COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 25

The *Sin* Question

STUDY GUIDE 3 OF 4:

Guarding the Mind, Words and Conduct

An overview of guarding thoughts, words and conduct.



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.

Content

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION: GUARDING THE LIFE WE HAVE RECEIVED

THE BATTLE BEGINS IN THE MIND

AN UNCONTROLLED THOUGHT LIFE

AS A MAN THINKETH IN HIS HEART

GUARDING THE EMOTIONS

AN UNCONTROLLED TONGUE

SPEAKING TRUTH: LYING AND DECEIT

INTEGRITY IN WHAT WE TAKE AND GIVE

CHEATING AND DISHONEST GAIN

THE LIFE OF CHRIST WITHIN GOVERNS MIND, WORDS AND CONDUCT

CONCLUSION: GUARDING THE WHOLE LIFE

Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

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PREFACE

BACK TO CONTENTS

The previous Study Guides have established important truths concerning sin. We have seen that temptation itself is not sin, that personal sin involves responsibility and choice, and that sin is not inherited from Adam as a sinful nature passed from one generation to another.

We now come to the practical question of how the believer guards the life received in Jesus Christ. When a person is born again, Jesus Christ comes to dwell within as Spirit. The believer has been brought from spiritual death into spiritual life and is no longer left to face temptation through human determination alone. The Person of Jesus Christ now dwells within.

Yet the believer must remain watchful. Temptation has not disappeared, and Scripture repeatedly warns God's people against allowing wrong thoughts, desires, words and actions to gain a place in their lives.

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

> *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:"*

The command is clear: *"Be sober, be vigilant."* Many temptations begin long before an outward act of sin takes place. A thought may be entertained, anger may be allowed to grow, bitterness may take root, words may be spoken carelessly, and dishonesty may first appear insignificant.

For that reason, this Study Guide will consider three closely connected areas:

- The mind and the thoughts we entertain;
- The words that proceed from our mouth;
- The conduct that becomes visible in everyday life.

The purpose is not to produce a life of anxious self-examination or outward religious discipline. The Christian life is Jesus Christ living within the born-again believer and His life being expressed through them.

As we examine thoughts, emotions, speech, honesty and conduct, one question must remain before us: Are we allowing the life of Jesus Christ within to govern the whole person?

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must Christ's life within govern thoughts, words and visible conduct together?

Personal Reflection

Which private thought, spoken word or action shows a need for Christ's life to govern you more fully?

Action Step

Examine that area before God and choose one specific response that agrees with His Word and His life within you.

INTRODUCTION: GUARDING THE LIFE WE HAVE RECEIVED

BACK TO CONTENTS

The new birth brings a person into a completely new spiritual condition. The sinner who was separated from God is forgiven, brought from death into life and receives Jesus Christ within as Spirit. This is not the beginning of a life in which the believer must struggle alone to become better. Jesus Christ Himself is now the source of the believer's spiritual life.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:6-7**:

> *"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."*

Notice Paul's instruction: *"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him."* The believer has received Christ and is now called to continue walking in Him. The Christian life begins in Christ and must continue in Christ.

Yet being born again does not mean that temptation has disappeared. The believer still lives in a world where wrong desires, pressures, attitudes and opportunities can appeal to the mind. Scripture therefore repeatedly calls God's people to remain watchful.

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."*

Peter does not tell believers to live in fear of the adversary. He tells them to be *"sober"* and *"vigilant,"* and then says, *"Whom resist stedfast in the faith."* The enemy may tempt, deceive and seek opportunity, but he cannot force the believer to sin. Temptation still requires a response, and this is why vigilance matters.

Spiritual victory must not be treated carelessly. If a believer ceases to resist temptation and deliberately chooses to yield to sin, the victory being enjoyed can be lost. The tempter seeks to draw the believer back into sin, but he cannot compel that choice.

The believer therefore remains responsible to resist temptation, refuse sin and continue walking in obedience to Jesus Christ. The enemy may present the temptation, but the believer must choose whether to yield or resist.

A wrong action often begins before anything outward becomes visible. A thought may be entertained, an offence may be rehearsed repeatedly, anger may be allowed to grow into bitterness, fear may begin to govern decisions, or a careless word may be spoken before its consequences are considered. What is eventually seen outwardly may have been developing inwardly for some time.

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 shows a progression. Temptation does not have to become sin. There is a point at which desire is entertained and allowed to develop, and that is why the believer must learn to recognise temptation early rather than waiting until it has already produced words or actions.

Guarding the Christian life therefore involves more than watching outward behaviour. We must consider what we allow to remain in the mind, how we respond to emotions and desires, what we allow ourselves to say, and how we behave when nobody else is watching.

For that reason, this Study Guide will consider:

- What we allow to remain in the mind;
- How we respond to emotions and desires;
- What we allow ourselves to say;
- How we behave when nobody else is watching.

The purpose is not to produce a life of anxious self-examination or outward religious discipline. Victory is not produced by human discipline separated from Jesus Christ. The believer possesses the Person. Jesus Christ dwells within, and His life within is the source from which obedience must flow.

As we examine thoughts, emotions, speech, honesty and conduct, one truth must remain before us: the Christian life is not about trying to create righteousness from ourselves. We have received Jesus Christ, and we are called to walk in Him, allowing His life within to govern the whole person.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does guarding conduct begin with the life Jesus Christ has already given?

Personal Reflection

Where have you tried to appear disciplined outwardly while overlooking the inner motive?

Action Step

Consider the motive behind one daily habit, then choose how that habit can express the life of Christ rather than self-made righteousness.

THE BATTLE BEGINS IN THE MIND

BACK TO CONTENTS

Many outward actions begin long before anything becomes visible to another person. A word is usually spoken after a thought has been entertained. Anger may grow because an offence has been rehearsed repeatedly in the mind. Revenge may begin with an imagined response, and fear may strengthen as the mind continually dwells upon what might happen.

For this reason, Scripture gives serious attention to the believer's thought life. Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**:

> *"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) 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;"*

Paul describes a spiritual battle. He speaks about *"strong holds," "imaginations,"* things that exalt themselves *"against the knowledge of God,"* and *"every thought."* This teaches us that spiritual warfare is not limited to what happens outwardly. A battle can develop within the mind when thoughts are allowed to remain in opposition to what God has revealed.

Bringing Every Thought Into Captivity

Paul's instruction is very direct: *"bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."* This does not mean that every unwanted thought that enters the mind is immediately sin. Temptation itself is not sin, and a thought may present itself without being invited.

The important question is: What do we do with that thought once it comes? Do we reject it because it is contrary to the Word of God, or do we entertain it, develop it and allow it to influence our attitude and behaviour?

A temptation may begin as a suggestion. If it is rejected, it does not have to develop further. But when a wrong thought is welcomed and repeatedly entertained, it can begin to shape desire, emotion, speech and eventually conduct. This agrees with what James has already taught concerning temptation developing towards sin.

The believer must therefore learn to recognise what should not be given room within the mind. The thought may have appeared without invitation, but we still have a responsibility concerning whether it is allowed to remain.

The Mind Must Be Renewed

Paul also wrote in **Romans 12:2**:

> *"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."*

There are two directions in this verse. First, *"be not conformed to this world."* Then, *"be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."*

The believer is not to allow the thinking of the world to determine how life is understood or lived. The world may encourage revenge when we have been wronged. It may excuse dishonesty when there is personal advantage. It may encourage pride, self-interest, bitterness or uncontrolled desire.

