COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 23

The *Sin* Question

STUDY GUIDE 1 OF 4:

Understanding Sin

An overview of what sin is and how it works.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

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PREFACE

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Sin is one of the most important subjects we can understand from the Word of God because it reaches directly into the question of salvation, spiritual life and our relationship with Jesus Christ. Yet it is also a subject surrounded by many assumptions, traditions and conflicting religious teachings.

Some have been taught that sin is something every person inherits at birth. Others believe that even after a person is born again, continuing to sin is unavoidable. Many therefore approach the subject through personal experience, asking what Christians commonly do rather than first asking what the Bible actually teaches.

This Study Guide begins from a different foundation. The Word of God is the plumb line. Our experiences, traditions and long-held beliefs must be examined in the light of Scripture.

We must not change the meaning of God's Word to accommodate what we have experienced, nor should we make Scripture say more than it actually says. Our purpose is to allow the Bible to define sin, explain its consequences and show what salvation in Jesus Christ accomplishes.

We will consider what Scripture means when it speaks of sin, the difference between temptation and sin, and the responsibility each person has before God. We will also examine what happens when a person is born again and becomes a new creation in Jesus Christ.

The Christian life is not an attempt to overcome sin through human determination or by trying to imitate Jesus from the outside. Jesus Christ personally dwells within the born-again believer as Spirit. His life within is the source of the new life we have received.

This is why the question of sin cannot be separated from Jesus Christ. He did not come simply to forgive past actions while leaving His people under the continuing dominion of sin. Salvation brings us into a new relationship with Him and a new way of living.

As we begin this module, one principle must remain before us: we are not asking what religious tradition says about sin. We are asking what the Word of God says. That foundation will guide everything that follows.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must the Word of God, rather than religious tradition, be the plumb line for this module's study of sin?

Personal Reflection

Which belief about sin has shaped the way you judge your own conduct, and have you tested it against the Bible?

Action Step

Examine that belief in the Bible, name what needs correcting in your thinking, and explain how you will respond to God's truth.

INTRODUCTION: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT SIN?

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The subject of sin affects every person. It concerns why humanity needs salvation, the consequence of disobedience, and the change that takes place when a person is born again. Because this subject is so important, we cannot build our understanding upon religious tradition, personal experience or what most people believe.

The first question must always be: What does the Bible say? Many Christians have been taught that every person is born with an inherited sinful nature passed down from Adam. From this teaching comes another common belief: because this sinful nature remains within us, even born-again believers must continue to sin throughout their lives.

But before accepting that conclusion, we must allow Scripture to speak for itself. Paul wrote in **Romans 6:1-2**:

> *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"*

Paul does not present continuing in sin as the expected condition of the born-again believer. He asks how those who are *"dead to sin"* could continue living in it. His words require us to examine carefully what Scripture means by sin and what salvation actually changes.

Several important questions therefore need to be answered. What exactly is sin? Is every wrong thought a sin? Is temptation itself sinful? Can a person be tempted without committing sin? What does Scripture mean when it says that the believer is dead to sin? And what changes when someone becomes a new creation in Jesus Christ?

These questions must be answered from the Word of God. Jesus did not come simply to change our religious identity. His very name declared the purpose of His coming. Matthew wrote in **Matthew 1:21**:

> *"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."*

Notice the wording: *"He shall save his people from their sins."* Salvation is not permission to remain under the dominion of sin while calling ourselves Christians. Jesus Christ came to deliver His people from sin and bring them into a new life in Him.

This does not mean that a born-again believer loses the ability to make choices or can no longer be tempted. Scripture shows that temptation remains a reality. The important distinction is between being tempted and yielding to temptation, and we will examine that difference carefully.

We will also see that Christian victory is not produced by human willpower. At the new birth, Jesus Christ comes to dwell within the believer as Spirit. The new life is not an outward attempt to copy Him. It is His life within us, enabling us to walk in the newness of life He has given.

Throughout this Study Guide, one principle will govern every conclusion: the Word of God is the plumb line. We will allow Scripture to define sin, explain temptation, reveal the consequences of sin and show us the life Jesus Christ has made possible for those who are born again.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does understanding sin require attention to what the Bible says about the heart, responsibility and choice?

Personal Reflection

Where have you judged sin by outward appearance or public opinion rather than by what God says?

Action Step

Identify one judgement you need to change, test it by the Bible, and let that truth govern your next decision.

THE WORD OF GOD, NOT EXPERIENCE, IS THE STANDARD

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When the subject of sin is discussed, one of the first questions people often ask is: *"Do you still sin?"* But that is not the question that should determine what we believe. A person's experience cannot establish biblical truth.

One person may say that they continue to sin every day, while another may say that they do not. Neither testimony changes what the Word of God teaches. The correct question is: What does the Bible say about sin and the life of the born-again believer? Our beliefs must begin there.

God's Word Establishes the Standard

The Bible is not to be interpreted according to what we have experienced. Our experiences must be judged according to the Bible. What God says matters more than what people around us say, what a denomination teaches, or what we have personally experienced.

Jesus said in **Matthew 10:28**:

> *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*

This is particularly important when studying sin. If a person begins with the assumption that every Christian must continue to sin, they may begin searching Scripture for verses that appear to support that belief. Instead of allowing Scripture to form the conclusion, the conclusion has already been decided.

That is not the right way to study God's Word. We must allow Scripture to establish the doctrine rather than using Scripture to defend what we already believe.

Scripture Must Be Read in Harmony

One verse frequently used when discussing sin is **1 John 1:8**. John wrote:

> *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."*

Taken by itself, someone might conclude that John is teaching that every believer must always continue in sin. But the same writer later says in **1 John 3:6**:

> *"Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him."*

These Scriptures cannot be made to contradict one another. We must therefore study their context, audience and purpose before deciding what either Scripture means. The answer is not to ignore one verse because another seems more convenient, but to understand both Scriptures in harmony.

Another verse frequently quoted is **Romans 3:10**.

Paul wrote in **Romans 3:10**:

> *"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:"*

This verse must also be understood within Paul's complete argument. Paul is describing humanity's condition under sin; he is not teaching that Jesus Christ cannot make a person righteous. The same letter goes on to speak of justification, freedom from sin and the believer being made alive unto God through Jesus Christ. We must therefore allow **Romans 3:10** to take its proper place within the harmony of Paul's teaching rather than using one verse to overthrow the rest of Scripture.

This principle will be especially important later when we consider Scriptures such as Romans 7 and other Scriptures that are often used to teach that continuing in sin is unavoidable. We must allow each Scripture to take its proper place within the whole testimony of God's Word.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must verses about sin be read alongside the rest of the Bible?

Personal Reflection

Has a personal experience made you reluctant to accept what the Bible says about freedom from sin?

Action Step

Compare that experience with the verses in context and identify one belief or response you need to change.

Experience Must Never Become Our Doctrine

Religious experience can be powerful. People may feel deeply moved in worship, believe they have received something from God, or point to an experience as proof that a particular teaching must be correct. But an experience cannot establish truth.

