COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 24

The *Sin* Question

STUDY GUIDE 2 OF 4:

Is Sin Inherited?

An overview of whether sin is inherited from Adam.



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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The question of whether sin is inherited has shaped Christian teaching for centuries. Many have been taught that every person enters the world carrying a sinful nature inherited from Adam, and that this inherited condition explains why all people eventually sin.

If that teaching is correct, it affects how we understand human nature, personal responsibility, temptation, salvation and the new birth. It also affects what we believe Jesus Christ came to accomplish. For that reason, this question must not be settled by tradition, church history or theological systems. The Word of God must decide the matter.

In the previous Study Guide, we established that Scripture connects sin with knowledge, responsibility and choice. We also saw that temptation itself is not sin and that the born-again believer receives a new life in Jesus Christ.

This Study Guide now asks a more specific question: Does the Bible teach that sin itself, or a sinful nature, is inherited from Adam?

To answer that question, we will examine the Scriptures most often used to support inherited sin. We will consider David's words in Psalm 51 and Psalm 58, Paul's teaching in Romans 5 and Romans 7, and John's statement in **1 John 1:8**. We will also consider Adam's own disobedience and the biblical teaching concerning personal accountability before God.

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 where the responsibility is placed: *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* Scripture does not place the iniquity of the father upon the son. Each soul is accountable before God.

As we study this subject, we must be careful not to make Scripture say more than it says or less than it says. Every Scripture must be considered within its context and in harmony with the rest of God's Word.

The purpose is not simply to challenge a long-held doctrine. The purpose is to understand what the Bible actually teaches about the origin of sin and the responsibility of every soul before God.

Once again, the Word of God will remain the plumb line.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does Ezekiel's statement that the soul who sins shall die matter when considering inherited guilt?

Personal Reflection

Have you accepted a belief about inherited guilt without checking whether **Ezekiel 18:20** *actually supports it?*

Action Step

Compare that belief with Ezekiel 18 in context, acknowledge any wrong assumption, and explain what you will now accept from God's Word.

INTRODUCTION: IS SIN INHERITED?

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In the previous Study Guide, we established that sin is not the same as temptation. Scripture connects sin with personal responsibility, choice and disobedience to God. We also saw that the born-again believer is a new creation in Jesus Christ and is called to walk in the new life received in Him.

We now come to a question that has influenced Christian teaching for many centuries: Is sin inherited?

Many religious traditions teach that when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, something sinful was passed from Adam to every person born after him. This is commonly called original sin, the Adamic nature, the sin nature, or an inherited sinful nature. According to this teaching, people do not simply become sinners because they personally choose to sin. They are said to be born already possessing a sinful condition inherited from Adam.

But is that what the Bible actually teaches? Paul 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. Paul clearly connects Adam with the entrance of sin into the world, and he also says that death came by sin and passed upon all men. But notice the final words: *"for that all have sinned."*

We must therefore examine carefully what Paul is saying rather than beginning with a theological conclusion and then reading that conclusion into his words. Did Adam's personal sin become the personal sin of every person born after him? Did humanity inherit a sinful nature through physical birth? Or did Adam introduce sin into the world, after which each person became personally responsible when they themselves chose disobedience?

Ezekiel gives us an important principle. He 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."*

God places responsibility upon *"The soul that sinneth."* He then states plainly that the son does not bear the iniquity of the father. These verses must therefore be understood in harmony.

Throughout this Study Guide, we will examine the Scriptures commonly used to support inherited sin, including **Psalm 51:5**, **Psalm 58:3**, Romans 5, **1 John 1:8** and Romans 7. We will also consider the historical development of the doctrine and compare those teachings with the Word of God.

Our purpose is not to defend a religious position simply because it is familiar. Our purpose is to discover what Scripture actually teaches. Every Scripture must be allowed to speak within its context and in harmony with the rest of God's Word.

The question must therefore remain before us from beginning to end: Is sin inherited, or is every soul personally responsible before God for the sin that soul commits?

Personal Response

Key Truth

What question must be answered before calling sin a condition passed from Adam to every child?

Personal Reflection

Which familiar explanation of inherited sin have you relied upon without examining its Bible context?

Action Step

Read the relevant verses in context, identify what your previous explanation overlooked, and adjust your belief accordingly.

THE WORD OF GOD MUST DECIDE THE QUESTION

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Before examining the history of the doctrine of inherited sin or the individual Scriptures used to support it, we must establish the standard by which the question will be decided. A teaching is not true simply because it has been believed for centuries. Neither does widespread acceptance make a doctrine biblical. Religious traditions can develop, change and divide, but the Word of God remains the standard.

The Word of God must decide the question. This is especially important when dealing with a doctrine such as inherited sin because what we believe about sin affects what we believe about salvation, the new birth and the life of the believer.

True Doctrine Matters

Sometimes doctrine is treated as though it is less important than sincerity. People may say that Christians should simply love Jesus and not be concerned about differences in teaching. But Jesus connected love with obedience.

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

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

What we believe matters because what we believe influences how we understand and obey the Word of God. If we believe that sin is unavoidable because every person possesses an inherited sinful nature, that belief will affect how we understand verses that speak of freedom from sin. If we begin instead with the Word of God, we must allow every Scripture to speak according to its context.

Religious Division Does Not Determine Truth

The existence of many different teachings within Christianity demonstrates why tradition cannot be our final authority. Paul warned the Corinthian believers about division.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:3**:

> *"For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?"*

Paul did not present religious division as evidence of spiritual maturity. He associated division with carnality. At the same time, Paul taught that God's people are one body.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:4**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;"*

He also wrote in **Ephesians 1:22-23**:

> *"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."*

Jesus Christ is the Head, and the Church is His body. Therefore, our purpose in studying doctrine is not to defend denominational traditions or prove that one religious group has won an argument. We are seeking to understand the truth revealed in God's Word.

Scripture Must Be Read in Context and Harmony

Some verses concerning sin can appear difficult when they are read by themselves. For example, **1 John 1:8** says:

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

Yet the same writer says in **1 John 3:6**:

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

We must not use one verse to silence the other. Both belong to the Word of God. The correct approach is to examine the context, audience and purpose of each verse and then understand them within the harmony of Scripture.

The same principle must govern our study of Psalm 51, Psalm 58, Romans 5 and Romans 7. A difficult verse must be interpreted within the whole testimony of God's Word.

Warnings Against False Teaching

The New Testament also warns that teachings can arise from within religious communities that draw people away from truth. Paul told the elders at Ephesus in **Acts 20:29-30**:

> *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."*

The fact that a teaching develops within Christianity therefore does not prove that it came from Scripture. Every doctrine must still be tested, and that includes the doctrine of inherited sin.