But the born-again believer has received a different life. The mind must therefore be brought into agreement with the truth of God's Word so that our thinking agrees with the life of Jesus Christ within.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the renewing of the mind bring our thinking into agreement with God's Word?

Personal Reflection

What recurring thought have you allowed to remain even though it conflicts with what God says?

Action Step

Compare that thought with the Bible, reject what is untrue, and choose a response that agrees with Christ within.

Wrong Thoughts Must Be Forsaken

Isaiah gives a similar instruction. He wrote in **Isaiah 55:7-9**:

> *"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."*

Notice that the wicked person is told to forsake both *"his way"* and *"his thoughts."* The outward way and the inward thought are connected. Wrong conduct does not appear from nowhere. The way a person acts is often connected with what has first been accepted within.

This is why guarding the mind is so important. God's ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. The answer is not to insist upon our own reasoning when it conflicts with His Word. We must allow His truth to correct us.

Strongholds Can Develop

Paul's use of the expression *"strong holds"* is also significant. A wrong thought that is entertained repeatedly can become established. An offence may be remembered again and again until bitterness seems justified. Fear may be rehearsed until it begins to control decisions. Suspicion may grow until motives are assigned to others without evidence.

The thought may have begun small, but repeated attention strengthens it. This is why Scripture teaches us to deal with wrong thinking before it becomes established.

The believer should not ask only, Have I committed an outward act of sin? We should also ask what we are allowing to remain within our thoughts. Are we rehearsing anger, imagining revenge, feeding lust, assuming the worst about another person, or allowing fear to govern us?

These are important questions because thoughts can prepare the ground for later words and actions. What is entertained inwardly can eventually become visible outwardly.

The Believer Is Not Left to Fight Alone

However, this teaching must never become a message of mental self-control separated from Jesus Christ. The believer is not simply told to think better thoughts and become a better

person. At the new birth, Jesus Christ has come to dwell within as Spirit, and His life within changes the source from which we now live.

Paul 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."*

The Christian life is therefore not an outward attempt to imitate Jesus by controlling every thought through human strength. Christ lives within. His Word exposes what is wrong, and His life within gives the believer a new spiritual direction.

We are responsible to refuse thoughts that oppose Him and to bring the mind into obedience to His truth. But the power and life are not produced by human determination. The believer possesses the Person.

The battle often begins in the mind. For that reason, the believer must remain watchful concerning what is entertained, repeated and allowed to remain. A thought does not have to become an attitude. An attitude does not have to become a word. A word does not have to become an action.

Wrong thoughts can be recognised and refused before they develop further. That is why Scripture teaches us to bring *"every thought to the obedience of Christ."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can a wrong thought be recognised and refused before it governs conduct?

Personal Reflection

Which thought has repeatedly shaped an attitude or action you now recognise as wrong?

Action Step

Identify how the pattern begins and refuse the thought at its first appearance, looking to Jesus Christ for your response.

AN UNCONTROLLED THOUGHT LIFE

BACK TO CONTENTS

The thoughts we allow to remain within us can have a powerful influence upon our words, attitudes and actions. A passing thought is not automatically sin, but a thought that is welcomed, repeated and developed can begin to shape the direction of the life.

Zophar said in **Job 20:2**:

> *"Therefore do my thoughts cause me to answer, and for this I make haste."*

His words show the connection between thought and response. What is taking place within the mind can eventually come out through what we say and do. This raises an important question: Which thoughts are we allowing to influence our response?

Wrong thoughts do not have to be accepted simply because they enter the mind. They can be recognised and refused before they develop into bitterness, revenge, fear, jealousy or sinful action.

Wrong Thoughts Can Grow

An uncontrolled thought life provides opportunity for harmful thoughts to become established. A person may repeatedly think about an offence until anger becomes bitterness. Fear may be rehearsed until it begins to govern decisions. Jealousy may be fed until another person's blessing becomes difficult to accept.

The problem is often not the first thought that appears. The danger comes when we give that thought a place to remain. This is why Scripture tells us to bring our thoughts into obedience to Christ.

We are not helpless before everything that enters our mind. The believer can recognise thoughts that oppose God's Word and refuse to continue feeding them.

Joseph Had Reason to Become Bitter

Joseph provides an important example. His brothers had hated him, sold him into slavery and allowed their father to believe that he was dead. Joseph later endured slavery and imprisonment before eventually being raised to a position of great authority in Egypt.

Years later, after Jacob died, Joseph's brothers became afraid that he would finally take revenge upon them. Moses wrote in **Genesis 50:15-21**:

> *"And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them."*

Joseph recognised what his brothers had done. He did not pretend that their actions were harmless. He said, *"ye thought evil against me."* But Joseph did not allow their evil to determine what would govern his own heart.

He could see something greater: *"God meant it unto good."* Instead of revenge, Joseph chose mercy. Instead of using his authority to punish his brothers, he said, *"I will nourish you, and your little ones."* His words and conduct reveal what had been allowed to govern his thinking.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did Joseph refuse bitterness and revenge despite what his brothers had done?

Personal Reflection

Whose treatment of you has made bitterness or a desire to retaliate seem reasonable?

Action Step

Examine your response in the light of Joseph's example and choose one honest act of mercy without excusing the wrong done.

Joseph Saw God's Purpose

Joseph had already expressed the same understanding when he first revealed himself to his brothers. Moses wrote in **Genesis 45:5-8**:

> *"Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt."*

Joseph had suffered greatly, but he did not allow suffering to produce a life controlled by resentment. He recognised that God had been working through circumstances that Joseph himself could not have understood while they were happening.

That did not make his brothers' sin right. It meant that their wrongdoing did not have to determine Joseph's response. There is an important lesson here. When we continually rehearse what someone has done to us, bitterness can begin to control the way we see that person and eventually the way we respond. Joseph shows another way.

The Mind of Christ

Paul gives us the greater New Covenant foundation. He wrote in **Philippians 2:5-7**:

> *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:"*

The mind presented here is characterised by humility and servanthood rather than self-exaltation. The believer is not being told simply to copy Jesus outwardly. Jesus Christ now dwells within the born-again believer, and His life within is to govern the way we think and respond.

Self-interest asks: What has been done to me? How can I protect myself? How can I repay this person? The servant mind asks a different question: What response agrees with the life of Jesus Christ within me?

Saul Allowed Jealousy to Grow

The life of Saul provides a very different example. Saul became jealous of David, and his thoughts increasingly moved towards fear, hostility and destruction.

Samuel recorded in **1 Samuel 18:25**:

> *"And Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies. But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines."*

Notice the expression, *"Saul thought to make David fall."* This was no longer a passing feeling. His jealousy had developed into an intention to destroy another person.

Samuel later wrote in **1 Samuel 18:29**:

> *"And Saul was yet the more afraid of David; and Saul became David's enemy continually."*

Fear, jealousy and hostility were allowed to grow until David was viewed as an enemy. This is a warning concerning what can happen when wrong thoughts are repeatedly entertained.

Evil Intentions Can Become Plans

Nehemiah faced a similar danger from those who opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Nehemiah wrote in **Nehemiah 6:2**:

> *"That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief."*

Their thoughts had moved beyond dislike. They had developed a plan. The same pattern can be seen in Haman.

