, put your hands together. I just pray, sometimes, when I’m just waiting on an elevator: “Man, my friend that just asked me to pray. Well, I’m going to do that; I’m going to do that right now,”—just little, little things like that. What are the things that we make the main thing in our life every day? It can really—really be simple things.

For me, that is: “What is identity?” Even as a mother, when I’m shepherding my child, am I doing this and saying—am I doing this: “Am I pointing my child to Christ? Am I doing this in a way that is just infused with the good news of the gospel?”

Bob: So, here is what I hear you saying—I hear you saying, “When you understand your identity—understand: ‘I’m a child of God. I belong to Him. I’m in His family,—this is who I am.’ Now, I’m facing decisions about my sexuality/about my desires—

Christopher: Yes.

Bob: —“about my attractions. My identity is going to govern how I respond to that input”; is that right?

Christopher: Yes; yes. The desires and the feelings that we get—and sometimes, we can say even “bombarded”—sometimes, during the day, it could be like, “I’m good.” Other times of the day, or times of the week, you’re just bombarded with these thoughts that you didn’t ask for—and these feelings and the desires. I’m going to be filtering those all through the grid of my identity in Christ—that even the feelings—because I know, my sinful behavior/anyone’s sinful behavior always begins with the heart/with the desire in my mind. If I’m not filtering those things, it’s much easier to kind of fall right into the behavior.

I need to be catching these things—my thoughts/my desires—so the sexual desires that I have. I’m a single man; I’m not married, so any sexual desire that I have—it will not be toward my potential wife; so therefore, I need to be putting them under the authority of Christ and say, “That is not God’s will.”

Bob: I think this is so significant and so important for us to get our arms around. I think the key idea here to understand, “What is our identity?”—

Dave: Yes.

Bob: —and then to have our behavior governed by that understanding. When your behavior is different than your identity, something is wrong; right?
Dave: Yes; and I am inspired right now in this way; because it’s so easy to say, “My desire is so strong—I can’t really control it.” I’ve heard Christian men say that: “That’s—I just can’t.” I’m hearing you say, “Yes; you can.”

Christopher: Yes.

Dave: And I know I can, and I have desires—we’ve all had wrong sinful desires that are strong. It isn’t like—you know, they are real, and they’re strong; but in Christ—the identity piece again—

Bob: Right.

Dave: —there is actually a power that I did not have when I was not in Christ that—

Bob: Yes.

Dave: —I now have. Literally, the Holy Spirit of God lives in me. “Can I control this desire?”—“yes; I can make decisions.” I’d like to say to people, listening right now: “You can win this battle right now.

Christopher: Yes.

Dave: “You have the power.”

Bob: This is the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead.

Ann: Yes.

Dave: Yes!

Bob: So, if He can raise people from the dead, He can help you put to death the desire that you’re dealing with.

Ann: I was thinking, too—when you said you came out of prison—you, literally, were a new person; because Christ was living in you.

Christopher: Yes.

Ann: You had the power of the Holy Spirit—you were brand-new—

Christopher: Yes; amen.

Ann: —and you are brand-new.
Christopher: Amen. Praise God.

Ann: That is a brand-new identity.

Dave: And anybody *in Christ* is brand-new—

Ann: Yes.

Christopher: That’s right.

Dave: —the power of God’s resurrection.

Christopher: This is why identity is so important; because if you think about it—who we identify *as*—you know, what flows from that?—thinking, our thoughts, our behavior—

Bob: Yes.

Christopher: —our actions, our relationships. I really think that *so much* is tied *directly* into who we are; because then, if you have the *wrong* identity, guess what’s going to flow out of that?—wrong thinking, wrong behavior, wrong relationships.

Bob: This is why this book is—not just for people who are curious about same-sex attraction and that issue—this is a book that helps you understand human sexuality—all of our sexuality: our desires, our behaviors, our actions—and how the gospel and our sexuality ought to interact. I think this would be a *great* book for small groups to go through together—a good book for parents and teens to go through together.

*Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God’s Grand Story*—the author is our guest today, Christopher Yuan. We’ve got copies available for you in our *FamilyLife Today* Resource Center. Order from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call to order: 1-800-FL-TODAY. The website, again: FamilyLifeToday.com—the phone number is 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

You know, we feel like these kinds of conversations are important for us to be having. It’s important for us to keep coming back to what the Bible has to say about subjects like gender, identity, sexuality, marriage, parenting—all of the things we talk about, here, on *FamilyLife Today*. Our goal is to effectively develop godly marriages and families. The way you do that is by continuing to renew your mind around what God’s Word has to say on these subjects.

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Well, Christopher Yuan has given us a lot to think about today on the subject of sexuality and the gospel. The President of FamilyLife®, David Robbins, is with us again today with some thoughts about this subject. David—

**David:** Yes; you know, it has been such a sobering, yet really healthy, reminder for us all to be aware of what we are capable of. Theologian John Stott once said, “Be killing sin, or it will be killing you.”

**Bob:** Right.

**David:** The reality is that we will be tempted in life—there is no getting around it. This is not something you can prevent, or avoid, or negotiate; but we can choose to what extent we posture ourselves to battle the temptation of sin that will come in our lives and, specifically, to flee sexual temptation that will come. Jesus experienced temptation and so will we. He *modeled*, in Matthew 4, not to play around with temptation and, actually, modeled for us how to battle it.

I hope that we would respond at the earliest promptings of the Holy Spirit. If you find yourself hiding even the smallest sin, keeping it covered up will usually lead to greater sin. The enemy has us where he wants us when we take the bait of hiding sin; because it’s when we think we have it under control, or it’s in a place that we don’t think we need to confess it to others, that he really develops a foothold in our lives.

Perhaps, God sovereignly has you listening today because He is inviting you to respond. Maybe, it’s confessing something that you’ve been covering up. Maybe, it’s realizing you’re in a season of being tempted, and He’s inviting you to be on guard and increase your dependence upon Him. Whatever it is, Jesus has been tempted in every way just like us. Yet, He was without sin; and as a result, we can approach God’s throne of grace with confidence to battle the things that are in our lives.

**Bob:** Yes; the same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us and gives us the ability to say, “No,” to sin. Thank you, David.
I hope our listeners can be back with us again tomorrow. We’re going to talk about how suffering fits into this whole issue; because when you deny your appetites, there can be suffering involved with that. We’ll talk more about that with Christopher Yuan tomorrow. I hope you can be with us for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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