A person may sincerely say, *"I felt something, therefore it must have been God."* Another may say, *"This has been my experience for many years, therefore the doctrine must be true."* But sincerity does not make an interpretation correct.

The Word of God remains the standard by which every experience must be examined. Job gives us a powerful example of this principle. There were times when he could not perceive what God was doing, yet he did not abandon what he knew to be true.

Job said in **Job 23:8-12**:

> *"Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food."*

Job could not always understand what was happening around him, but he continued to hold to God's Word. That is the attitude we must bring to this subject.

We Must Use a Just Balance

The Bible warns against using an unfair standard. Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 11:1**:

> *"A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight."*

A just balance requires us to gather the whole testimony of Scripture rather than selecting only the verses that support what we already believe. If ten Scriptures plainly teach one truth and one verse appears difficult, we should not allow the difficult verse to overthrow everything else. We should study it carefully until we understand how it fits within the harmony of God's Word.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 28:16**:

> *"Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste."*

Jesus Christ is the sure foundation. Everything we believe must agree with Him and with His Word. Job also said in **Job 31:6**:

> *"Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity."*

That is the attitude we need as we study the subject of sin. We are not trying to prove a denominational position, defend what we have always believed, or make the Bible agree with our experience. We are asking God to show us what His Word actually says.

That principle must govern everything that follows. The Word of God is the plumb line.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can personal experience neither define doctrine nor replace the just balance of God's Word?

Personal Reflection

When have you defended an experience more strongly than you have examined God's Word?

Action Step

Reconsider the conclusion you drew from that experience, test it by the Bible, and explain what you will now believe or do differently.

THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH

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Once Scripture has been established as the standard, we must face what the Bible says about the seriousness of sin. Sin is not simply a mistake, a weakness or an unfortunate habit. The Word of God connects sin directly with death.

Paul wrote in **Romans 6:23**:

> *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

Paul places two completely different outcomes before us: sin produces death, while God gives eternal life through Jesus Christ. The word *"wages"* speaks of something earned. A person receives wages because of what has been done, and Paul therefore shows that death is the consequence of sin.

By contrast, eternal life is not something we earn through our own goodness or religious works. It is *"the gift of God"*, and that gift is found *"through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

Sin Brought Spiritual Death

The connection between sin and death can be seen from the beginning. God said to Adam in **Genesis 2:16-17**:

> *"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."*

God said, *"in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."* Adam did not physically die on the day he disobeyed. He continued to live physically for many years, but something else happened immediately. Adam became spiritually separated from God.

After his disobedience, he was driven from the Garden. Moses wrote in **Genesis 3:24**:

> *"So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."*

The consequence of Adam's sin was immediate. His relationship with God was changed because sin brought spiritual death. This principle remains throughout Scripture: sin separates; sin brings death.

Jesus Came to Save From Sin

This helps us understand the purpose of salvation. Matthew wrote in **Matthew 1:21**:

> *"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."*

Jesus did not come simply to make sin less serious or to provide a religious covering while people continued under its dominion. He came to save His people from their sins. Salvation is therefore deliverance from sin, not permission to continue in it.

Paul instructed believers in **Romans 6:12-13**:

> *"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."*

Notice the contrast again. There is death, and there is being *"alive from the dead."* There is yielding to unrighteousness, and there is yielding to God. Paul is not describing sin as something that must continue to rule the believer. He tells them, *"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body."*

Eternal Life Is Found in Jesus Christ

The believer's life is not produced by personal strength. Eternal life is found in Jesus Christ, and He personally dwells within those who are born again. Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ. At the new birth, Jesus Christ comes to dwell within the believer as Spirit. Therefore, the answer to sin is not greater human determination. The answer is Jesus Christ.

The same verse that declares *"the wages of sin is death"* also declares *"the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* Before we can understand Christian victory over sin, we must first understand how Scripture defines sin itself. That is the question we will consider next.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the wages of sin and the gift of eternal life show both the seriousness of spiritual death and the hope found in Christ?

Personal Reflection

Are you excusing a deliberate choice while forgetting the seriousness of sin and the life Jesus Christ gives?

Action Step

Examine that choice honestly before God. If you have sinned, turn from it and take a definite step that agrees with Christ's life.

WHAT IS SIN?

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Most people understand that sin is something wrong, but many have never stopped to ask how the Bible actually defines it. The word is used so commonly that it can become a general description for anything considered undesirable, imperfect or morally questionable. But if sin brings spiritual death, we need a clear biblical definition. God's Word must define sin.

We cannot allow religious tradition, personal opinion or changing social standards to decide what sin is. If Scripture is the standard, then Scripture must also tell us what sin means and where personal responsibility begins.

The Bible Defines Sin

John gives one of the clearest definitions of sin. John wrote in **1 John 3:4**:

> *"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."*

Sin involves transgression. The expression translated "transgression of the law" carries the sense of lawlessness: living in opposition to the rule and revealed will of God. Sin is therefore not simply an imperfect action; it is stepping outside what God has established as right. James gives us another important definition in **James 4:17**:

> *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."*

These two verses show that sin can involve both doing what God has forbidden and failing to do what God has required. Sin therefore cannot be defined simply by a list of outward actions. It concerns our response to the revealed will of God.

God's Law Is Fulfilled in Love

When John speaks of transgressing the law, our minds should not return to the ceremonial system of the Law of Moses. Jesus revealed the great principles upon which God's requirements rest. Jesus said in **Matthew 22:37-40**:

> *"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."*

Love towards God and love towards others are therefore central to righteous living. Jesus also said in **John 14:15**:

> *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."*

Obedience is not separated from love. When we love Jesus Christ, His Word matters to us, and we desire to walk within what He has revealed rather than deliberately choosing a way contrary to Him.

Jesus Christ Is Our Righteousness

The opposite of sin is not human goodness. The believer's righteousness is found in Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 1:30**:

> *"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:"*

Jesus Christ is our righteousness. The Christian life is therefore not an attempt to construct our own righteousness by keeping enough rules or performing enough good works. The born-again believer is in Christ, and Christ dwells within the believer as Spirit. His life within provides the foundation from which obedience flows.

Sin moves in the opposite direction. It rejects God's way and chooses disobedience. Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 59:2**:

> *"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."*

This is why sin is so serious. Sin is not simply breaking an abstract regulation. It is choosing a course contrary to God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the Bible's definition of sin relate disobedience to God's law of love and to the righteousness found in Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

Have rules or outward behaviour become more important to you than genuine love towards someone?

Action Step

Identify the person affected and choose one sincere response of love through the life of Jesus Christ within you.

Knowledge and Responsibility

Scripture also shows that knowledge is important when considering personal responsibility for sin. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 15:56**:

> *"The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law."*

God's law reveals what is right and wrong. When God's will is known, a person becomes responsible for the choice made concerning it. This can be seen in the Old Testament distinction between deliberate disobedience and something done through ignorance.