The writer of Esther recorded in **Esther 3:5-6**:

> *"And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai."*

The progression is sobering. Mordecai would not honour Haman as Haman desired. Haman became *"full of wrath."* That wrath was entertained until his thinking moved beyond Mordecai himself, and he eventually sought the destruction of an entire people.

A wrong thought had become a destructive purpose.

What We Entertain Matters

Joseph, Saul, Sanballat and Haman show us very different responses of the mind. Joseph had suffered genuine wrong but refused to allow revenge to govern him. Saul allowed jealousy and fear to turn David into an enemy. Sanballat and Geshem developed harmful intentions into a plot, while Haman allowed wounded pride and wrath to grow into a plan of destruction.

The lesson is not that believers will never experience an unwanted thought or difficult emotion. The lesson is that we must be careful about what we allow those thoughts and emotions to become.

A thought can be rejected. An offence can be forgiven. Jealousy does not have to be fed. Fear does not have to govern. Anger does not have to become bitterness.

Christ Must Govern the Inner Life

Guarding the mind is therefore not simply positive thinking. Neither is it pretending that painful circumstances do not exist. Joseph knew exactly what his brothers had done, yet he refused to let their sin determine his own conduct.

For the born-again believer, the foundation is even greater. The believer possesses the Person. Jesus Christ dwells within as Spirit, and His life within provides a new centre from which we are to think, speak and act.

The believer must therefore learn to recognise harmful thoughts early and refuse to give them a settled place within. What begins in the mind can eventually appear in our words and actions. That is why an uncontrolled thought life is dangerous.

What we continually entertain within can eventually govern what we do outwardly.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can what is repeatedly entertained within eventually govern outward conduct?

Personal Reflection

Which repeated thought or desire is beginning to govern your actions rather than the truth of God's Word?

Action Step

Interrupt that pattern, identify what the Bible says, and respond through the life of Christ instead of feeding the desire.

AS A MAN THINKETH IN HIS HEART

BACK TO CONTENTS

Scripture does not deal only with what can be seen outwardly. God is also concerned with what is taking place within the heart and mind. A person may perform an outward action that appears kind while inwardly being governed by selfishness, pride or personal advantage. Another person may suffer wrong and yet refuse to allow bitterness or revenge to control the heart.

Solomon gives us an important principle in Proverbs. He wrote in **Proverbs 23:6-7**:

> *"Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats: For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee."*

The immediate context describes a person whose outward words do not agree with what is truly within. He says, *"Eat and drink,"* but Scripture explains, *"his heart is not with thee."* His outward behaviour appears generous, but his inward attitude reveals something different.

This teaches an important lesson: what is taking place within matters to God.

Outward Actions Can Hide Inward Motives

It is possible for words and actions to create an appearance that does not agree with what is happening within the heart. Someone may speak kindly while inwardly resenting the person before them. Someone may give while hoping to receive praise, or agree outwardly while inwardly planning something very different. Someone may appear calm while continually feeding anger and revenge within.

This is why guarding the thought life is not simply about preventing obvious outward sin. It is also about allowing the truth of God to govern the motives from which our actions flow.

Jesus repeatedly directed attention towards what was within a person. He said in **Luke 6:45**:

> *"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh."*

What is stored within eventually finds expression. Jesus speaks of *"the good treasure of his heart"* and *"the evil treasure."* The question is therefore not only what we do outwardly. We must also ask: What are we allowing to accumulate within?

What We Feed the Mind Matters

Thoughts are strengthened by attention. If we continually feed the mind with resentment, resentment becomes easier to return to. If we constantly dwell upon fear, fear can begin to shape our expectations. If we feed lust, pride or jealousy, those desires become more familiar and more difficult to resist.

But Scripture does not simply tell us what not to think about. It also directs us towards what should occupy the mind. Paul wrote 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."*

Notice the deliberate instruction: *"think on these things."* Paul names what is true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report. The believer should not leave the mind open to whatever thought demands attention. We have a responsibility concerning what we continue to dwell upon.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does Paul's instruction to think on true, just and pure things require of a believer?

Personal Reflection

What have you regularly watched, read or listened to that encourages thoughts contrary to what is true and pure?

Action Step

Remove one source of that influence and deliberately give your attention to what agrees with God's Word.

Truth Must Govern Our Thinking

A thought may feel powerful without being true. Fear may tell us that something terrible will certainly happen. Suspicion may persuade us that we know another person's motives. Pride may tell us that we deserve recognition, while bitterness may tell us that revenge is justified.

But feelings and repeated thoughts do not become truth simply because they are strong. Paul begins his list with *"whatsoever things are true."* This is especially important.

Before we allow a thought to govern us, we should ask: Is this actually true? Does it agree with God's Word? Am I responding to what has really happened, or to what I imagine may have happened? Am I assigning motives to another person that I cannot know? Am I allowing fear to create a future that has not occurred?

The mind must be governed by truth rather than assumption.

"Let This Mind Be in You"

Paul gives an even deeper foundation when he writes concerning the mind of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in **Philippians 2:5-8**:

> *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."*

Paul points towards a mind characterised by humility, obedience and servanthood rather than self-exaltation. Pride asks, How important am I? Self-interest asks, What will I gain? Resentment asks, How can I make sure they pay for what they did? But the mind described in Philippians is characterised by humility and service.

The Mind of Christ Is Not External Imitation

We must be careful how we understand Paul's instruction, *"Let this mind be in you."* The Christian life is not an attempt to study Jesus from a distance and then reproduce His attitudes through human determination. The born-again believer possesses something greater.

Jesus Christ dwells within as Spirit. 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. Therefore, the mind of Christ is not simply an outward pattern that we try to copy. The Person whose mind is revealed in Philippians now dwells within the believer. His life within is to govern the way we think.

This gives the believer a foundation greater than positive thinking or mental discipline.

Our Thoughts Must Agree With the Life Within

The believer still has responsibility. Paul says, *"think on these things."* He also says, *"Let this mind be in you."* We must refuse thoughts that oppose the Word of God and refuse to feed attitudes that lead away from obedience.

But our confidence is not in the strength of our own mind. Our confidence is in Jesus Christ. The more we allow His Word to govern our thinking, the less room we give to thoughts built upon pride, fear, bitterness, lust, revenge or self-interest.

This is why the inner life matters so much. What we continually entertain can influence what we eventually say and do. The mind must not be left unguarded.

The believer possesses the Person of Jesus Christ within, and the thoughts we choose to entertain should agree with the life we have received in Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How should chosen thoughts agree with the Person of Jesus Christ dwelling within?

Personal Reflection

What private line of thought would you be unwilling to defend in the presence of Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Identify its underlying motive and replace it with a truthful thought consistent with Christ's humility and purity.

GUARDING THE EMOTIONS

BACK TO CONTENTS

Thoughts and emotions are closely connected. What we repeatedly think about can influence how we feel, and strong emotions can in turn influence what we think, say and do.

Emotions themselves must not automatically be called sin. A person may feel anger after being treated unjustly. Fear may arise when danger appears. Sorrow may follow loss. Temptation may awaken a wrong desire. The important question is: What do we allow that emotion or desire to become?

An emotion that is entertained and allowed to govern us can develop into bitterness, revenge, unbelief, pride or sinful conduct. This is why the believer must learn to recognise what is taking place within and bring every response under the government of Jesus Christ.