We must ask: Does Scripture actually teach that Adam's sin or sinful nature is passed physically from parent to child? Does the Bible say that every baby is born spiritually guilty because of Adam? Does Romans 5 teach inherited sin, or has that conclusion been placed upon Paul's words?

These questions cannot be answered by appealing to tradition, and neither can they be answered by personal experience. The Word of God is the plumb line.

As we now consider how the doctrine of inherited sin developed, we must continually return to that standard. History may tell us what people believed, but only Scripture can determine whether what they believed was true.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can neither religious division nor the age of a doctrine establish that inherited sin is biblical?

Personal Reflection

Has respect for a teacher or tradition made it difficult for you to examine the Bible independently?

Action Step

Test one teaching about inherited sin against the Bible and choose to follow what God's Word establishes, even if it corrects tradition.

HOW THE DOCTRINE OF INHERITED SIN DEVELOPED

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The belief that every person is born possessing a sinful nature inherited from Adam did not develop in isolation. Ideas concerning the physical body, human desire, Adam's fall and the transmission of sin were debated for centuries. Understanding some of that history can be helpful, but history cannot decide whether the doctrine is true.

A doctrine may be ancient and still need to be tested by the Word of God. Our purpose is therefore not to decide the question by tracing who believed what. We are considering how certain ideas developed so that we can then return to Scripture and ask whether those ideas are actually taught there.

The Early Church Faced False Teaching

The New Testament itself warns that false teaching would arise. Paul wrote in **Acts 20:29-30**:

> *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."*

The early Church therefore had to contend with teachings that attempted to alter the Gospel or the identity and work of Jesus Christ. Among the movements that developed in the early centuries were various forms of Gnosticism. These movements were not all identical, but many made a strong distinction between the spiritual and material worlds.

Some Gnostic systems regarded matter as corrupt or evil while treating the spiritual realm as pure. Salvation was often connected with special or hidden knowledge rather than the simple Gospel of Jesus Christ. This created a serious problem because Christianity does not teach that the physical creation itself is inherently evil, nor does Scripture teach that salvation comes through secret knowledge available only to a spiritually superior group.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:8-9**:

> *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."*

Salvation is God's gift through Jesus Christ.

Cerinthus and the Separation of Jesus From Christ

Early Christian writers associated a teacher named Cerinthus with beliefs that separated the man Jesus from the divine Christ. According to those accounts, Cerinthus taught that a heavenly Christ came upon Jesus and later departed from Him.

Whether considering Cerinthus or other similar teachings, the doctrinal danger is clear. Jesus Christ must not be divided into a human person on one side and a separate divine Person who temporarily came upon Him on the other. Scripture gives us a very different foundation.

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. Jesus Christ is not a human being who was temporarily joined by another divine Person. The one true God was revealed through His genuine human life. This matters to our study because teachings that sharply separated spirit from matter helped create an environment in which the physical body was sometimes treated as the source or carrier of corruption.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does the discussion of Cerinthus require us to hold together the genuine humanity and deity of Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever spoken of Jesus Christ as though His humanity and the Spirit of Christ were two separate persons?

Action Step

Examine **Romans 8:9** *and the teaching on Christ's identity, then correct any wording that divides Jesus Christ into separate persons.*

Manichaeism and the Conflict Between Light and Darkness

Another movement that strongly emphasised a conflict between spirit and matter was Manichaeism, founded by Mani in the third century. Manichaeism described existence in terms of an ongoing conflict between light and darkness. The material world was viewed as deeply connected with darkness, while salvation involved the liberation of light from its entanglement with matter.

This was not biblical Christianity. Yet these ideas formed part of the intellectual and religious world in which later discussions about human nature, desire and sin developed. One person particularly important to the later doctrine of original sin was Augustine of Hippo.

Augustine and Original Sin

Before becoming a Christian, Augustine spent a number of years associated with Manichaeism. He later rejected that religion and became one of the most influential theologians in Western Christianity.

Augustine did not simply repeat Manichaean teaching. Nevertheless, his later theology placed considerable emphasis upon humanity's fallen condition, disordered desire and the effects of Adam's sin upon succeeding generations. During his controversies concerning grace, human ability and salvation, Augustine developed a highly influential understanding of original sin.

In this understanding, Adam's fall did not affect Adam alone. Humanity was regarded as sharing in a fallen condition inherited through natural generation. Augustine also used the term concupiscence to describe disordered desire associated with humanity's fallen condition. Sexual desire and human generation became closely connected in his explanation of how original sin was transmitted from one generation to another.

Whatever historical influence Augustine may have had, we still have to ask the biblical question: Does Scripture actually teach that sin, guilt or a sinful spiritual nature is transmitted from parent to child through physical generation? That question cannot be answered by Augustine. It must be answered by the Word of God.

The Doctrine Spread Through Western Christianity

Augustine's teaching became extremely influential within Western Christianity. Different traditions later explained original sin in different ways, but the underlying belief that humanity inherits a fallen condition from Adam became widely accepted.

Roman Catholic theology developed its own understanding of original sin and connected baptism with its removal. Later Protestant traditions also retained forms of inherited sin, although they differed concerning its effects and the way salvation deals with it. Some holiness movements taught that an inherited sinful nature remained after conversion and required a later work of sanctification in which that nature was eradicated.

These systems differ from one another, but they share one important assumption: something sinful is inherited from Adam before the individual personally chooses to sin. That is the assumption we must now test.

The Body Cannot Be Made the Source of Sin Without Scriptural Proof

If a sinful nature is physically transmitted from parent to child, then the human body becomes involved in carrying a spiritual condition from one generation to another. But Scripture consistently treats sin as a spiritual and moral matter involving the soul's relationship with God.

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 again the personal language: *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* Then Scripture says, *"The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father."* Whatever conclusions we reach concerning Adam and humanity must agree with that Scriptural testimony.

History Cannot Overrule Scripture

It is useful to know that ideas concerning inherited sin developed through centuries of theological discussion. It is also useful to understand Augustine's enormous influence upon Western Christianity and to recognise that Catholic, Protestant and holiness traditions have expressed the doctrine in different ways. But none of those facts establish the doctrine as biblical truth.

We must now move from history back to Scripture. The important question is not, How many Christians have believed in inherited sin? The important question is, Does the Word of God teach it?

In the next section, we will begin with the nature of sin itself and ask whether something spiritual can be inherited physically from Adam. The Word of God remains the plumb line.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is Augustine's influence not the same as proof from the Bible that a sinful nature is inherited?

Personal Reflection

Has the age or popularity of a doctrine made you more willing to accept it without examining the Bible?

Action Step

Choose one historical claim about inherited sin, test the underlying belief against God's Word, and state whether your conclusion needs to change.

SIN IS PERSONAL, NOT PHYSICALLY INHERITED

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If every person inherits a sinful nature from Adam, we need to ask an important question: How is that sinful nature transmitted from one generation to another?