Moses wrote in **Leviticus 4:27-28**:

> *"And if any one of the common people sin through ignorance, while he doeth somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which ought not to be done, and be guilty; Or if his sin, which he hath sinned, come to his knowledge: then he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he hath sinned."*

Notice the words, *"if his sin, which he hath sinned, come to his knowledge."* The verse distinguishes an act committed without knowledge from deliberate rebellion against a known command. This becomes important when considering personal accountability.

Scripture does not present sin as something automatically inherited simply because a person has been physically born. The question of inherited sin will be examined more fully in the next Study Guide. For now, the important point is that Scripture connects personal responsibility with what a person knows and the choice that follows.

Intent Also Matters

The Old Testament also recognised a difference between deliberate wrongdoing and accidental harm. For example, the Law made provision for a person who unintentionally

caused another person's death. An accident was not treated in the same way as deliberate murder.

This teaches an important principle: the intention of the heart gives moral character to an action. An accidental act and a deliberate act may produce similar outward consequences, but they are not morally identical.

This does not mean that consequences cease to matter. It means that when God judges sin, He sees more than the outward act. He knows the knowledge, intention and choice behind it.

Sin of Commission

A sin of commission occurs when a person knowingly does what God has forbidden. Adam provides a clear example. God gave Adam a direct command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam knew what God had said, yet he chose to disobey.

A sin of commission therefore involves knowingly crossing a boundary God has established. John's definition applies directly: *"sin is the transgression of the law."* The person knows what God has said and chooses another way.

Sin of Omission

Sin can also occur by failing to do what God has shown us is right. James wrote in **James 4:17**:

> *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."*

A person may avoid doing something openly wicked and yet still refuse something God requires. Jesus commands us to love, so we may sin not only by actively harming another person, but also by refusing the good we know should be done.

We may sin by speaking what should not be spoken, but we may also fail by refusing to speak truth when God requires it. We may sin through a wrong action, or through knowingly withholding a right action.

This gives us two important categories:

- Commission: doing what God has forbidden;
- Omission: failing to do what God has required.

Both involve a response to what is known.

Sin Is a Choice Against God's Way

This definition is important for everything that follows. Sin is not simply human weakness. It is not the same as being tempted, and it is not automatically present because an unwanted thought enters the mind. Neither should every mistake, accident or lack of knowledge automatically be treated as deliberate sin.

Scripture connects sin with knowledge, responsibility and choice. We must therefore be careful not to define sin more broadly than the Bible does, but neither should we make its definition weaker than Scripture makes it. Sin is serious because it is disobedience to God.

This also prepares us to understand an important truth that is sometimes overlooked: temptation itself is not sin. A person can face temptation without yielding to it. Jesus Himself

was tempted, yet He remained without sin. That distinction will be the subject of the next section.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do knowledge, intent, sins of commission, and sins of omission clarify personal responsibility for disobedience?

Personal Reflection

What good have you knowingly withheld, or what wrong have you justified, despite understanding God's will?

Action Step

Accept responsibility for that choice and respond by doing the good you have delayed or refusing the wrong you have excused.

TEMPTATION IS NOT SIN

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One of the most important distinctions we must make when studying sin is the difference between being tempted and committing sin. A wrong thought may come into the mind. A person may feel the pull of a desire that is contrary to God's Word, or something may appear attractive that should be rejected. None of these things, by themselves, mean that sin has already been committed.

Temptation is not sin. We know this because Jesus Himself was tempted. The writer of Hebrews said in **Hebrews 4:15**:

> *"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."*

Jesus was genuinely tempted, yet He remained *"without sin."* Therefore, temptation and sin cannot be the same thing.

This truth is important because some people live under unnecessary condemnation simply because an unwanted thought has entered their mind. They assume that because the thought came, they must already have sinned, but Scripture does not teach that. The question is not simply whether a temptation appears. The question is what we do with it.

Wrong Thoughts Must Not Be Entertained

Although temptation itself is not sin, it becomes dangerous when a wrong thought is welcomed, entertained and allowed to develop. Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 10:5**:

> *"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;"*

Notice Paul's language. Wrong imaginations are to be cast down, and thoughts are to be brought *"into captivity"* to the obedience of Christ. The appearance of a wrong thought is therefore not the same as agreeing with it. We can reject what is contrary to God's Word rather than allowing it to remain and develop.

This is one reason the thought life is so important. Temptation often begins by presenting something to the mind that promises satisfaction outside God's will. The enemy cannot force a person to sin. Temptation presents a choice.

Temptation Seeks to Draw Us Away

Temptation attempts to move our desire away from satisfaction in Jesus Christ towards something contrary to Him. John wrote in **1 John 2:15**:

> *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."*

In this Scripture, the word "world" is not referring to the people whom God loves. It is speaking of the system of desires, values and rebellion that stands in opposition to God. Paul described this course in **Ephesians 2:2**:

> *"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:"*

The believer has been delivered from that former walk, yet temptation still seeks to draw the heart back towards what has been left behind. James wrote in **James 4:4**:

> *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."*

Temptation therefore seeks to make what opposes God appear desirable.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is being tempted different from choosing to entertain a wrong thought until it draws the heart away from God?

Personal Reflection

What unwanted thought have you begun to entertain, rather than recognising it as a temptation to refuse?

Action Step

When it returns, reject the thought and deliberately direct your mind to the truth of God's Word and the life of Christ within.

Three Areas of Temptation

John identifies three broad areas through which the world appeals to human desire. He wrote in **1 John 2:16**:

> *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."*

These are:

- The lust of the flesh;
- The lust of the eyes;
- The pride of life.

The Lust of the Flesh

The lust of the flesh concerns desires that seek satisfaction contrary to God's will. Natural desires are not automatically sinful, but temptation attempts to take desire outside the boundaries God has established. The danger begins when desire is allowed to govern us rather than being brought under the authority of Jesus Christ.

The Lust of the Eyes

The lust of the eyes concerns what we see and begin to desire wrongly. Jesus said in **Matthew 6:22-23**:

> *"The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"*

What we continually place before our eyes can influence what we begin to desire. Job understood the importance of guarding what he allowed his eyes to encourage. Job said in **Job 31:1**:

> *"I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?"*

He recognised that what is entertained through the eyes can develop within the heart.

The Pride of Life

The pride of life turns attention towards self: our possessions, achievements, position or ability. It encourages a person to find confidence and satisfaction in themselves rather than in God. John also wrote in **1 John 3:17**:

> *"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"*

Pride turns inward, while love looks outward.

Eve Faced These Same Appeals

The account of Eve demonstrates how these desires can work together. Moses wrote in **Genesis 3:6**:

> *"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat."*

The tree was presented as *"good for food," "pleasant to the eyes,"* and *"desired to make one wise."* But seeing and considering the temptation was not the final act. The decisive moment came when Eve *"took of the fruit thereof, and did eat."* Temptation moved towards sin when the choice was made to disobey God's command.