Anger Must Not Become Bitterness

Anger can arise when we are hurt, disappointed or treated unfairly. Scripture does not teach that every experience of anger is itself sin, but it repeatedly warns about what anger can become.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 12:15**:

> *"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;"*

Notice the expression *"root of bitterness."* A root begins beneath the surface before its effects become visible. In the same way, an offence may be allowed to remain within until anger develops into bitterness. Bitterness then begins to influence the way we think about a person, speak about them and respond to them.

This is why revenge must be refused. Paul wrote in **Romans 12:19-21**:

> *"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."*

The believer does not need to take personal vengeance. God says, *"Vengeance is mine; I will repay."* Our responsibility is, *"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."* Holding onto anger does not undo the wrong. It allows that wrong to continue influencing us.

Self-Pity Can Turn the Mind Inward

Another danger is self-pity. There are times when people genuinely suffer, are misunderstood or are treated unfairly. Acknowledging pain is not wrong, but self-pity develops when our attention becomes centred continually upon ourselves and our difficulties.

The mind begins to ask, Why does this always happen to me? Nobody understands what I am going through. Others have it easier than I do. If this thinking continues, it can produce resentment, covetousness and even anger towards God.

The biblical answer is not to pretend that difficulties do not exist. It is to refuse to allow those difficulties to become the centre of our thinking. Paul wrote in **Ephesians 5:20**:

> *"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;"*

Thanksgiving turns the attention away from continual concentration upon ourselves. Paul and Silas provide a powerful example.

Luke wrote in **Acts 16:25**:

> *"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them."*

They had been beaten and placed in prison. They had genuine reasons to suffer, yet at midnight they were praying and singing praises unto God. Their circumstances had not changed, but their circumstances did not control their response.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What do Paul and Silas show about responding to painful circumstances with prayer and praise?

Personal Reflection

Which difficult circumstance has led you to rehearse fear or complaint rather than trust in Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Bring that circumstance to Him in prayer and express specific thanksgiving before anything around you changes.

Fear Must Not Be Allowed to Govern Us

Fear is another powerful emotion. Some fear is a natural response to danger, but fear becomes spiritually dangerous when imagined possibilities begin to control our decisions and weaken our confidence in God.

Jesus spoke directly about anxiety concerning life's needs. He said in **Matthew 6:31-34**:

> *"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."*

Fear often moves the mind into tomorrow. What if this happens? What if I fail? What if I lose what I have? Jesus directs our attention back to trust in God: *"your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."*

Paul gives similar instruction in **Philippians 4:6-7**:

> *"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*

Fear tells us to rehearse the problem continually. Scripture tells us to bring the matter to God in prayer.

Pride Must Be Rejected

Pride moves the attention in another direction. Instead of thinking too little of ourselves because of self-pity, pride causes us to think too highly of ourselves.

Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 16:18**:

> *"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."*

Pride gives credit to self. It wants recognition, compares itself with others and seeks position. It can even cause a person to forget their complete dependence upon Jesus Christ.

Jesus said in **John 15:5**:

> *"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."*

Those final words destroy the foundation of spiritual pride: *"without me ye can do nothing."* Whatever spiritual fruit appears in the life of a believer does not give us reason to glorify ourselves. The source is Jesus Christ. The branch cannot boast against the vine.

Lust Must Not Be Fed

Scripture also warns about desires that draw the heart towards the world. John wrote in **1 John 2:16-17**:

> *"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. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."*

John identifies *"the lust of the flesh," "the lust of the eyes,"* and *"the pride of life."* These things appeal to desire, but they are temporary. *"The world passeth away, and the lust thereof."*

A desire may present itself without invitation, but it does not have to be fed. The believer must be careful what is watched, imagined, rehearsed and desired. The more a wrong desire is entertained, the more influence it can gain.

Emotions Must Not Become Our Master

Anger, self-pity, fear, pride and lust can all affect the direction of our thinking if they are allowed to govern us. But we must keep the distinction clear: feeling an emotion is not the same as choosing sin. The danger comes when the emotion is welcomed, fed and allowed to determine our response contrary to God's Word.

Anger does not have to become bitterness. Suffering does not have to become self-pity. Fear does not have to become unbelief. Success does not have to become pride. Desire does not have to become lustful conduct.

There is a point at which we can recognise what is developing and refuse to let it govern us.

Christ Within Governs the Response

This responsibility must never be separated from the indwelling life of Jesus Christ. The Christian life is not a programme of emotional suppression, nor are we attempting to become calm, humble and disciplined enough to earn God's approval.

The believer possesses the Person. Jesus Christ dwells within as Spirit, and His life within gives the believer a new spiritual centre from which to respond.

When anger rises, His life within calls us towards forgiveness rather than revenge. When fear presses upon us, His Word directs us towards faith. When pride seeks recognition, His life directs us towards humility. When wrong desire appears, His life within does not agree with that desire.

The believer must therefore learn not to be governed by every emotion that arises. We acknowledge what we feel, test our response by the Word of God and refuse to allow anything contrary to Christ to take control.

Emotions may speak strongly, but they do not have to rule. Jesus Christ is Lord, and His life within is to govern the whole person.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why do strong emotions not have to rule a person in whom Christ lives?

Personal Reflection

When have you allowed anger, fear or hurt to determine how you treated another person?

Action Step

Before a similar situation arises, examine your motive and decide how Christ's life should govern your words and actions.

AN UNCONTROLLED TONGUE

BACK TO CONTENTS

The previous sections have shown how thoughts and emotions can influence the direction of our lives. We now come to one of the clearest ways in which the inner life becomes visible: our words.

Words may be spoken in only a few seconds, yet their effect can continue for years. They can encourage someone who is discouraged, bring peace into a difficult situation and communicate truth. They can also wound, divide, deceive and destroy trust. For that reason, Scripture gives serious attention to the tongue.

James wrote in **James 3:2-10**:

> *"For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."*

James uses several powerful pictures. A small bit can direct a horse, a small helm can turn a large ship, and a small fire can spread until great damage has been done. In the same way, the tongue is physically small but can have an enormous influence.

The Power of Words

James warns, *"how great a matter a little fire kindleth!"* A careless sentence may begin an argument. Gossip may damage someone's reputation. An angry response may deepen an offence, while a lie may destroy trust that took years to build.

Once words have been spoken, they cannot simply be taken back. We may apologise, and forgiveness may be given, but the effect of the words may remain. This is why guarding our speech is an important part of guarding the whole life.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can the effect of spoken words remain even after an apology?

Personal Reflection

What words have you spoken that may still be causing harm to another person?

Action Step

Consider the hurt honestly and, where appropriate and safe, make a sincere effort to repair it while changing how you speak.

The Wisdom of Speaking Less

Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 10:19**:

> *"In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise."*

The more we speak without thought, the greater the opportunity for careless or harmful words. Wisdom does not require us to remain silent when truth must be spoken. There are times when correction, encouragement or warning is necessary. But Scripture teaches us not to speak simply because we have something to say.

There is wisdom in considering words before they leave the mouth. We can ask: Does this need to be said? Am I the right person to say it? Am I saying it for the right reason?