Human beings reproduce physically. Our bodies come through our parents, but sin is not a physical substance carried in flesh, blood or genetics. Scripture presents sin as a spiritual and moral matter involving a person's relationship with God. The Bible therefore directs our attention towards personal responsibility, not inherited guilt.

Sin Is Not a Physical Condition

When God created Adam, He formed his physical body from the dust of the ground, but Adam was not created sinful. Moses wrote in **Genesis 1:27**:

> *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."*

Later, after completing His creation, Moses recorded in **Genesis 1:31**:

> *"And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day."*

Adam's physical body was therefore not inherently sinful, nor did sin arise because God created humanity with something corrupt within them. Solomon wrote in **Ecclesiastes 7:29**:

> *"Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions."*

Notice the distinction: God made man upright. The departure from that upright condition came through what man chose.

Adam Sinned by Choice

Adam was given a clear command. Moses wrote 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."*

Adam knew what God had said. He was not created sinful, and he did not need an inherited sinful nature in order to disobey. He possessed the ability to choose.

When Adam chose contrary to God's command, sin entered his life and spiritual death followed. This is important because Adam himself demonstrates that a person does not need to possess an inherited sinful nature before they can choose disobedience.

Adam was created upright, yet Adam still chose to sin. The origin of Adam's sin was therefore not something inherited from another person. It was his own disobedience.

The Soul That Sinneth Shall Die

Ezekiel gives one of the clearest statements of personal responsibility in Scripture. God said in **Ezekiel 18:4**:

> *"Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die."*

Notice where God places responsibility. He does not say that the soul whose father sinned shall die. He says, *"the soul that sinneth, it shall die."*

Later in the same chapter, the statement becomes even more specific. 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."*

This verse places responsibility upon the individual. The father is responsible for his sin, and the son is responsible for his sin. *"The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father."*

That principle must be considered carefully when we are told that every child is born bearing a sinful condition inherited from Adam.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Adam's choice and **Ezekiel 18:20** *place the guilt of sin on the person who commits it?*

Personal Reflection

Where have you blamed a condition or influence rather than acknowledging a choice you personally made?

Action Step

Identify the choice honestly before God and respond to it without shifting responsibility to Adam, another person or circumstances.

The Spirit Comes From God

Scripture also distinguishes between the physical body and the spirit. Solomon wrote in **Ecclesiastes 12:7**:

> *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."*

The body returns to the earth, while the spirit returns to "God who gave it." Job similarly said in **Job 33:4**:

> *"The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life."*

Life comes from God. James wrote in **James 1:17**:

> *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."*

We therefore should not make God the source of a corrupt spiritual nature given to every child at birth. The biblical picture is that human beings begin life innocent before God and become personally accountable for sin when they themselves choose disobedience.

This does not mean that children grow up without influences, desires, pressures or temptations. It means that temptation, human weakness and physical inheritance must not automatically be called sin. Sin involves personal responsibility before God.

All Have Sinned

Someone may immediately ask: If sin is not inherited, why does the Bible say that all have sinned? Paul wrote in **Romans 3:23**:

> *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"*

The verse says, *"all have sinned."* It does not say that all were born having personally sinned, nor does the verse explain how sin originated in each person's life. That question must be answered from the wider testimony of Scripture.

Adam introduced sin into the world, but Scripture repeatedly connects personal guilt with personal sin. We will examine Paul's teaching in Romans 5 in detail shortly.

Personal Responsibility Does Not Remove the Need for Jesus Christ

Recognising personal responsibility does not lessen humanity's need for salvation. Every person who has sinned needs Jesus Christ. 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."*

Sin brings spiritual death, but Jesus Christ brings eternal life. The answer to sin is therefore not to blame Adam, an inherited nature, circumstances or the devil. The answer is to acknowledge our own sin and receive the salvation found in Jesus Christ.

Sin is personal. Responsibility is personal. And salvation is found in Jesus Christ.

With that foundation established, we can now examine one of the verses most often used to teach inherited sin: **Psalm 51:5**.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does personal responsibility for sin make Christ's gift of life necessary rather than optional?

Personal Reflection

Are you looking to your own efforts or an inherited condition for an explanation that should lead you to Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Examine your own need of Christ and, if a sin needs addressing, turn from it and respond in obedience from His life within.

WHAT DOES PSALM 51:5 MEAN?

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One of the verses most frequently quoted in support of inherited sin is **Psalm 51:5**. David wrote:

> *"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."*

At first reading, some understand this verse to mean that David was saying he personally possessed sin from the moment of conception. But we must read his actual words carefully. David does not say, *"Sin was conceived in me."* He says, *"in sin did my mother conceive me."* Those are not the same statement.

The verse places David's conception within a setting described in terms of iniquity and sin, but it does not say that a sinful nature was biologically or spiritually transferred from his parents into him. We must therefore allow the verse to say exactly what it says without adding a doctrine that the words themselves do not state.

David Acknowledged His Own Sin

The immediate context of Psalm 51 is extremely important. David is not blaming Adam, his parents or an inherited nature for what he had done. He is confessing his own personal transgression before God.

David wrote in **Psalm 51:3-4**:

> *"For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest."*

Notice the personal language: *"my transgressions," "my sin,"* and *"I have sinned, and done this evil."* David accepts responsibility for his actions. Nothing in these verses suggests that he was excusing his sin because of something inherited at birth.

David Lived Under the Law

David also lived under the Mosaic Law, during a time when the sacrifices offered for sin could not provide the complete spiritual reality later brought through Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews said in **Hebrews 10:4**:

> *"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins."*

Paul also wrote in **Galatians 3:22**:

> *"But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."*

David therefore lived within an Old Covenant setting in which sin was continually exposed and sacrifices were repeatedly offered, yet those sacrifices could not accomplish what Jesus Christ would later accomplish completely. That covenant setting should be remembered when reading David's words.

David's Sin Involved Personal Choice

The history recorded in 2 Samuel also shows how David's sin developed. David saw Bathsheba, inquired about her and then chose a course contrary to God's will. His actions developed through desire and deliberate decisions.

This agrees with the principle we have already seen concerning temptation. John 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."*

David was not forced to sin because of something inherited from his parents. He faced desire and then made choices. That is why Psalm 51 is a confession of personal responsibility.

God Desires Truth in the Inward Parts

David continues in the next verse. He wrote in **Psalm 51:6**:

> *"Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom."*

David moves from speaking of conception to speaking about the *"inward parts"* and the *"hidden part."* His concern is not simply outward behaviour. God desires truth within.

David had attempted to conceal what he had done, but nothing hidden from people is hidden from God. The language therefore turns our attention towards the inward spiritual condition of the person rather than towards a theory of sin being physically transmitted through conception.