We Must Be Prepared to Resist

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 5:8-9**:

> *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."*

The believer is told to be sober, vigilant and ready to resist. Rehoboam provides an example of what happens when the heart is not prepared. We read in **2 Chronicles 12:14**:

> *"And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD."*

Our strength, however, is not found in self-confidence. Paul wrote in **Ephesians 6:10-11**:

> *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."*

Notice where the strength is found: *"Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."* Victory over temptation is not produced by human determination. Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer as Spirit, and His life within is the source of our strength to resist temptation.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 26:3**:

> *"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."*

The answer is not to become preoccupied with temptation, but to keep the mind stayed upon the Lord. Paul gives the same direction in **Philippians 4:8**:

> *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."*

Temptation will come, but temptation does not have to become sin. A wrong thought may appear, but it does not have to be accepted. A desire may arise, but it does not have to be obeyed.

The believer can bring the thought into obedience to Christ, remain dependent upon the One who dwells within, and refuse the temptation before it develops into sin. In the next section, we will look more closely at how temptation develops into sin when wrong desire is allowed to continue.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life explain the appeals Eve faced and believers still face?

Personal Reflection

Which appeal — flesh, eyes or pride — most often draws your attention away from Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Identify what makes that appeal attractive, remove one opportunity to feed it, and prepare a response based on God's Word.

HOW TEMPTATION DEVELOPS INTO SIN

BACK TO CONTENTS

We have established that temptation itself is not sin. A temptation may present itself to the mind, but the appearance of that temptation does not mean that sin has already taken place. James helps us understand what happens when temptation is allowed to continue.

James wrote in **James 1:14-15**:

> *"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."*

James describes a clear progression. There is temptation, being drawn away, enticement, lust conceiving, sin and finally death. These are not all the same thing, and understanding the difference helps us see where temptation must be resisted.

Temptation Presents a Choice

James begins by saying, *"every man is tempted."* Temptation is therefore something people will face. It attempts to attract the mind or desire towards something outside God's will.

James then says that a person is *"drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."* The word lust does not always mean sexual desire. It speaks of desire or craving. In this verse, it is desire that has moved outside the boundaries of righteousness and is pulling the person away from obedience to God.

Temptation presents something for the desire to consider, but it still has to be accepted before it becomes sin. A wrong thought may enter the mind and immediately be rejected. A temptation may appear and be refused. The believer does not have to give that thought permission to remain.

This is why Paul instructed us to bring our thoughts into obedience to Christ. Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 10:5**:

> *"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;"*

The thought is not to be entertained until it gains strength. It is to be brought into obedience to Christ.

When Lust Conceives

James then moves beyond temptation and says, *"Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin."* The picture is deliberate. Conception takes place when something that has been presented is received and allowed to develop.

This is an important distinction. Temptation presents the possibility of sin. Yielding gives that temptation permission to develop. A person may be tempted towards anger, dishonesty, revenge, immorality, pride or some other act contrary to God's Word. The temptation itself does not make them guilty of the act.

The danger comes when the temptation is welcomed, justified, dwelt upon and finally chosen. That is why wrong desire must be dealt with before it develops into sinful action.

Sin Produces Death

James completes the progression with the words, "and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." This agrees with what Paul wrote in **Romans 6:23**:

> *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

Temptation seeks to make sin attractive while hiding where sin ultimately leads. It may promise satisfaction, relief, pleasure, revenge or personal advantage, but God's Word reveals the end from the beginning. Sin brings death.

The believer must therefore not judge temptation by how attractive it appears at the beginning. We must judge it by where the Word of God says it leads.

The Believer Is Not Powerless

The answer is not to live in fear of every temptation. The born-again believer is not left alone to battle sin through human strength. Jesus Christ personally dwells within the believer as Spirit.

Peter wrote in **2 Peter 1:4**:

> *"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."*

Notice that Peter speaks of having *"escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."* The Christian life is therefore not one of surrendering to wrong desire because we assume sin is inevitable. Neither is victory produced by trying harder in our own strength.

Jesus Christ dwells within us, and His life within provides the power to refuse what is contrary to Him. Temptation may come, but it does not have to conceive. A wrong desire may present itself, but it does not have to be welcomed. A thought may appear, but it does not have to become an action.

This gives us a simple biblical progression to remember: temptation is presented, desire is enticed, the person chooses whether to entertain it, and when wrong desire is embraced and acted upon, sin follows. Sin, when completed, brings death.

Understanding this progression helps us deal with temptation at the beginning rather than waiting until it has developed into sinful action. The next question is therefore very important: What has changed in the person who has been born again? That brings us to the new creation in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does James's progression from temptation through conceived desire to sin and death show the importance of an early choice?

Personal Reflection

At what point have you allowed a temptation to grow instead of refusing it?

Action Step

Identify the earliest warning sign and decide how you will respond through Christ before the desire is welcomed or acted upon.

THE NEW CREATION IN CHRIST

BACK TO CONTENTS

We have seen what sin is, how temptation differs from sin, and how temptation can develop when wrong desire is accepted and allowed to continue. We now come to an important question: What changes when a person is born again?

The Gospel does not present salvation as God simply forgiving a person's past while leaving that person spiritually unchanged. The new birth brings a real change. The sinner who was spiritually dead is made alive in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:17**:

> *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

Notice Paul's language. He does not say that the believer is simply an improved version of the old person. He says, *"he is a new creature."* The new birth brings a new spiritual life because the believer is now in Christ, and Jesus Christ personally dwells within the believer as Spirit.

Salvation Brings a New Beginning

Every person who comes to Jesus Christ for salvation comes with a history of sin. Paul wrote in **Romans 3:23-25**:

> *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;"*

Paul says that *"all have sinned,"* but he also speaks of *"the remission of sins that are past."* Salvation does not mean pretending that the past never happened. It means that through Jesus Christ the sinner is forgiven, justified and brought into a new life.

The person's past sins do not continue to define the new creation. Old things are passed away. The believer begins a new life in Jesus Christ.

God Promised a New Heart

Long before Pentecost, God spoke through Ezekiel of the spiritual change He would bring to His people. Ezekiel wrote in **Ezekiel 36:26-27**:

> *"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."*

Notice what God promised:

- "A new heart also will I give you";
- "A new spirit will I put within you";
- "I will put my spirit within you."

This is not outward religious improvement. God was promising an inward spiritual work. At the new birth, Jesus Christ comes to dwell within the believer as Spirit, so the Christian life begins with something far greater than a decision to become a better person.

The believer receives the Person of Jesus Christ within. His indwelling life becomes the source of the new life.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What new beginning does God give in Christ, and why is the promised new heart more than an improved old life?

Personal Reflection

Where are you still trying to repair your former way of life by self-discipline rather than trusting Christ within?

Action Step

Name what needs to change and choose one response that expresses the new life you have already received in Jesus Christ.

The New Creation Is Called to Obedience

The new birth does not remove a person's ability to choose, nor does it mean that temptation will never come again. But something fundamental has changed. The believer is no longer spiritually dead and separated from God. Jesus Christ now dwells within, and the believer is called to walk in obedience to Him.