Gossip and Slander

One of the most destructive uses of speech is gossip. Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 18:8**:

> *"The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly."*

Notice the description: *"as wounds."* Gossip is not harmless conversation. Words about another person can wound deeply, especially when private matters are repeated unnecessarily or when faults are discussed with people who are not part of the solution.

Solomon also wrote in **Proverbs 20:19**:

> *"He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips."*

A person who continually reveals private information shows that they cannot be trusted with what has been shared. Before repeating something concerning another person, three simple questions can be helpful:

- Is it true?
- Is it kind?
- Is it necessary?

Something may be true and still not need to be repeated. Truth does not give us permission to spread information for entertainment, attention or self-importance.

Speaking in Anger

Words are especially dangerous when emotions are strong. Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 15:1**:

> *"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."*

There are two possible directions in this verse. A soft answer can reduce conflict, while grievous words can increase it.

Solomon continues in **Proverbs 15:18**:

> *"A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife."*

An angry response often produces another angry response. The argument grows because each person reacts to the other. Scripture therefore teaches us to slow the process down before words are spoken.

Be Swift to Hear and Slow to Speak

James wrote in **James 1:19-20**:

> *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."*

Notice the order: swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. Much unnecessary conflict happens because people reverse that order. They are quick to speak, quick to become angry and slow to listen.

James tells us to listen first. Listening gives us time to understand what was actually said rather than reacting immediately to what we think was meant. This can prevent words from being spoken that we later regret.

Respond Rather Than React

When anger rises, there can be a strong desire to answer immediately. But not every thought needs to become a sentence, not every accusation needs an instant reply, and not every offence needs to be answered while emotions are at their strongest.

A pause can be valuable. We can allow the Word of God to govern our response before our emotion governs our tongue. This is not weakness. It is wisdom.

The question is not, What do I feel like saying? The better question is, What response agrees with the life of Jesus Christ within me?

Words Can Build or Destroy

The tongue is not only something that must be restrained. It can also be used for good. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:9**:

> *"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."*

A peacemaker does not ignore truth. Peace is not pretending that problems do not exist. But the believer should not use words to increase unnecessary conflict. Our speech can encourage, comfort, explain, correct and restore.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:29**:

> *"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."*

Paul gives both a negative and a positive command. First, *"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth."* Then, *"that which is good to the use of edifying."* To edify means to build up.

Our words should therefore be measured not only by whether they are technically true, but also by whether they are being used in a way that helps rather than needlessly harms.

The Mouth Reveals What Is Within

Jesus said in **Luke 6:45**:

> *"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh."*

The tongue is therefore connected with the heart. If bitterness is continually stored within, it will eventually influence speech. If pride fills the heart, it will eventually appear in words. If resentment is rehearsed privately, it may eventually be expressed publicly.

Guarding the tongue therefore begins deeper than simply learning when to stay quiet. The inner life must be governed by Jesus Christ.

No Man Can Tame the Tongue by Himself

James makes a striking statement: *"But the tongue can no man tame."* This should prevent us from turning this teaching into another programme of human self-control. James does not say that disciplined people eventually become strong enough to master the tongue through their own ability.

The believer needs something greater than determination. The believer possesses the Person. Jesus Christ dwells within as Spirit. His love within changes the way we speak to others. His truth within opposes deceit. His humility within opposes proud and cutting words. His life within directs us towards peace rather than unnecessary conflict.

We still have responsibility to guard what we say, but our confidence is not in ourselves.

Guarding the Tongue

Before speaking, it is wise to consider what our words may accomplish. Will they heal or wound? Will they clarify or confuse? Will they bring peace or stir further conflict? Are they true? Are they necessary? Are they being spoken from love or from anger, pride or the desire to hurt?

The tongue can become a powerful instrument of destruction when it is uncontrolled. But it can also become an instrument through which truth, encouragement, wisdom and peace are expressed. The believer's words should agree with the life of Jesus Christ within.

James warns that blessing and cursing should not proceed from the same mouth. His conclusion is simple and direct: *"My brethren, these things ought not so to be."*

The next question therefore follows naturally: Are the words we speak truthful?

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do truth, kindness and necessity help guard the tongue?

Personal Reflection

Which is hardest for you when speaking: truth, kindness or considering whether the words are necessary?

Action Step

Identify why you neglect that test and apply all three before a conversation in which your words matter.

SPEAKING TRUTH: LYING AND DECEIT

BACK TO CONTENTS

The previous section considered the power of the tongue. We now come to one particular use of speech that Scripture treats very seriously: lying and deceit.

The world may sometimes treat dishonesty as unimportant. A lie may be excused because it seems small, because telling the truth would be uncomfortable, or because someone believes the lie will avoid a problem. But Scripture does not present truthfulness as optional for the believer.

John wrote in **Revelation 21:8**:

> *"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."*

These are very serious words. John includes *"all liars."* Lying must therefore never be dismissed as a harmless weakness that does not matter to God.

There Is No Safe Category of Deceit

People sometimes speak about a *"white lie"* as though a false statement becomes acceptable when the reason appears small or considerate. Someone may lie to avoid embarrassment, because they do not want to admit a mistake, or because they want to protect themselves from an uncomfortable consequence.

Someone may exaggerate in order to make themselves appear more important. Another person may leave out important information in order to create a false impression. The circumstances may differ, but the central issue remains the same: Are we speaking truth, or are we deliberately creating deception?

Scripture does not give us a special category in which deliberate falsehood becomes righteous simply because we think the reason is understandable. At the same time, truthfulness does not mean that we must say everything we know on every occasion. Wisdom may require silence, and private information may need to remain private.

The choice is not between lying and revealing everything. Sometimes the truthful response is simply not to speak.

Ananias and Sapphira

Acts chapter 5 gives a sobering example of deliberate deception. Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession and kept part of the price. Keeping part of the money was not itself presented as the problem. Peter made clear that the property had been theirs and that the money remained under their control.

Their sin was deception. They presented themselves as though they had given the whole amount when they had secretly kept part of it. The outward action appeared generous, but the inward intention was dishonest.

This again shows why the condition of the heart matters. A person may perform an outwardly good action while using that action to create a false impression. Deception can exist even when the outward appearance seems righteous.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What did Ananias and Sapphira reveal about using a good-looking act to create a false impression?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever allowed an outwardly good action to create an impression that was not completely truthful?

Action Step

Examine the motive behind that impression and, where appropriate, correct it without defending the deception.

Sound Speech That Cannot Be Condemned

Paul gave Titus instruction concerning both conduct and speech. Paul wrote in **Titus 2:7-8**:

> *"In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you."*

Notice the connection between *"sincerity"* and *"Sound speech, that cannot be condemned."* Truthfulness should become part of the believer's normal way of living. Our words should be dependable.

People should not have to wonder whether we are exaggerating, hiding the truth, changing the story or saying whatever is most convenient at the moment. Integrity means that our words can be trusted.

A Word Spoken in Due Season

Truth must also be spoken wisely. Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 15:23**:

> *"A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!"*

There is a right word, but there is also a right time. Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 50:4**:

> *"The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned."*

Notice that the purpose of this speech is to help *"him that is weary."* Truth is not something we use as a weapon simply because we want to say what we think. A truthful word can encourage, correct, warn or comfort.

Wisdom considers both the truth being spoken and the effect of how it is communicated.