What Psalm 51:5 Does Not Say

Psalm 51:5 does not say that Adam's guilt was transferred to David, that David inherited Adam's personal sin, that a sinful nature entered David through physical conception, or that David was incapable of choosing righteousness because of something received at birth.

Those ideas must be established from Scripture if they are to be believed. They cannot simply be inserted into this verse. The context shows David confessing his own sin and accepting responsibility for what he had chosen to do.

Psalm 51:5 describes David's conception in language connected with iniquity and sin, but the verse does not establish that sin itself is inherited through conception. We must therefore continue examining the Scriptures before reaching our final conclusion.

Another verse frequently used to support inherited sin is **Psalm 58:3**.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must David's confession in **Psalm 51:5** *be read with his account of his own chosen sin and desire for inward truth?*

Personal Reflection

What have you assumed **Psalm 51:5** *proves, and does David's full confession support that assumption?*

Action Step

Read the whole psalm, reconsider your assumption, and explain how David's honesty about his own sin should affect your response to God.

WHAT DOES PSALM 58:3 MEAN?

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Another verse frequently used to support the doctrine of inherited sin is found in Psalm 58. David wrote in **Psalm 58:3**:

> *"The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies."*

If this verse is read without considering its language and context, it may appear to say that people are born spiritually wicked. But notice first who David is describing. He does not say that all people are estranged from the womb. He says, *"The wicked are estranged from the womb."* The subject is a particular class of people whom David is describing as wicked.

The Language Is Figurative

We also know that David is using strong poetic language because he says, *"they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies."* A newborn baby cannot literally speak lies. If the second part of the statement cannot be taken as a literal description of a newborn child, we should be very careful about turning the first part into a literal doctrine concerning the spiritual condition of every baby.

The figurative language becomes even clearer as the Psalm continues. David wrote in **Psalm 58:6**:

> *"Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD."*

David is obviously not describing literal newborn infants with teeth that God should break. He is using vivid poetic language to describe the character and conduct of wicked people.

David Is Describing Wicked People

The broader Psalm speaks about people who deal unjustly, practise violence and refuse righteous judgment. David wrote in **Psalm 58:1-2**:

> *"Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men? Yea, in heart ye work wickedness; ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth."*

These are people whose wickedness is demonstrated through their actions. David is therefore not presenting a theological explanation of how every human being receives sin at birth. He is describing people whose lives have become characterised by wickedness and using strong poetic language to show how deeply established that course has become.

The expression *"from the womb"* emphasises the extent of their wicked course. It should not automatically be turned into a statement that every child is born possessing an inherited sinful nature.

Scripture Must Interpret Scripture

This is where the principle of harmony becomes important. If **Psalm 58:3** were teaching that every child bears an inherited sinful condition from their parents, we would need to explain that conclusion alongside Ezekiel's clear statement concerning personal responsibility.

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."*

Responsibility rests upon *"The soul that sinneth,"* and Scripture plainly says, *"The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father."* **Psalm 58:3** therefore cannot simply be assumed to teach that sin is physically or spiritually inherited at birth.

David is using figurative language to describe the established wickedness of people who have gone astray. **Psalm 51:5** and **Psalm 58:3** are both important verses, but neither verse by itself establishes the doctrine of an inherited sinful nature.

We now come to the Scripture most often placed at the centre of this question: Romans chapter 5.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Psalm 58's figurative language about wicked people differ from a literal claim about every newborn?

Personal Reflection

Have you treated strong poetic language in Psalm 58 as literal teaching without considering its meaning?

Action Step

Read Psalm 58 alongside **Ezekiel 18:20***, correct any unsupported conclusion, and apply the principle of personal responsibility.*

ROMANS 5: HOW SIN ENTERED THE WORLD

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Romans chapter 5 is one of the most important Scriptures in the discussion concerning inherited sin. Paul clearly connects Adam with the entrance of sin into the world, but we must allow him to explain exactly what happened.

Paul 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 contains several statements that must be considered carefully: sin entered into the world by one man; death entered by sin; death passed upon all men; and this happened *"for that all have sinned."* The verse does not say that Adam's personal act of sin was physically transferred into every human being at birth. Paul says that Adam introduced sin into the world and that death followed sin.

Romans 5 Must Be Read in Context

Romans 5 begins by describing the blessings received through Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in **Romans 5:1-2**:

> *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."*

The chapter therefore begins with salvation through Jesus Christ. In the second half of the chapter, Paul places Adam and Jesus Christ in contrast. Adam brought sin and death into the world, while Jesus Christ brings grace, righteousness and life.

Romans 5 is therefore not simply a chapter explaining how sin began. It is showing how the work of Jesus Christ answers what entered through Adam.

Sin Entered Into the World

Look again at Paul's exact wording: *"by one man sin entered into the world."* Adam's disobedience introduced something into a creation that God had declared very good.

Moses wrote in **Genesis 1:31**:

> *"And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day."*

Sin was not part of God's original creation. Adam was created upright and given a command. When he chose disobedience, sin entered human experience and the world became a place in which sin and death were realities.

That is very different from saying that Adam's personal sin was placed spiritually inside every child born after him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does **Romans 5:12** *say about Adam's entrance of sin and the reason death passed upon all people?*

Personal Reflection

Where have you added inherited personal guilt to Romans 5 before following Paul's complete argument?

Action Step

Read **Romans 5:12** *in its context, distinguish what Paul states from what you have assumed, and revise your understanding where needed.*

Death Came by Sin

Paul continues with the words, *"and death by sin."* This agrees with the warning God had given Adam.

God said in **Genesis 2:17**:

> *"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."*

Adam did not physically die on the day he ate. He continued living physically for many years, but his relationship with God changed immediately. He was driven from the Garden, and the spiritual separation God had warned about became a reality.

Paul later states the same principle in **Romans 6:23**:

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

Sin produces death, but Jesus Christ gives life.

"For That All Have Sinned"

The final words of **Romans 5:12** are extremely important: *"for that all have sinned."* Paul does not say that death passed upon all men because Adam's guilt was counted as their own personal sin. He says, *"for that all have sinned."*

This agrees with his earlier statement in **Romans 3:23**:

> *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"*

The universal need for salvation is real because all have sinned. But the fact that all eventually sin does not itself prove that each person was born already possessing Adam's personal sin or guilt.

The question remains: How does Scripture place responsibility upon the individual? Ezekiel answers, *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* That principle cannot be ignored when interpreting Romans 5.

What About Romans 5:13?

Paul continues in **Romans 5:13**:

> *"(For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.)"*

Notice again that Paul says, *"sin was in the world."* His language continues to describe sin as something that had entered the world. Paul then raises the question of imputation and law.

We must be careful here. Scripture itself speaks elsewhere of sin through ignorance, so **Romans 5:13** should not be made to say that an act cannot be sinful in any sense unless the person already possesses full knowledge. What Paul does show is that law reveals and identifies transgression, and that accountability must be understood in relation to what God has revealed.