Jesus said in **John 14:15**:

> *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."*

He also said in **John 15:14**:

> *"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."*

Obedience is not an attempt to earn salvation. It is the proper response of the life that has been received in Jesus Christ. The new creation does not obey in order to become saved. The new creation obeys because Jesus Christ has brought that person into a new life in Him.

Abiding in Christ Changes How We Live

John speaks very plainly about the relationship between abiding in Christ and continuing in sin. John wrote in **1 John 3:6**:

> *"Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him."*

John does not present continual sinning as the normal life of someone abiding in Jesus Christ. He continues in **1 John 3:8**:

> *"He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."*

Then John writes in **1 John 3:9**:

> *"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."*

These are strong words, and we must allow them to stand where Scripture places them. John connects the new birth with a changed relationship to sin.

He does not teach that the believer loses the ability to make a wrong choice. Other Scriptures clearly warn believers against falling away and returning to sin. John's point is that sin is no longer the life of the person who has been born of God and abides in Christ.

The Source of the New Life Is Jesus Christ

This truth must never be turned into a teaching about human perfection achieved through personal determination. The new creation is not successful because the believer has become naturally stronger than everyone else. The difference is Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ. At the new birth, Jesus Christ comes to dwell within the believer as Spirit. The Christian life is therefore not an outward effort to copy Jesus. It is Jesus Christ living within His people and His life being expressed through them.

That is why the Gospel offers something greater than forgiveness alone. It gives us Jesus Christ. The believer has been brought from spiritual death into spiritual life, from the old creation into the new, and from separation from God into a living relationship with the One who now dwells within.

The next question naturally follows: If we are a new creation in Christ, what does it mean to be dead to sin and alive unto God?

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does abiding in Christ produce obedience from His indwelling life rather than from mere outward imitation?

Personal Reflection

Which duty have you been performing outwardly while losing sight of your relationship with Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Before doing it again, consider your motive and respond from love for the One who already dwells within you.

DEAD TO SIN, ALIVE UNTO GOD

BACK TO CONTENTS

When a person is born again, their relationship with sin changes. The believer is no longer spiritually dead and living under the dominion of sin. Jesus Christ has brought that person into a new life.

Paul explains this clearly in Romans chapter 6. Paul wrote in **Romans 6:1-2**:

> *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"*

Paul's question is direct: How can someone who is dead to sin continue living in it? He does not teach that grace makes continuing in sin acceptable. He teaches the opposite. The born-again believer has entered into a different relationship with sin.

Dead to Sin Does Not Mean Unable to Be Tempted

We need to understand what Paul means when he says that the believer is *"dead to sin."* He does not mean that temptation can never come again. We have already seen that believers can be tempted and must resist temptation.

Neither does Paul mean that the believer has lost the ability to make a wrong choice. Scripture repeatedly warns believers to remain faithful and not return to the life from which they have been delivered. To be dead to sin means that sin is no longer to govern the believer's life. The old relationship with sin has ended.

Paul continues in **Romans 6:6-7**:

> *"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin."*

Notice the purpose: *"that henceforth we should not serve sin."* Before salvation, sin ruled. The person lived according to the old life and was spiritually separated from God. But in Jesus Christ that relationship has been broken.

Paul then says, *"he that is dead is freed from sin."* The believer is no longer called to serve sin because a new Master now governs the life.

Reckon Yourselves Dead to Sin

Paul then tells believers how they are to understand their new position. He wrote in **Romans 6:11**:

> *"Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

The word *"reckon"* means to recognise something as true. Paul is telling believers to understand who they now are in Jesus Christ. They are dead unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is not positive thinking. Paul is not telling people to imagine themselves free while they remain spiritually unchanged. He is describing the new relationship created through salvation. The believer has been brought from spiritual death into spiritual life, and the source of that life is Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does being dead to sin in Christ leave temptation possible while changing the believer's relationship to sin?

Personal Reflection

When temptation comes, do you think as though sin still has the right to rule you?

Action Step

Bring that assumption under **Romans 6:11** *and respond to the next temptation as one who is alive unto God in Christ.*

Do Not Let Sin Reign

Because the believer is dead to sin, Paul immediately gives a command. He wrote in **Romans 6:12-14**:

> *"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."*

Notice that Paul says, *"Let not sin therefore reign."* The word *"reign"* describes ruling like a king. Sin is not to occupy that place in the believer's life.

Paul then speaks of two possible directions. A person can yield themselves as an instrument of unrighteousness, or they can yield themselves unto God. This shows again that salvation does not remove human choice. The believer must choose to walk according to the life that has been received.

But Paul also gives a powerful declaration: *"For sin shall not have dominion over you."* That is far stronger than saying that Christians must spend the rest of their lives defeated by sin. Sin is not to reign, and sin is not to have dominion.

Grace Does Not Excuse Sin

Sometimes grace is spoken of as though it simply allows God to overlook continuing disobedience. But that is not Paul's teaching. He begins Romans 6 by asking, *"Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?"* His answer is, *"God forbid."*

Grace does not make sin harmless, and it does not change the wages of sin. Grace brings us into Jesus Christ and gives us what we could never produce for ourselves.

Paul wrote in **Titus 2:11-12**:

> *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;"*

Grace teaches us to deny ungodliness, not to accept it as unavoidable. The grace that saves also teaches the believer how to live.

Alive Unto God Through Jesus Christ

The Christian life is not centred only upon what we have died to. It is centred upon the One to whom we are now alive. Paul says we are *"alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

This is the greater reality. The believer has not simply been separated from the old life. The believer has received a new life in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

At the new birth, Jesus Christ personally comes to dwell within the believer as Spirit. Therefore, victory over sin does not rest upon human determination. The believer is alive unto God because Jesus Christ dwells within.

His indwelling life is the source from which righteousness and obedience flow. We are not trying to produce spiritual life from ourselves. We are walking in the life that has been received in Him.

Free From Sin to Serve God

Paul later summarises the change in **Romans 6:22**:

> *"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."*

Notice the progression: made free from sin, become servants to God, fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. Freedom from sin is not freedom to live however we choose. It is freedom to serve God.

The believer has been released from the old master so that the life of Jesus Christ can now be expressed through them. This is what it means to be dead to sin and alive unto God.

Sin is no longer to reign. Sin is no longer to have dominion. The believer has been made alive unto God through Jesus Christ.

The next question is important. If a believer has been made free from sin, can that believer later choose to return to it? Scripture answers that question very clearly.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Paul's commands not to let sin reign and to serve God show that grace does not excuse continued sin?

Personal Reflection

Where have you used grace to excuse a practice that conflicts with the life Christ has given?

Action Step

Identify that practice, stop defending it, and choose a clear act of obedience grounded in Christ's indwelling life.

CAN A BORN-AGAIN BELIEVER RETURN TO SIN?

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We have seen that the born-again believer is a new creation in Jesus Christ, dead to sin and alive unto God. Sin is no longer to reign or exercise dominion over that life. But this raises another important question: Can a person who has genuinely been born again later choose to return to sin?