Listen Before You Speak

James gives another important instruction. He wrote in **James 1:19**:

> *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:"*

Many false statements are not deliberate lies at the beginning. Sometimes people repeat something before checking whether it is true. They hear part of a story and supply the rest themselves, assume another person's motive, or pass on information that later proves to be wrong.

Being *"swift to hear"* and *"slow to speak"* protects us from passing on information carelessly. Before speaking about another person, we should know whether what we are saying is actually true.

"Set a Watch Before My Mouth"

David understood the need to guard his speech. He wrote in **Psalm 141:3**:

> *"Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."*

That is a valuable prayer. There are situations in which the safest words are the ones we do not say. When emotions are strong, facts are uncertain, or the desire to defend ourselves is controlling the moment, we may need to stop before speaking.

This does not mean avoiding necessary conversations. There are times when truth must be spoken plainly. But even correction should not become an excuse for anger, humiliation or unnecessary harm.

False Words Begin Within

Jesus teaches us that the problem goes deeper than the mouth. He said in **Matthew 15:18-19**:

> *"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:"*

Jesus connects "false witness" with what proceeds "from the heart." This agrees with His words in **Luke 6:45**:

> *"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh."*

If dishonesty repeatedly appears in our speech, the answer is not simply to learn better communication techniques. We must consider what is happening within. Why do I want to deceive? Am I protecting pride? Am I trying to escape responsibility? Am I attempting to gain an advantage? Am I afraid of what will happen if the truth is known?

The words reveal something about the heart.

Words Can Bring Life or Harm

Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 18:21**:

> *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof."*

Words have consequences. A lie can damage trust, false accusations can injure reputations, and exaggeration can mislead. But truthful words, spoken wisely, can restore confidence and strengthen relationships.

For the believer, truthfulness is therefore more than simply avoiding obvious lies. It means becoming someone whose words agree with reality and whose speech can be trusted.

Truth Flows From the Life Within

Once again, this must not become an outward attempt to maintain perfect speech through human discipline alone. The believer possesses the Person. Jesus Christ dwells within as Spirit.

His life is true, and His life within does not agree with deceit, manipulation or falsehood. The believer therefore has a responsibility to allow what is spoken outwardly to agree with the life received inwardly.

We should not need one story for one person and another story for someone else. We should not create false impressions for personal advantage, and we should not excuse dishonesty simply because truth is inconvenient. At the same time, truth must be governed by wisdom and love.

We are called to speak what is true, to speak it wisely, and to allow the life of Jesus Christ within to govern both what we say and why we say it.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must the life of Christ govern both the truth of our words and the motive for saying them?

Personal Reflection

When have technically true words been used to protect yourself, mislead others or cause unnecessary hurt?

Action Step

Consider the motive carefully and speak one necessary truth with honesty, wisdom and love.

INTEGRITY IN WHAT WE TAKE AND GIVE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Stealing is often understood only in its most obvious forms, such as robbery or taking another person's property. Scripture certainly condemns those things, but the principle of honesty reaches much further. A person can gain dishonestly through business, misuse something entrusted to them, take another person's work without permission, waste resources for which someone else is paying, or deliberately withhold what is rightfully owed.

The question is not simply: Did I physically take something from another person? The wider question is: Am I dealing honestly with what belongs to others and faithfully with what God has entrusted to me?

A False Balance

Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 11:1**:

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

In the ancient marketplace, goods were often bought and sold by weight. A dishonest merchant could alter the scales or use false weights so that the customer received less than they had paid for. The deception might have been small enough to escape notice, but God saw it.

He called the false balance *"abomination,"* while *"a just weight is his delight."* Integrity therefore applies to ordinary transactions. The issue is not simply whether we can avoid being caught, but whether the other person is receiving what we have honestly represented.

Honest Measures

God gave Israel specific instruction concerning dishonest measures. Moses wrote in **Deuteronomy 25:13-16**:

> *"Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy God."*

The dishonest merchant could use one measure when buying and another when selling. God required *"a perfect and just weight"* and *"a perfect and just measure."*

The principle remains important. Whether we are selling goods, providing a service, keeping records, charging for work or entering into an agreement, honesty requires that we do not deliberately gain by deceiving another person.

Integrity in Business

Dishonesty can appear in many forms. A product may be represented as better than it really is. A service may be charged for but never properly supplied. Important information may be concealed because revealing it might prevent a sale, or a person may knowingly charge for work that was not performed.

The methods change, but the principle remains the same as the false balance. Personal gain does not make deception acceptable. The born-again believer should be dependable in business and financial dealings, and what we promise should agree with what we provide.

Integrity is important even when dishonest behaviour might produce greater profit.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does business integrity matter even when dishonesty might yield greater profit?

Personal Reflection

Where might personal advantage tempt you to be less than truthful about a price, promise, measure or duty?

Action Step

Review one real transaction or commitment, acknowledge any unfairness and put it right where possible.

Taking What Does Not Belong to Us

Stealing can also include property or resources that do not physically look like money. Another person's equipment does not become ours simply because we can use it without being noticed. Someone else's written work, ideas, digital material or intellectual property should not be deliberately taken and presented as our own.

Something being easy to copy does not automatically give us the right to take it. The principle is simple: If it belongs to another person, we should respect their ownership and the rights connected with it.

This becomes especially important in a world where digital material can be copied in seconds. Technology may make taking easier, but it does not make dishonesty right.

Time and Resources Also Matter

Integrity also applies to employment. When a person agrees to work for an employer for a certain period of time, there is an expectation that the time will genuinely be given to the work.

Repeatedly arriving late without reason, deliberately wasting large amounts of paid time, falsifying hours, or using an employer's property for unauthorised personal gain can all involve dishonesty. This does not mean that every moment of every working day must be measured anxiously. The principle is faithfulness.

If someone is paying for our time and labour, we should not knowingly take payment while deliberately refusing to provide what was agreed. The believer should seek to be trustworthy even when nobody is watching.

What About “Robbing God”?

The source of much Christian teaching about stealing and giving is Malachi chapter 3, where God accused Israel of robbing Him. We must read this Scripture carefully within its covenant setting.

God said in **Malachi 3:8-10**:

> *"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."*

These words were spoken to Israel under the covenant in which tithing had been commanded. The tithe had a specific place within Israel's covenant responsibilities and supported the Levites and the work connected with the tabernacle and later the Temple.

We should therefore not take the accusation *"ye have robbed me"* and automatically place that Old Covenant charge upon every born-again believer without recognising the setting in which God spoke it. At the same time, this Scripture contains an important principle that must not be lost: God's people should not consume everything upon themselves while neglecting the work of God and the needs of others.

Giving Did Not Begin With Moses

The principle of giving a tenth appears before the Law of Moses. Abraham gave a tenth to Melchizedek, and Jacob later spoke of giving God a tenth of what he received. Tithing therefore did not originate with Moses, although under the Mosaic Law it became part of Israel's organised covenant responsibilities.

For the New Covenant believer, giving should never be reduced to an outward religious payment performed without love. Giving is to be willing, faithful, cheerful, responsible and generous.

Ten per cent can provide a useful biblical foundation or benchmark, but it should never become a ceiling that prevents generosity. Neither should giving become a transaction through which we imagine that money can purchase a financial return from God.