This agrees with the principle established earlier: knowledge, responsibility and choice must all be considered when discussing personal sin.

Adam's Transgression Opened the Way

Paul wrote in **Romans 5:14**:

> *"Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come."*

Adam's transgression was unique in one important respect. He stood at the beginning of human history and introduced sin into the world. Others did not have to repeat Adam's exact act of eating from the forbidden tree in order to sin.

But Paul still distinguishes their acts from *"Adam's transgression."* Adam's act was Adam's act. The consequences of sin entered the world, and humanity thereafter lived within a world in which sin and death were realities.

Adam and Christ Are Contrasted

Paul's purpose is not to leave us looking at Adam. He turns our attention towards Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 5:15**:

> *"But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many."*

Adam's offence brought terrible consequences, but Paul says *"much more"* concerning the grace of God through Jesus Christ. The emphasis of Romans 5 is not that Adam possesses greater power to corrupt humanity than Jesus Christ possesses to save. The greater reality is found in Christ.

Condemnation and Justification

Paul continues the contrast in **Romans 5:18**:

> *"Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."*

Adam's offence brought condemnation into human history, while Jesus Christ brought the free gift unto justification of life. The verse does not teach that every person is automatically justified without receiving Christ. In the same way, we must be careful about reading automatic personal guilt into every person simply from Adam's act.

Paul is describing two great realities introduced through Adam and through Jesus Christ: Adam is connected with sin, condemnation and death, while Jesus Christ is connected with righteousness, justification and life.

"Made Sinners" and "Made Righteous"

Paul wrote in **Romans 5:19**:

> *"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."*

This verse must be read together with everything Paul has already said. Adam's disobedience introduced sin into the world, and humanity followed the way of sin. Paul has already stated, *"for that all have sinned."*

Likewise, righteousness comes through the obedience of Jesus Christ. The central contrast is between disobedience through Adam and righteousness through Jesus Christ. But the answer is not to remain under Adam. The answer is to be found in Jesus Christ.

Grace Abounds Through Jesus Christ

Paul concludes this part of the chapter in **Romans 5:20-21**:

> *"Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."*

This is where Paul's argument is heading. Sin entered and sin reigned unto death, but *"grace did much more abound."* Grace reigns *"through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."*

Romans 5 therefore should not be used to build a doctrine that leaves humanity helplessly bound to an inherited sinful nature. Paul is preparing us for Romans 6, where he will ask, *"Shall we continue in sin?"* and answer, *"God forbid."*

What Romans 5 Establishes

Romans 5 teaches that Adam's disobedience had enormous consequences. Through Adam, sin entered the world and death came through sin. But Paul also says why death passed upon all men: *"for that all have sinned."*

The chapter does not require us to conclude that a sinful spiritual nature is physically transmitted from parent to child. Instead, it places Adam at the entrance of sin into human history and Jesus Christ at the entrance of righteousness, grace and life.

Adam introduced sin into the world. Jesus Christ brings the answer to sin. The greater message of Romans 5 is therefore not the power of Adam's failure, but the greater power of the grace and life found in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Romans 5 contrast Adam's disobedience with the greater grace and life available through Christ?

Personal Reflection

Does the seriousness of Adam's sin sometimes occupy more of your thinking than the greater grace found in Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Examine Paul's contrast in Romans 5 and explain one way this truth should strengthen your confidence in Christ's saving life.

WHAT DOES 1 JOHN 1:8 ACTUALLY TEACH?

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One of the Scriptures most frequently quoted to support the belief that Christians must continue to 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."*

This verse is sometimes understood to mean that every Christian continues to possess sin and must continue sinning throughout life. But is that what John is teaching? We must apply the same principle that has governed this Study Guide from the beginning: we cannot isolate one verse from the rest of the letter.

John's statements concerning sin, cleansing, fellowship, light, darkness and the new birth must all be understood together.

Why Did John Write?

John explains the purpose of his letter near the beginning. He wrote in **1 John 1:3-4**:

> *"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."*

John is writing about fellowship. He wants those who hear his message to have fellowship with God's people and, above all, fellowship with Jesus Christ. This becomes the setting for everything that follows.

The question is not simply whether a person claims to know God. The question is whether that person's life agrees with the fellowship they claim to possess.

God Is Light

John immediately establishes an important truth. He wrote in **1 John 1:5**:

> *"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."*

Notice how absolute John's language is: *"God is light,"* and *"in him is no darkness at all."* John then applies this directly to those who claim fellowship with Him.

He wrote in **1 John 1:6**:

> *"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:"*

That statement is extremely important when interpreting verse 8. John does not teach that a person can walk continually in darkness while maintaining true fellowship with Christ. He says the opposite. If someone claims fellowship with Him but walks in darkness, *"we lie, and do not the truth."*

Walking in the Light

John then gives the other side of the contrast. He wrote in **1 John 1:7**:

> *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."*

Notice the words *"walk in the light"* and *"cleanseth us from all sin."* John does not say that Jesus Christ cleanses the believer from some sin while leaving the remainder as an unavoidable condition. He says *"all sin."*

Therefore, when we reach verse 8, we must interpret it in harmony with verses 5-7. Verse 6 says we cannot walk in darkness and honestly claim fellowship with Christ. Verse 7 says that those who walk in the light are cleansed from all sin. Verse 8 cannot suddenly mean that continuing in sin is the unavoidable condition of every Christian.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must **1 John 1:8** *be read alongside John's contrasts between darkness, walking in light, and cleansing from all sin?*

Personal Reflection

Have you relied on **1 John 1:8** *without considering John's teaching about light, confession and complete cleansing?*

Action Step

Read **1 John 1:5–2***:1 together, identify what the whole passage corrects, and respond honestly to its teaching.*

"If We Say That We Have No Sin"

Now consider the wording carefully. John wrote in **1 John 1:8**:

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

John is warning against denying the reality of sin. A person who refuses to acknowledge their sin cannot honestly come to Jesus Christ for cleansing. If someone says, *"I have no sin,"* John says that person is deceiving themselves.

But John does not stop at verse 8. The next verse tells us what should happen when sin is acknowledged.

Confession Leads to Cleansing

John wrote in **1 John 1:9**:

> *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

The movement is clear. Sin must not be denied. It must be confessed. God then forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

The purpose of confession is not to establish a permanent cycle in which the Christian assumes they must continue sinning every day. The purpose is forgiveness and cleansing. John again uses comprehensive language: *"all unrighteousness."*

If verse 8 teaches that a person must always remain sinful, then verse 9 would immediately contradict it by saying that God cleanses from all unrighteousness. The two verses must be read together.