Scripture shows that the new birth does not remove a person's ability to choose. The believer has been delivered from the dominion of sin, but God does not remove the responsibility to remain faithful to Jesus Christ. This is why the New Testament contains serious warnings addressed to people who have known the truth.

Wilful Sin Is Serious

The writer of Hebrews gives one of the clearest warnings. He wrote in **Hebrews 10:26**:

> *"For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,"*

Notice carefully what the verse says. It speaks of those who have *"received the knowledge of the truth"* and then warns, *"if we sin wilfully."* The word *"wilfully"* is important.

This is not describing temptation. It is not describing an unwanted thought entering the mind, and neither should we read every human mistake into this verse. The warning concerns a deliberate choice to return to sin after knowing the truth.

That agrees with what we have already learned. Sin involves knowledge, responsibility and choice. The believer is not forced back into sin, but neither should anyone imagine that receiving salvation makes future choices spiritually meaningless. Freedom from sin does not remove responsibility before God.

Some Can Depart From the Faith

Paul gave another direct warning. He wrote in **1 Timothy 4:1**:

> *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;"*

Paul says that some would *"depart from the faith."* A person cannot depart from something they were never connected with. The warning therefore shows that continuing in the faith matters.

Salvation is not a licence to say, *"Whatever I choose later can never affect my relationship with God."* The born-again believer has received Jesus Christ and is called to remain in Him.

John's words become especially important here. John wrote in **1 John 3:6**:

> *"Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him."*

Notice the word *"abideth."* The Christian life is not simply about beginning with Jesus Christ. It is about continuing in Him.

Paul Did Not Take Faithfulness for Granted

The Apostle Paul understood this responsibility personally. He wrote in **1 Corinthians 9:27**:

> *"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."*

Paul had preached the Gospel to others, yet he did not speak as though his own future choices no longer mattered. He understood the need to remain faithful.

That does not mean Paul was attempting to preserve himself through human strength. His life was found in Jesus Christ. But because Christ lived within him, Paul took seriously the responsibility to refuse what was contrary to the life he had received.

There is an important balance here. We must not teach that the born-again believer is powerless and destined to keep sinning. But neither should we teach that once someone has been saved, deliberate disobedience can never again have spiritual consequences. Both ideas weaken what Scripture teaches.

The Believer Still Has a Choice

Paul wrote in **Romans 6:12-13**:

> *"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."*

The words *"let not"* and *"yield"* show responsibility. The believer can choose what they yield themselves to. But Paul is speaking to people who are *"alive from the dead."*

They are not trying to become spiritually alive through their obedience. They have already received life through Jesus Christ, and now they are called to walk according to that life.

This keeps the order clear: Jesus Christ gives the life. The believer remains responsible to walk in the life received.

Salvation Does Not Make Sin Safe

We must never allow confidence in God's grace to make sin appear harmless. The same Paul who declared that believers are free from sin also warned them not to return to its dominion. Sin still brings death, and that is why the warnings of Scripture must be taken seriously.

At the same time, the believer need not live in fear that every temptation means salvation has been lost. Temptation is not sin. The appearance of a wrong thought is not the same as deliberately choosing disobedience. The danger is in knowingly turning away from the truth and yielding again to sin.

The believer's security is therefore not found in a religious formula. Our life is in Jesus Christ. He has delivered us from sin, He personally dwells within us as Spirit, and we are called to abide in Him.

The new creation is not called to look backwards towards the old life. We are called to continue forward in the life Jesus Christ has given.

That brings us to the next question: How does the new creation actually walk in everyday life?

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must a born-again believer take wilful sin and the possibility of departing from faith seriously?

Personal Reflection

Are you treating a deliberate wrong as harmless because you once received salvation?

Action Step

If this applies, turn from the wrong, seek appropriate support, and establish a safeguard that supports faithfulness to Christ.

WALKING IN NEWNESS OF LIFE

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The new birth brings a person into a new life in Jesus Christ, but that new life must now be lived. Paul does not describe salvation as an experience that changes our standing before God while leaving our daily walk untouched. The same Gospel that brings us from spiritual death into life also calls us to walk according to the life we have received.

David wrote in **Psalm 119:105**:

> *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."*

God's Word gives direction for the life of the believer. It shows us where to walk, what to avoid and how the new life in Jesus Christ is to be expressed.

We Are Called to Walk Differently

Paul asks a very direct question in Romans chapter 6. He wrote in **Romans 6:1-2**:

> *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"*

The new creation is not called to continue walking according to the old life. Something has changed. The person who was once spiritually dead has been made alive unto God through Jesus Christ, so the walk must now agree with the life that has been received.

Paul continues in **Romans 6:3-4**:

> *"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."*

Notice where Paul says the believer is baptised: *"into Jesus Christ."* This is not speaking of an outward ceremony producing spiritual life. The believer is brought into Jesus Christ through the new birth, receiving His Spirit and becoming one with Him.

Paul's purpose is to show the spiritual change that has taken place. The old life is left behind, and the believer is now to *"walk in newness of life."*

Newness of Life Is Not the Old Life Improved

The Gospel does not simply make a person more religious. It does not take the old life and add prayer, Bible reading and church attendance while leaving the heart unchanged.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:17**:

> *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

The new creation is called to live according to what is now true spiritually. The old things are not to remain the controlling pattern. Paul does not say, *"Try to make the old man behave better."* Instead, he teaches that the old life is to be put off and the new life expressed.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does walking in newness of life require beyond polishing the habits of the former life?

Personal Reflection

What behaviour from your former life are you still attempting to manage rather than leave behind?

Action Step

Consider what belongs to the new life in Christ and replace that behaviour with one definite, obedient response.

The Former Behaviour Must Be Left Behind

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:21-22**:

> *"If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;"*

The word *"conversation"* in this verse refers to the former manner of life or behaviour. Paul is telling believers that the conduct belonging to the old man is no longer to govern them. The

old life was shaped by desires that pulled away from God, but the new life is different because Jesus Christ now dwells within.

This does not mean that a believer becomes incapable of making a wrong choice. It means that the former behaviour no longer belongs to the new identity received in Christ.

The Mind Must Be Renewed

Paul continues in **Ephesians 4:23**:

> *"And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;"*

The believer has received new spiritual life, but the mind must now be brought into harmony with that life. Old patterns of thinking may have developed over many years. Attitudes, habits, reactions and assumptions may need to be corrected by the Word of God.

Paul explains this further in **Romans 12:1-2**:

> *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."*

Notice the contrast: *"be not conformed to this world,"* but *"be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."* The believer is not to allow the world to shape the way they think. The Word of God is to renew the mind so that the outward life increasingly agrees with the spiritual life already received in Jesus Christ.

Renewal Is Not External Imitation

This transformation must be understood correctly. The Christian life is not an attempt to study Jesus from a distance and then copy His behaviour. Jesus Christ is not outside the believer as an example we are trying to reproduce through human effort.

He personally dwells within the born-again believer as Spirit. The Word of God renews our thinking so that our choices, attitudes and behaviour come into agreement with the life of the One who already dwells within.