From Taking to Giving

The New Testament gives us a beautiful picture of what happens when a person's attitude towards possessions changes. Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:28**:

> *"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."*

Notice how complete the change is. Paul does not stop with *"steal no more."* That would already be necessary, but the transformation goes further. The former thief is told to *"labour"* and *"have to give to him that needeth."*

The person who once took from others now works honestly so that they can give to others. Taking becomes giving. Dishonesty becomes honest labour. Self-interest becomes generosity.

It Is More Blessed to Give

Paul reminded the elders at Ephesus of the words of Jesus. He said in **Acts 20:35**:

> *"I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

Jesus turns our attention away from a life centred upon acquiring more for ourselves. There is joy in giving, blessing in helping, and spiritual health in recognising that what we possess can be used for the good of others.

Integrity Flows From the Life Within

Once again, honesty is not simply an external code of behaviour. The believer possesses the Person. Jesus Christ dwells within as Spirit, and His life within does not agree with dishonest gain, theft, deceit or selfishness.

The believer must therefore allow the life within to govern the way money, possessions, work, time and resources are handled. We should be people who can be trusted with another person's property, with money, in employment, in business, and even when nobody else would know if we acted dishonestly.

The change goes further than simply refusing to take what belongs to others. The life of Jesus Christ within leads us towards generosity. The Gospel moves the hand from taking to giving, from dishonest gain to honest labour, and from selfish possession to faithful stewardship.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Christ's life move the hand from taking to giving?

Personal Reflection

Where have you avoided obvious dishonesty while remaining unwilling to share what you could give?

Action Step

Examine the motive behind holding back, then give practical help, time or resources sincerely where there is a real need.

CHEATING AND DISHONEST GAIN

BACK TO CONTENTS

Cheating is another form of dishonesty. It involves gaining an advantage through deception, unfairness or the deliberate breaking of an agreed standard. It may appear in school, business, employment, sport, financial dealings, relationships or the use of another person's work.

Cheating is sometimes excused with statements such as, *"Everybody does it," "Nobody will know," "It does not really hurt anyone,"* or *"I cannot succeed unless I do this."* But the behaviour of other people does not determine what is right. The believer must ask: Does this action agree with truth, honesty and the life of Jesus Christ within me?

Cheating Seeks an Unfair Advantage

Cheating can take many forms. A student may copy another person's answers and present them as their own. Someone may present another person's writing, ideas or work as though they produced it themselves. Records may be altered to hide the truth, information may be deliberately falsified, or a person may use bribery or deception to gain an advantage that they could not obtain honestly.

Technology has created new opportunities for dishonesty, but the principle has not changed. An easier way to deceive does not make deception right. Cheating attempts to obtain something without honestly meeting the requirements that everyone else is expected to follow.

Faithful in That Which Is Least

One danger with dishonesty is that what first appears small can become easier to repeat. Jesus said in **Luke 16:10**:

> *"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much."*

Jesus connects faithfulness in small matters with faithfulness in greater matters. Character is not formed only in major decisions. It is also revealed when the matter appears insignificant.

The temptation may be to think, No one will notice. It is only a small thing. This will not matter later. But Scripture directs us towards faithfulness even *"in that which is least."* Small dishonest choices should therefore not be treated as harmless.

Jacob Learned the Pain of Deception

The life of Jacob contains a powerful example of deception. Jacob and Rebekah deceived Isaac so that Jacob would receive the blessing Isaac intended to give Esau.

Moses recorded in **Genesis 27:35-36**:

> *"And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing. And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?"*

Jacob later experienced deception himself while living with Laban. He agreed to serve seven years for Rachel, but Laban gave Leah to him instead.

Moses wrote in **Genesis 29:25-27**:

> *"And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me? And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years."*

Jacob knew what it felt like to be deceived. The account does not teach that every person who deceives another will later experience exactly the same circumstances. But it clearly shows the pain, confusion and broken trust that deception can produce.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does Jacob's experience teach about the damage deception can cause without promising identical consequences for everyone?

Personal Reflection

When have you justified a dishonest shortcut because it seemed small or because you felt entitled to it?

Action Step

Refuse that shortcut in your next decision and correct any misleading impression that you have already created.

Nothing Is Hidden From God

Cheating may appear successful when nobody discovers it, but secrecy does not make dishonesty righteous. Jesus said in **Luke 8:17**:

> *"For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad."*

A person may hide an action from a teacher, employer, customer, friend or family member, but nothing is hidden from God. This should affect the way the believer thinks about integrity.

The question should not be, Can I get away with this? The question should be: Is this right before God?

Walking Uprightly Brings Security

Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 10:9**:

> *"He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known."*

Dishonesty creates uncertainty. Once a false story has been told, another story may be required to protect it. Once records have been changed, more deception may be needed to keep the truth hidden.

Honesty removes that burden. The person who walks uprightly does not need to remember which version of the story was told to which person. Integrity produces a life that does not depend upon concealment.

The World's Standard Must Not Become Our Standard

Cheating may become common in a workplace, school or society, but common behaviour is not automatically righteous behaviour. Paul wrote in **Romans 12:2**:

> *"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."*

The believer is not to decide what is right by asking what everyone else accepts. If dishonesty becomes normal around us, Scripture still calls us to truth.

The Christian cannot say, *"Everybody does it,"* and make that the standard. The Word of God remains the standard.

Cheating Affects Other People

Cheating is not only about the advantage gained by the person who cheats. It affects others. A dishonest student gains an advantage over those who completed their own work. A dishonest business practice takes from the customer. Falsified records may place another person at a disadvantage, while plagiarism takes credit for work produced by someone else.

Jesus gave a simple principle concerning how we treat others. He said in **Luke 6:31**:

> *"And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."*

We do not want others to deceive us. We do not want to pay for something that has been falsely represented, and we do not want another person to take credit for our work. The same standard must govern how we treat them.

Honesty Should Be Visible

Jesus said in **Matthew 5:16**:

> *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."*

Integrity is one of the ways the believer's conduct becomes visible. A Christian should not be known as someone who takes shortcuts through deception. Our conduct should be trustworthy.

This applies when honesty costs us something. It applies when telling the truth may expose our mistake, when cheating would be easier, and when no one else appears likely to know.

Christ Within Governs Our Conduct

Once again, integrity is not produced by human determination alone. The believer possesses the Person. Jesus Christ dwells within as Spirit, and His life within does not agree with deception, unfair advantage or dishonest gain.

When the temptation comes to cheat, the believer is not left without an answer. We can refuse the shortcut, accept the consequences of doing what is right, correct dishonest behaviour where correction is possible, and choose truth even when deception would appear easier.

Cheating may promise an advantage, but it damages trust and weakens integrity. The life of Jesus Christ within calls us to something better: truth, faithfulness and upright conduct before God and before others.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why do cheating and dishonest gain weaken trust as well as integrity?

Personal Reflection

What opportunity for unfair advantage most tests your honesty when nobody is watching?

Action Step

Choose the fair course in that situation and accept the cost because your conduct belongs to Jesus Christ.

THE LIFE OF CHRIST WITHIN GOVERNS MIND, WORDS AND CONDUCT

BACK TO CONTENTS

Throughout this Study Guide, we have considered the mind, emotions, speech, honesty and conduct. Scripture gives clear instruction concerning each of these areas because the Christian life is not confined to what happens in a meeting or during prayer. The life received in Jesus Christ is to govern the whole person.