John Also Speaks of Past Sin

John continues in **1 John 1:10**:

> *"If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."*

Notice the wording changes. Verse 8 says, *"If we say that we have no sin."* Verse 10 says, *"If we say that we have not sinned."* John is confronting denial.

A person cannot truthfully claim that they have never sinned. All who come to Jesus Christ for salvation must acknowledge the reality of their own sin. This agrees with Paul's words in **Romans 3:23**:

> *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"*

The need for salvation begins with acknowledging that we have sinned. But acknowledging past sin is very different from teaching that continuing sin must remain the normal life of the born-again believer.

John's Purpose Is "That Ye Sin Not"

The next verse is especially important. John wrote in **1 John 2:1**:

> *"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:"*

John tells us directly why he is writing: *"that ye sin not."* That statement should control our interpretation. John does not say, *"I write these things because you must continue sinning."* He says, *"that ye sin not."*

The second part of the verse does not weaken the first. *"And if any man sin"* recognises the seriousness of sin and immediately points the sinner towards Jesus Christ the righteous.

These words also contain wonderful hope for the person who is still in sin. Sin does not have to be the end of the story. The sinner is not told that they must remain in darkness or that sin is an unavoidable condition from which there is no escape. There is an Advocate — Jesus Christ the righteous.

John has already explained that if we confess our sins, Jesus Christ is faithful and just to forgive and to *"cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* The person who has sinned can therefore turn to Jesus Christ, acknowledge their sin and find forgiveness and cleansing in Him.

At the same time, this does not turn sin into an inevitable Christian lifestyle. John does not say, *"when you inevitably sin every day."* He says, *"if any man sin."*

His stated purpose remains unmistakably clear:

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not."

The message is therefore both a warning and a hope.

Do not continue in sin. But if you are still in sin, there is an Advocate — Jesus Christ the righteous.

Jesus Christ Came to Take Away Sin

John returns to this subject later in the same letter. He wrote in **1 John 3:4-5**:

> *"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin."*

Again, John's teaching is consistent. Jesus Christ was manifested *"to take away our sins."* This agrees with the words spoken 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."*

Jesus came to save His people from their sins. John's teaching must be interpreted in harmony with that purpose.

Abiding in Christ and Sin

John continues in **1 John 3:6**:

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

This is the same writer who wrote **1 John 1:8**. We cannot accept verse 8 while ignoring verse 6. If **1 John 1:8** meant that every born-again believer must continually sin, John would contradict himself only two chapters later.

Instead, his teaching forms one consistent message:

- Do not deny sin;
- Confess sin;
- Receive forgiveness and cleansing;
- Walk in the light;

- Abide in Jesus Christ;
- Do not continue walking in sin.

"Let No Man Deceive You"

John makes the distinction even stronger. He wrote in **1 John 3:7-8**:

> *"Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. 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."*

Notice that John himself warns against deception. Earlier he said, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves."* Now he says, *"let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous."*

Both truths must stand together. We must not deceive ourselves by denying the sin from which we need salvation. Neither must we be deceived into believing that continuing in sin is the unavoidable condition of someone who has been born of God.

The Born-Again Life

John wrote in **1 John 3:9-10**:

> *"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. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."*

These are strong words, but we should not weaken them in order to make them fit a traditional interpretation of **1 John 1:8**. John connects the new birth with a changed relationship to sin.

This does not mean temptation becomes impossible or that a believer loses the ability to make a wrong choice. Scripture warns believers to remain faithful. But John does not describe continuing sin as the normal expression of the born-again life.

What 1 John 1:8 Actually Teaches

First **John 1:8** is therefore not a declaration that every Christian must continue sinning every day. It is a warning against denying the reality of our sin and our need for cleansing.

The surrounding verses give us the complete movement: sin must be acknowledged, sin must be confessed, Jesus Christ forgives, Jesus Christ cleanses from all unrighteousness, the believer walks in the light, and John writes *"that ye sin not."*

The verse must therefore never be isolated from the rest of John's teaching. Jesus Christ does not save His people so that they can remain comfortably in darkness while claiming fellowship with Him. He brings us into the light, cleanses us from sin, dwells within us, and gives us a new life in Himself.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do confession and cleansing in **1 John 1:8–9** *fit with John's stated aim that believers do not sin?*

Personal Reflection

Where have you used a verse about confession to excuse a choice that should be brought into the light?

Action Step

If this applies, acknowledge that choice before God, turn from it, and take one step consistent with walking in the light.

ROMANS 7: PAUL'S STRUGGLE UNDER THE LAW

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Romans chapter 7 is frequently used to support the belief that even a born-again believer must continue struggling helplessly with sin. Particular attention is often given to Paul's words describing a person who knows what is right but repeatedly does what he hates.

Paul wrote in **Romans 7:15-17**:

> *"For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."*

If these verses are read by themselves, they may appear to describe the normal life of a born-again believer. But Romans 7 cannot be separated from Romans 6 and Romans 8. We must allow Paul's complete argument to determine what Romans 7 means.

Romans 6 Establishes the Foundation

Immediately before Romans 7, Paul has already spoken very clearly concerning the believer's relationship with sin. 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 describe continuing in sin as the normal condition of the born-again believer. He asks, *"How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"*

He 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 expressions Paul uses: *"our old man is crucified," "henceforth we should not serve sin,"* and *"freed from sin."* These statements must govern how we understand the struggle described in Romans 7.

Paul cannot teach in Romans 6 that the believer is dead to sin and freed from its dominion, and then teach in Romans 7 that the normal born-again life is helpless bondage to the very sin from which Christ has delivered us.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must Paul's description of struggle in Romans 7 be read after Romans 6's teaching about freedom from sin?

Personal Reflection

Have you taken the struggle of Romans 7 as permission to expect lifelong bondage to sin?

Action Step

Read Romans 6, 7 and 8 together, then correct that expectation in the light of the freedom found in Jesus Christ.

Paul Is Discussing the Law

Romans 7 opens by identifying the subject Paul is addressing. Paul wrote in **Romans 7:1**:

> *"Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?"*

Paul is speaking to people familiar with the Law of Moses and explaining the relationship between the law and the new life found in Jesus Christ.

His words are most likely also directed, at least in part, towards people who knew the Mosaic Law but had not yet accepted Jesus Christ and entered into the deliverance found in Him. Paul does not explicitly state in **Romans 7:1** that every person he is addressing is unsaved, so we should not make that an absolute statement. However, the contrast he develops strongly supports this understanding.

He speaks of the former condition:

"when we were in the flesh"

and then contrasts it with:

"But now we are delivered from the law."

He is therefore explaining the difference between the condition of a person under the law and the new life that is found in Jesus Christ.

This becomes even clearer a few verses later.

