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Homosexuality, the Grace of God, and the Ongoing Struggle

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Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, clarifies the biblical understanding of homosexuality in “A New Testament Perspective on Homosexuality” published in the current issue of Themelios, a journal published by the Religious and Theological Studies Fellowship in Great Britain [article not available online].

In his essay, Schreiner rightly points to the unambiguous opposition to homosexual practice that is found throughout the Bible, but he brings his expertise as a New Testament scholar to some of the most important questions related to homosexuality and the church.

In so doing, he sets the record straight concerning the continuing battle against sin that marks the Christian life. This is intended as a word of grace and warning to those who struggle with homosexual desires. As Schreiner writes:

The tension of Christian experience surfaces here. We are new creations in Christ and liberated from the power of sin, but at the same time, we await the fullness of our redemption. The newness of our redemption in Christ does not mean that we are completely free of sin. Rather, as believers, we continue to battle against, and struggle with sin every day. First Peter 2:11 says, ‘Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.’ Notice that the passions and desires from the flesh are still powerful in all believers. They are so strong that they war against us.

We might think that we will not have any desires to do evil as believers in Jesus Christ, but as long as we are in the body, desires for sin, sometimes incredibly powerful desires, will be ours. Such desires do not mean that we are failures, or that we are not truly believers, they are a normal part of the Christian life before the day of resurrection. We ought not to think, therefore, that the newness we have in Christ means that believers will have no desire to return to a homosexual lifestyle. The newness that we have in Christ does not mean that we are freed from old temptations. There is a progressive and even sometimes a slow growth in holiness in our Christian lives. Indeed, we can sin dramatically as believers, even if we have been Christians for a long time. Even when we sin in such a way, there is no excuse for sinning, and we are called to a deep sorrow and repentance for the evil in our lives.

Thus, this comes as reassurance to Christians struggling with homosexual desires. In the first place, they are not alone in the struggle against sin – even in a most difficult struggle against the sins of the flesh. Furthermore, their desires, in themselves, are not a sign that they are not truly believers.

On the other hand, Professor Schreiner rightly points to the fact that *all* believers are involved in a struggle against sin, and we are warned to wage war against these desires. This side of our glorification, we remain in the struggle – but not without hope.