That is a very different foundation. We do not create the new life. We have received the new life in Jesus Christ, and our responsibility is to walk according to what He has already made us.

Put On the New Man

Paul continues in **Ephesians 4:24**:

> *"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."*

Notice how Paul describes the new man: *"created in righteousness and true holiness."* Righteousness and holiness are not optional additions to the Christian life. They belong to the nature of the new life received in Jesus Christ.

The believer is therefore called to put off conduct that belongs to the old life and to walk according to the new. This does not mean righteousness is produced independently by the believer. Jesus Christ is our righteousness.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 1:30**:

> *"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:"*

The believer's righteousness is found in Him.

The Word Directs the Walk

This is why continual attention to the Word of God is so important. The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 119:11**:

> *"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."*

God's Word exposes wrong thinking, corrects our understanding and keeps our attention fixed upon His way. But Bible reading by itself is not a religious exercise that produces spiritual life. The life is in Jesus Christ. The Word teaches us how to walk in agreement with the Person who lives within.

Free From Sin to Bear Fruit

Paul brings the thought together in **Romans 6:22**:

> *"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."*

The believer has been made free from sin and become a servant of God. The result is *"fruit unto holiness."* This is the walk of the new creation.

It is not sin managed more successfully, and it is not the old life made more respectable. It is a new life in Jesus Christ. The believer has received Him, is alive unto God through Him, and is now called to allow that inward life to govern the outward walk.

The next step is to understand more clearly what Paul means when he speaks of putting off the old man and putting on the new man.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do renewal of the mind and the direction of God's Word shape a daily walk that agrees with Christ's life within?

Personal Reflection

What repeated thought has influenced your conduct more than the Word of God?

Action Step

Choose a relevant Bible verse, consider what it corrects, and return to that truth whenever the thought appears.

PUT OFF THE OLD MAN, PUT ON THE NEW MAN

BACK TO CONTENTS

Paul uses the expressions *"old man"* and *"new man"* to describe two very different ways of life. The old man belongs to the former life of sin and disobedience, while the new man belongs to the life received in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:22-24**:

> *"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."*

Notice the progression: put off the old man, be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man. Paul is describing a complete change in the manner of life.

The Old Man Belongs to the Former Life

The old man is associated with what Paul calls the *"former conversation."* In the language of the King James Version, conversation often refers to conduct or behaviour. Paul is therefore speaking about the way a person lived before receiving new life in Jesus Christ.

He describes that old man as *"corrupt according to the deceitful lusts."* Wrong desires are deceitful because they promise satisfaction while hiding their true consequence. James explains where uncontrolled desire leads.

James wrote in **James 1:14-15**:

> *"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."*

The old life followed those desires, but the new life does not. The believer is no longer called to live according to the patterns, desires and choices that belonged to the person they once were.

The Old Man Is Not to Be Improved

This distinction is important. Paul does not tell us to repair the old man or make the old life more respectable, more disciplined or more religious. He tells us to put off the old man.

The Gospel is not a programme for improving the former life. The old life is left behind because the believer has become a new creation in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 6:6**:

> *"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."*

The purpose is clear: *"that henceforth we should not serve sin."* The believer has been delivered from the old mastery of sin.

The Mind Must Agree With the New Life

Between putting off the old man and putting on the new man, Paul says, *"And be renewed in the spirit of your mind."* This renewal is important because old patterns of thinking can continue to influence behaviour if they are allowed to remain.

The Word of God teaches the believer to recognise what belongs to the former life and what agrees with the new life in Jesus Christ. This is why transformation involves the renewing of the mind.

But the renewed mind is not the source of spiritual life. Jesus Christ is the source. The mind is being brought into agreement with the Person who now dwells within.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is the old man to be put off rather than improved, and how must the mind agree with the new life in Christ?

Personal Reflection

Which former behaviour do you still defend as though it is part of who you must remain?

Action Step

Identify the excuse, reject the old behaviour in one real situation, and choose conduct that agrees with the new man in Christ.

The New Man Is Created in Righteousness

Paul describes the new man with remarkable words: *"which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."* The new man is not created in continuing bondage to sin. He is created in righteousness and true holiness.

This does not mean the believer produces righteousness independently. Paul has already shown us where our righteousness is found. He wrote in **1 Corinthians 1:30**:

> *"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:"*

Jesus Christ is our righteousness and sanctification. The new life therefore flows from Him.

We Have Escaped the Corruption of the Old Life

Peter uses similar language when describing what believers have received. Peter wrote in **2 Peter 1:4**:

> *"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."*

Notice that Peter says believers have *"escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."* This agrees with Paul's description of the old man as being corrupted by deceitful lusts. The believer has not been saved so that the old corruption can continue ruling beneath a Christian name. Through Jesus Christ, a new life has been received.

Peter says we have become *"partakers of the divine nature."* That does not mean the believer becomes God. It means we have received spiritual life from Him and now participate in the life He has given.

The writer of Hebrews similarly says in **Hebrews 12:10**:

> *"For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."*

The holiness is His. The life is His. The righteousness is His. The believer does not manufacture the new man through human effort. Jesus Christ dwells within, and His life is expressed through the believer.

Live According to What You Have Received

Putting off the old man and putting on the new man means refusing the behaviour that belonged to the former life and walking according to the new life received in Christ. The old man was governed by deceitful desires, while the new man is created in righteousness and true holiness. The old man served sin, but the new man belongs to Jesus Christ.

This is why salvation cannot be reduced to forgiveness alone. Jesus Christ did not save us so that the old life could remain unchanged. He gave us a new life in Himself.

The believer is therefore called to leave behind the conduct of the old man, allow the mind to be renewed by the Word of God, and walk according to the righteousness and holiness of the One who now lives within. This leads directly to the purpose for which Jesus Christ was manifested: to destroy the works of the devil.

CHRIST CAME TO DESTROY THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL

Everything we have considered concerning sin leads us back to the purpose of Jesus Christ. John wrote in **1 John 3:8**:

> *"He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."*

John does not say that Jesus came simply to make the works of the devil easier to endure. Neither does he say that believers must remain under their dominion throughout their Christian lives. He says that Jesus Christ was manifested *"that he might destroy the works of the devil."* That statement helps us understand what salvation is intended to accomplish.

The Works of the Devil

Scripture connects the works of the devil with disobedience, wickedness, sin and spiritual death. Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:2**:

> *"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:"*

Notice that Paul speaks of how believers walked "in time past." Disobedience belonged to the former life. Jesus also spoke plainly about the character of the devil. He said in **John 8:44**:

> *"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."*

The works described here stand in complete opposition to Jesus Christ, who is the truth. The result of sin is also clear. Paul wrote in **Romans 6:23**:

> *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

Ezekiel wrote in **Ezekiel 18:20**:

> *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."*

Sin leads to death, but Jesus Christ brings life.

Jesus Came to Save His People From Their Sins

The purpose of His coming was declared before His birth. Matthew wrote in **Matthew 1:21**:

> *"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."*

The wording is important. Jesus came to save His people from their sins. Salvation therefore cannot mean remaining under the same dominion from which Jesus came to deliver us. Jesus Christ came to break the power of sin and bring His people into spiritual life.