Paul wrote in **Romans 7:5-6**:

> *"For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter."*

Notice the contrast in Paul's language. He says, *"when we were in the flesh,"* but then, *"now we are delivered."* He contrasts *"the oldness of the letter"* with *"newness of spirit."* Paul is contrasting the former condition under law with the new life now available through Jesus Christ.

The Law Revealed Sin but Could Not Deliver From It

Paul is not attacking God's law as though it were evil. He asks in **Romans 7:7**:

> *"What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."*

The law revealed what was wrong and identified sin. But knowing the command did not itself supply the spiritual life necessary to overcome sin.

Paul explains further in **Romans 7:10-11**:

> *"And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me."*

The commandment was good, but the law could expose sin without giving spiritual life. Paul therefore reaches the struggle described later in the chapter.

"The Good That I Would I Do Not"

Paul wrote in **Romans 7:18-20**:

> *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."*

This is the picture of someone who recognises God's law and even desires to do what is right, but lacks the spiritual deliverance that comes through Jesus Christ. The problem is not that God's law is wrong. The problem is expressed in Paul's words: *"how to perform that which is good I find not."*

The law can say, *"Do not covet. Do not sin. Do what is right."* But the command itself cannot create new spiritual life. This is why the Old Covenant could never be the final answer.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 7:19**:

> *"For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God."*

The law pointed forward to something greater. That greater reality is Jesus Christ.

"O Wretched Man That I Am!"

The struggle reaches its climax near the end of Romans 7. Paul wrote in **Romans 7:22-24**:

> *"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"*

This is not a triumphant description of New Covenant life. The person is *"brought into captivity"* and cries, *"O wretched man that I am!"* Most importantly, Paul asks, *"who shall deliver me?"*

That question points beyond the struggle itself. Paul immediately gives the answer in **Romans 7:25**:

> *"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."*

The answer is not stronger human determination. The answer is Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 8 Continues the Answer

The chapter division between Romans 7 and Romans 8 was not part of Paul's original letter. His argument continues directly into the next chapter.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:1-2**:

> *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."*

Compare that with the condition described in Romans 7. Romans 7 says, *"bringing me into captivity to the law of sin."* Romans 8 says, *"hath made me free from the law of sin and death."*

Those are two very different conditions. One is captivity, while the other is freedom. The difference is Jesus Christ.

What the Law Could Not Do

Paul explains the difference in **Romans 8:3-4**:

> *"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."*

Notice Paul's words: *"what the law could not do."* Romans 7 shows us that inability. The law revealed what was right, but it could not give the spiritual life needed to accomplish it.

Jesus Christ brought what the law could not provide. The born-again believer does not simply receive another set of instructions and then attempt to obey them through greater human effort. Jesus Christ personally dwells within the born-again believer as Spirit, and His indwelling life is the source of the new life.

The Law Was a Schoolmaster to Christ

Paul explains the temporary purpose of the law in another letter. He wrote in **Galatians 3:24**:

> *"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."*

The law was not the final destination. It pointed towards Jesus Christ. Romans 7 therefore demonstrates the inability of the law, by itself, to produce spiritual victory.

The person knows what is right and desires what is right, yet still cries, *"how to perform that which is good I find not."* Jesus Christ changes that condition.

Paul's Born-Again Testimony

Paul's testimony concerning his life in Christ is very different from the captivity described in Romans 7. He wrote in **Galatians 2:20**:

> *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*

Notice the source of Paul's new life: *"Christ liveth in me."* This is the answer to Romans 7. The Christian life is not Paul struggling harder to make the law work. It is Jesus Christ living within.

Paul also wrote in **Philippians 1:21**:

> *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

His life is centred in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Paul Could Be Followed as an Example

Paul was also able to point other believers towards the life being expressed through him. He wrote in **1 Corinthians 11:1**:

> *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."*

He also wrote in **Philippians 3:17**:

> *"Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample."*

These verses must not be understood as teaching external imitation. Paul's own explanation is, *"Christ liveth in me."* What others could observe in Paul's life flowed from the life of Jesus Christ within him.

Romans 7 Must Be Read Between Romans 6 and Romans 8

The flow of Paul's argument is extremely important. Romans 6 shows the believer dead to sin and alive unto God. Romans 7 shows that the law reveals sin but cannot deliver from its power. Romans 8 shows that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes the believer free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 7 therefore should not be isolated from the chapters surrounding it and turned into a description of unavoidable Christian defeat. The struggle serves an important purpose. It shows the inability of the law to produce spiritual life and brings us to the question, *"Who shall deliver me?"* The answer is Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Answer to the Struggle Is the Indwelling Christ

Romans 7 is not given to provide an excuse for continuing in sin. It shows why knowledge of God's law, by itself, cannot save or produce righteousness. The command may reveal what is right, and human determination may desire what is right, but neither creates spiritual life.

The answer is Jesus Christ. At the new birth, the believer receives Him as Spirit. The life that Romans 7 could not produce through law is now found in the Person who dwells within.

That is why Paul can move from *"who shall deliver me?"* to *"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."*

Romans 7 shows the struggle under law. Romans 8 reveals the freedom found in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Romans 6, 7, and 8 distinguish what law reveals from the freedom given through the Spirit of life in Christ?

Personal Reflection

In what area are you depending on knowing the commandment or trying harder rather than on Christ's indwelling life?

Action Step

Bring that area before Jesus Christ and make one obedient choice grounded in the freedom described in **Romans 8:2**.

THE TRUE ORIGIN OF SIN

BACK TO CONTENTS

Throughout this Study Guide, we have examined the belief that sin is inherited from Adam. We have considered the historical development of that teaching and the Scriptures most often used to support it. We now return to the fundamental question: Where does personal sin actually begin?

People have often looked for something outside themselves to explain their sin. Adam has been blamed. An inherited nature has been blamed. The devil has been blamed. Circumstances, upbringing and human weakness may also be blamed. But Scripture continually brings responsibility back to the person who chooses to disobey God.

The Soul That Sinneth Shall Die

God spoke very plainly through Ezekiel. He wrote in **Ezekiel 18:4**:

> *"Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die."*

The statement is direct: *"the soul that sinneth, it shall die."* God does not place responsibility for the son's sin upon the father, or the father's sin upon the son.

Ezekiel makes this even clearer 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."*

Personal sin carries personal responsibility. This does not mean that people cannot influence one another. Parents, society, friends and the world around us may expose us to many forms of temptation. But influence is not the same as inherited guilt, and temptation is not the same as sin.

God Made Man Upright

Scripture does not begin with humanity created sinful. Solomon wrote in **Ecclesiastes 7:29**:

> *"Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions."*

Notice the two parts of the verse. First, *"God hath made man upright."* Then, *"they have sought out many inventions."* The departure comes through what people seek and choose.

Adam himself demonstrates this. Adam was not created with an inherited sinful nature, yet he was still capable of choosing disobedience. That means the ability to choose wrongly does not prove that sin must already exist within a person as an inherited nature.