It reaches what we think about, how we respond to emotions, what we say, how we treat others, how we handle money, work and possessions, and what we do when nobody else is watching. But one truth must remain at the centre of everything we have studied: the Christian life does not begin with self-control. It begins with Jesus Christ dwelling within.

Christ Liveth in Me

Paul described his life in these words. 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."*

Paul does not say that he studied Jesus and then learned how to copy Him. He says, *"Christ liveth in me."* That is the New Covenant reality.

The believer does not stand outside Jesus Christ attempting to reproduce His life through personal determination. The believer possesses the Person. Jesus Christ dwells within, and His life is now the source from which the believer is called to live.

The Spirit of God Is the Spirit of 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."*

Notice Paul's language. He speaks of *"the Spirit of God"* and *"the Spirit of Christ."* He is not describing two Spirits. The Spirit who dwells within the believer is the Spirit of Christ.

This means that the Christian is not left alone to face temptation, control the tongue or produce righteousness through natural strength. Jesus Christ has come to dwell within.

His Life Within Governs the Mind

When wrong thoughts appear, the believer has something greater than positive thinking. The life of Jesus Christ within does not agree with bitterness, revenge, pride or lust. His Word gives us truth by which wrong thoughts can be recognised and refused.

The believer is therefore responsible to bring thoughts into obedience to Christ, but that obedience is not an attempt to create spiritual life. Spiritual life has already been received. The mind is now to agree with the life within.

His Life Within Governs Our Words

The same principle applies to speech. Jesus Christ within does not agree with gossip, slander, lying, angry outbursts or deliberate deception. His life is true and pure, and His life does not seek to destroy another person through careless words.

The believer must still make choices concerning what is spoken, but the standard is not simply, What can I get away with saying? The better question is: Does what I am about to say agree with the life of Jesus Christ within me?

His Life Within Governs Our Conduct

Paul wrote in **Colossians 3:17**:

> *"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."*

Notice the extent of Paul's instruction: *"whatsoever ye do in word or deed."* Nothing is excluded. Our words, work, honesty, treatment of others, private conduct, and handling of money and possessions all matter.

The life received in Jesus Christ is therefore to become visible in ordinary decisions. The Christian life reaches beyond what others can see in a meeting. It governs the choices we make throughout everyday life.

Obedience Is Not External Performance

This does not mean that outward conduct is unimportant. Scripture plainly commands believers to guard their thoughts, speak truth, reject dishonesty and walk uprightly. But outward obedience must never be separated from the spiritual reality within.

Otherwise, Christianity becomes a system of behaviour management. The believer is not simply being trained to appear righteous. Jesus Christ has come to dwell within, and His life is to be expressed through the believer.

That is why the answer to temptation is greater than willpower. The answer to anger is greater than emotional restraint. The answer to lying is greater than learning communication skills, and the answer to dishonest conduct is greater than fear of consequences.

The answer is the life of Jesus Christ within, received at the new birth and allowed to govern the whole person.

The Whole Life Belongs to Jesus Christ

Mind, words and conduct cannot be separated from one another. What is entertained in the mind may eventually appear in speech. What is spoken may become action, and what is repeatedly practised may begin to shape the direction of life.

That is why vigilance matters, but vigilance must remain centred in Jesus Christ. The believer possesses the Person. His life within is the source of righteousness, truth, humility, love, faithfulness and integrity.

Our responsibility is to walk according to the life we have received in Him. We guard the mind, the mouth and the conduct, not because we are trying to create spiritual life, but because Jesus Christ already dwells within.

Jesus Christ within is to govern the mind, the mouth and the whole manner of life.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How are the mind, mouth and whole manner of life joined under Christ's rule?

Personal Reflection

Where do your private thoughts, public words and actual conduct fail to agree with one another?

Action Step

Identify the motive behind that gap and make one consistent change in thought, speech and conduct through Christ within.

CONCLUSION: GUARDING THE WHOLE LIFE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Throughout this Study Guide, we have seen that temptation often begins before anything becomes visible outwardly. A thought may be entertained, an emotion may be allowed to grow, words may be spoken, and eventually conduct may follow. For this reason, Scripture calls the believer to remain watchful over the whole life.

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 mind matters because thoughts can influence emotions, words and actions. Anger must not be allowed to become bitterness. Fear must not govern our decisions. Pride must not exalt self, and wrong desires must not be fed until they develop into sinful conduct.

Our words also matter. Gossip, slander, lying and angry speech can wound others and destroy trust. James reminds us that the tongue is powerful, and Scripture calls us to speak truthfully, wisely and with restraint.

Our conduct must agree with the same truth. Honesty is required in business, employment, study, relationships and the use of what belongs to others. The believer should be trustworthy whether other people are watching or not.

But the final emphasis must not be upon human discipline. The believer possesses the Person.

Paul 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."*

The Christian life is not an outward attempt to control ourselves well enough to become acceptable to God. Jesus Christ already dwells within the born-again believer as Spirit, and His life within is the source of the new life.

We are therefore called to guard what we allow into the mind, what we permit to develop within the heart, what we speak and how we conduct ourselves. Vigilance is necessary, but vigilance must remain centred in Jesus Christ.

The question is not simply: What am I allowed to do? The greater question is: Does this thought, word or action agree with the life of Jesus Christ within me?

Temptation may come, but it does not have to become sin. A thought may appear, but it does not have to be entertained. An emotion may rise, but it does not have to rule. Words may come to mind, but they do not have to be spoken. An opportunity for dishonest gain may appear, but it does not have to be accepted.

The believer has received something greater than a set of rules for controlling outward behaviour. We have received Jesus Christ Himself. His life within is to govern the mind, the heart, the mouth and the whole manner of life.

Guard the mind. Guard the words. Guard the conduct. But above all, remain centred in the One who dwells within. Jesus Christ is the source of the life we have received, and His life within is to govern the whole person.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must guarding the whole life remain centred in Jesus Christ rather than effort alone?

Personal Reflection

Which teaching about your thoughts, speech or conduct has most exposed your need to depend on Christ?

Action Step

Name one continuing response that will keep that area in agreement with God's Word and 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

How should the life of Jesus Christ within govern our thoughts, speech and conduct? Why is outward self-control by itself insufficient?

2. Understanding

How can repeated thoughts and emotions influence our speech and conduct? Use a Bible verse to explain why a renewed mind matters.

3. Personal Reflection

What have Joseph's forgiveness or another example in this guide exposed about the way you respond to hurt? Explain what needs correcting without disclosing private details.

4. Response to Truth

How should the response of Paul and Silas influence the way you deal with a difficult circumstance or strong emotion? Give one personal example.

5. Action Step

Choose one recurring thought or speech pattern that needs correction. What truth from the Bible will govern your response, and when will you begin practising it?

6. Early Response

Have you begun to address the pattern identified in Question 5? If so, describe what changed in your response. If not, explain what has prevented you from beginning.

7. Ongoing Practice

What will help you continue to speak with truth, kindness and wisdom, especially when you feel hurt, pressured or tempted to create a false impression?

8. Doctrinal Clarity

Why must integrity include motives, private behaviour, work and dealings with other people, not simply outwardly acceptable actions?

9. Living the Truth

Consider a real promise, transaction or responsibility. What would honest and generous conduct require of you, and how will you respond?

10. Final Response

What has this guide revealed about the connection between your thoughts, words and conduct? Explain one change you will make through the life of Christ within.