God's desire for humanity is salvation. Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 2:4**:

> *"Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."*

The Gospel brings people from sin into salvation, from spiritual death into life, and from disobedience into a life governed by Jesus Christ.

Delivered So That We May Serve God

Zacharias spoke prophetically concerning the salvation God was bringing. Luke recorded in **Luke 1:69-75**:

> *"And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life."*

Notice the purpose of deliverance: *"that we being delivered...might serve him."* And how are we to serve Him? *"In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life."*

Deliverance has a purpose. Jesus Christ brings us out of the old life so that we may live unto God.

Victory Is Found in Jesus Christ

Jesus said in **Luke 10:19**:

> *"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you."*

Any authority the believer possesses is not independent power. It comes from Jesus Christ. The Christian does not defeat sin by becoming stronger in human determination. Victory is found in the One who dwells within.

Jesus Christ has not saved us and then left us to overcome the enemy alone. He personally dwells within the born-again believer as Spirit. Paul therefore could say in **Romans 6:22**:

> *"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."*

That verse brings together the purpose of Christ concerning sin. The believer is made free from sin, becomes a servant of God, and bears *"fruit unto holiness."*

This is what Jesus Christ came to accomplish. He came to destroy the works of the devil, save His people from their sins, bring them from death into life, and dwell within them so that His life may be expressed in holiness and righteousness.

Salvation is not Jesus Christ helping the old life survive. It is Jesus Christ giving us a new life in Himself.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Christ's purpose to destroy the works of the devil support a life freed from sin to serve God?

Personal Reflection

Where have you treated a temptation or sinful habit as stronger than the deliverance found in Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Reject that belief and make one response of obedience or service that shows your trust in Christ rather than your own strength.

LOOKING AHEAD: IS SIN INHERITED?

BACK TO CONTENTS

Before we conclude this Study Guide, there is one important question that must be introduced because it affects almost everything people believe about sin: Is sin inherited?

Many Christians have been taught that every person is born possessing a sinful nature inherited from Adam. This teaching is often called original sin, the Adamic nature, or the inherited sin nature. It is then used to explain why people sin and why even born-again believers are expected to continue sinning throughout their lives.

But this raises some serious biblical questions. If sin is inherited from Adam, how is that sin passed from one person to another? Does Scripture teach that a child bears the guilt or spiritual condition of a parent? Does Romans 5 actually say that Adam's sin entered every human being, or does Paul say something different?

Ezekiel wrote in **Ezekiel 18:20**:

> *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."*

Notice the emphasis upon personal responsibility: *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* Scripture connects sin with the person who commits it.

Paul also wrote in **Romans 5:12**:

> *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:"*

This verse is central to the discussion, but we must allow Paul to say exactly what he says. We must not place words into the verse that are not there or allow a theological system to decide its meaning before the verse has been carefully examined.

In the next Study Guide, Is Sin Inherited?, we will examine this question carefully. We will consider Adam, personal responsibility, Psalm 51, Psalm 58, Romans 5, 1 John 1 and Romans 7. Each Scripture must be considered within its context and allowed to speak for itself.

The question will not be settled by tradition or theological systems. The Word of God will remain the plumb line.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must the Bible, rather than tradition or a theological system, settle the question of inherited sin?

Personal Reflection

Which assumption about Adam and inherited sin most affects how you view your own responsibility before God?

Action Step

Test that assumption against the Bible, identify what it changes about personal responsibility, and respond to the truth you find.

CONCLUSION: FREE FROM SIN TO SERVE GOD

BACK TO CONTENTS

Throughout this Study Guide, we have allowed the Word of God to define sin rather than allowing personal experience or religious tradition to determine what we believe. Scripture has shown us that sin is not the same as temptation. A wrong thought may be presented, but temptation does not become sin simply because it appears. Sin involves yielding to what is contrary to God and choosing disobedience.

We have also seen that salvation brings a real spiritual change. Paul wrote in **Romans 6:22**:

> *"But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."*

Notice the order. The believer is made free from sin, becomes a servant of God, and then bears *"fruit unto holiness."* Paul does not describe a life that remains under the dominion of sin. He describes a life that has been brought into a new relationship with God.

This life is not produced by human determination. The Christian life is not an outward attempt to imitate Jesus or to overcome sin through greater self-discipline. Jesus Christ personally dwells within the born-again believer as Spirit, and His indwelling life is the source of the new life we have received.

The believer is therefore not called to return to the old life from which Christ has delivered us. We are called to walk in newness of life, put off the conduct of the old man, allow our minds to be renewed by the Word of God, and live according to the righteousness and holiness of Jesus Christ within.

This does not mean that temptation disappears or that the believer loses the ability to choose. Scripture repeatedly warns us to remain faithful, resist temptation and refuse to yield ourselves again to sin. But the Bible does not present continuing sin as the unavoidable condition of the born-again believer.

Jesus came *"to save his people from their sins."* He was manifested *"that he might destroy the works of the devil."* Salvation therefore cannot be reduced to forgiveness while the old life continues unchanged. Jesus Christ brings us from spiritual death into life and gives us a new life in Himself.

That is the foundation upon which we must stand. As we continue through this module, the next question becomes unavoidable: If sin is a personal act of disobedience, is sin also inherited from Adam?

That question will be examined in the next Study Guide. The Word of God remains the plumb line.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do personal sin, Christ's new life, and freedom to serve God belong together?

Personal Reflection

What truth about sin and new life in Christ most challenges the way you think or live today?

Action Step

Name one change that follows from that truth and explain how you will live it through the life of Jesus Christ within you.

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

Explain how the Bible connects sin with a person's heart, knowledge and choice. Why does spiritual death make the life Jesus Christ gives necessary?

2. Understanding

What is the difference between temptation, deliberate disobedience and failure to do a known good act? How does personal responsibility apply to each?

3. Personal Reflection

What belief about sin or your ability to resist temptation has this teaching corrected? Explain how that truth changes the way you view Jesus Christ and His life within.

4. Response to Truth

When a wrong thought or desire arises, what must change in your response before it becomes a deliberate choice? Explain why Christ's indwelling life matters.

5. Action Step

Identify one temptation or wrong pattern that you need to address. What definite response will you take in the light of God's Word, and when will you begin?

6. Early Response

Have you begun the response identified in Question 5? If so, explain what you did and what it revealed about your thinking. If not, what has prevented you from beginning?

7. Ongoing Practice

How will you continue to guard your thoughts and choices without treating temptation itself as sin or depending only upon willpower?

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How do Ezekiel 18, Romans 6 and the teaching on the new creation help distinguish personal responsibility from inherited sin and complete salvation from continuing in sin?

9. Living the Truth

Consider one present relationship or responsibility. What truth from this guide challenges how you behave there, and what will an obedient response look like?

10. Final Response

How has your understanding of sin, temptation and new life in Christ changed? Explain one way you will live differently through His life within.