Life Comes From God

Job wrote in **Job 33:4**:

> *"The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life."*

Solomon also wrote in **Ecclesiastes 12:7**:

> *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."*

The physical body returns to the earth, while the spirit returns to God who gave it. James wrote in **James 1:17**:

> *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."*

God is not the source of sin. Moses wrote in **Genesis 1:31**:

> *"And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day."*

Sin did not originate in something corrupt that God placed within humanity. Adam was created upright, and then Adam chose another way.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why do God's good creation and Adam's later disobedience rule out making God the source of sin?

Personal Reflection

Have you spoken as though God created you sinful instead of accepting responsibility for your own choices?

Action Step

Examine **Genesis 1:31** *and Adam's disobedience, then correct how you explain the origin of personal sin.*

Temptation Does Not Remove Responsibility

James gives us one of the clearest descriptions of how personal sin develops. He 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."*

Notice the progression. There is temptation, enticement and desire. Then desire is allowed to conceive, and *"it bringeth forth sin."*

The devil may tempt. The world may appeal to wrong desire. Circumstances may place opportunities before us. But temptation cannot force a person to disobey God. The choice remains with the individual.

This is why blaming the devil does not remove personal responsibility. Neither does blaming Adam.

Choice Is Real

Joshua placed a choice before Israel. He said in **Joshua 24:15**:

> *"And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."*

The command was, *"choose you this day whom ye will serve."* Love and obedience involve real choice.

Adam was also given a choice. God gave him a clear command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam understood the command and chose disobedience. His spiritual death followed his own act.

The same principle is expressed throughout Scripture: sin involves personal responsibility before God.

All Have Sinned

This does not change the universal need for salvation. Paul wrote in **Romans 3:23**:

> *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"*

Every person who has sinned stands in need of salvation. But notice again Paul's wording: *"all have sinned."* The verse speaks of what people have done. It does not say that every person personally sinned before birth or that Adam's act became their own individual act.

The reality that all have sinned makes the Gospel necessary for everyone.

The Wages of Sin and the Gift of God

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."*

The wages belong to sin. The gift belongs to God. Eternal life is found *"through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

The answer to personal sin is therefore not to explain it away through Adam, heredity, circumstances or temptation. The answer is Jesus Christ. He came to save His people from their sins and bring them from spiritual death into life.

Who Is Responsible for Sin?

The biblical answer is simple: The person who commits the sin is responsible for it. Adam introduced sin into the world, but Adam cannot be blamed for the personal choices we make.

The devil may tempt, but the devil cannot force a person to sin. Wrong desires may arise, but temptation does not have to be welcomed.

Personal sin begins when a person chooses a way contrary to God. That is why Scripture calls us to repentance and why salvation requires us to acknowledge our own sin rather than placing responsibility somewhere else.

But the Gospel does not leave us with responsibility alone. Jesus Christ is the answer to sin. He forgives, cleanses, gives spiritual life and personally dwells within the born-again believer as Spirit.

The true origin of personal sin is found in personal disobedience. The answer to personal sin is found in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can neither Adam nor the devil bear responsibility for a person's own chosen disobedience?

Personal Reflection

Which temptation or circumstance have you used as an excuse for a choice you were responsible to make?

Action Step

Acknowledge the choice honestly; if it involved sin, turn from it and seek the cleansing and life found in Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION: EVERY SOUL IS RESPONSIBLE BEFORE GOD

BACK TO CONTENTS

Throughout this Study Guide, we have examined the question of inherited sin from the Word of God. We have seen that Adam introduced sin into the world, but Scripture does not teach that his personal guilt was physically transferred into every person born after him. The Bible repeatedly places responsibility upon the individual who sins.

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."*

The statement is clear: *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* The son does not bear the iniquity of the father, and the father does not bear the iniquity of the son. Personal sin carries personal responsibility.

We have also considered verses such as **Psalm 51:5** and **Psalm 58:3** and seen that they must be interpreted within their context rather than made to teach more than the words themselves establish. Romans 5 shows that sin entered the world through Adam and that death followed sin, but Paul also says, *"for that all have sinned."*

First **John 1:8** does not teach that the born-again believer must continue sinning every day. John warns against denying sin, calls for confession and cleansing, and then writes in **1 John 2:1**, *"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not."*

Romans 7 likewise does not present helpless bondage to sin as the normal Christian life. It shows the inability of the law to produce spiritual life and leads directly to the answer found in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:1-2**:

> *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."*

This brings us back to the central truth: every soul is responsible before God for personal sin. The devil may tempt, the world may influence and wrong desires may appeal, but temptation is not sin, and no one is forced to disobey God.

At the same time, personal responsibility does not mean that salvation is achieved by human effort. 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."*

The answer to sin is Jesus Christ. He forgives, cleanses, gives new spiritual life and personally dwells within the born-again believer as Spirit. The believer is therefore not left to overcome sin through human determination, but receives the life of Jesus Christ within.

Sin is personal, and responsibility is personal. But the final emphasis of the Gospel is not upon human failure. Salvation is found in Jesus Christ, who brings the sinner from death into life and gives the born-again believer a new life in Himself.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do personal responsibility for sin and salvation through Christ belong together?

Personal Reflection

Which verse has most challenged your previous thinking about sin, responsibility and Christ's salvation?

Action Step

State what you now understand and choose one practical response that combines personal responsibility with trust in Jesus Christ.

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

Why is each person responsible for personal sin, and how does Jesus Christ answer the spiritual death that sin brings?

2. Understanding

How do Adam's choice, **Ezekiel 18:20** *and Romans 5 help you examine the claim that personal guilt is passed from parent to child?*

3. Personal Reflection

What assumption about inherited sin has this guide most challenged? Explain what the Bible has shown you and why the correction matters personally.

4. Response to Truth

How should you respond when Psalm 51 or Psalm 58 is used to teach inherited guilt? Explain how context and personal responsibility govern your answer.

5. Action Step

Choose one statement about inherited sin that you previously accepted. Which Bible verses will you read to test it, what will you examine, and when will you begin?

6. Early Response

Have you begun the Bible examination described in Question 5? If so, explain what you found and what you may need to change. If not, what has prevented you from beginning?

7. Ongoing Practice

What ongoing practice will keep you from isolating **1 John 1:8** *or Romans 7 from the teaching on cleansing, freedom and new life in Christ?*

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How do Romans 6, 7 and 8 distinguish the weakness of the Law from the freedom given through the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ?

9. Living the Truth

Where have you been tempted to blame an influence rather than accept responsibility for your own decision? How should Christ's life within change your response?

10. Final Response

What have you learned about sin, choice and grace from Ezekiel, the Psalms and Romans? Identify one way you will now respond more faithfully to Jesus Christ.