

# Idolatry:

**“I am more prone to listen to therapeutic advice than spiritual advice, say, from a pastor.”**

**By Philip J. Rigdon**

**Lesson Three:**

**Title: Do I want advice which affirms my thoughts, attitudes, and actions?**

**Biblical Texts: Romans 7:18, I Corinthians 12:3, I Corinthians 2:14, Ephesians 2:1, Acts 7:51, Romans 8:7, II Corinthians 2:4, I Corinthians 6:11, Romans 5:11, I Thessalonians 1:5, Psalm 51:10, Romans 6:11, Galatians 4:4-5, Romans 5:5-6, Philippians 2:7-9**

**Lesson Objectives: The students will be able to:**

1. Identify the key characteristics of the sinful nature. (Knowledge)
2. Summarize the impact of the sinful nature on thinking, attitudes, and actions. (Comprehension)
3. Choose which life tasks are affected by the sinful nature. (Application)
4. Compare the sinful nature to the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify using Word and Sacrament. (Analysis)
5. Appraise the sanctified thoughts, attitudes, and actions of God in our salvation. (Evaluation)

## Lesson Three: Do I want advice which affirms my thoughts, attitudes, and actions?

# 3



### Setting Our Sights

In the last lesson we learned the difference between worldly and spiritual advice. What are we to think of the advice that comes from inside us? Can we trust it? In this lesson we will locate examples in the Bible of those who trusted their own advice and those who trusted God's Word. We will summarize the sinful nature and its impact on our thinking, attitudes, and actions, and then apply that summary to hypothetical life situations. From there we will compare the sinful nature to the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify us using Word and Sacrament. Finally, we will appraise the sanctified thoughts, attitudes, and actions of God in our salvation.

### Getting Started

1. At the end of the last lesson, you were asked to pay attention to advice that you heard or read during the week and decide if it was worldly or spiritual. Share the advice, your determination, and how you came to that conclusion.

2. Now that we have learned about the dangers of worldly advice, that is, advice which disagrees with God's Word, let's turn to advice that comes from our own hearts and minds.

There is a considerable amount of debate over the nature of human beings. Are we basically good or bad? The answer will determine the degree to which we can trust our own advice. Briefly debate the question in the group. Below are six talking points to get started.

- People only make bad choices when there are no other options.
- If you raise a child properly, they will become a good adult.
- The roots of crime can be found in poverty, lack of education, and injustice.

- Even small children will fight over a toy.
- There are well bred people in prison all over the United States.
- Humanity has existed for thousands of years. If evil could simply be taught out of us, we would have done so by now.

## Digging In

1. So what is the answer? Are human beings basically good or bad? As with all important questions, we need to turn to the Bible for the answer. With a partner, read each verse below regarding the sinful nature. Draw a line to the sentence that accurately paraphrases it.

### **Romans 7:18**

<sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

### **1 Corinthians 12:3**

...and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

### **1 Corinthians 2:14**

<sup>14</sup> The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

### **Ephesians 2:1**

**2** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins

### **Acts 7:51**

<sup>51</sup> "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears,

you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.

### **Romans 8:7**

<sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.

a. I am not able to understand the things of God. This requires the work of the Holy Spirit.

b. I cannot do the good I want to do because there is nothing good in me.

c. I am by nature God's enemy.

d. I need the Holy Spirit to trust in Jesus.

e. We are always working against the efforts of the Holy Spirit.

f. I am dead in my sins.

2. Now that we have learned the characteristics of the sinful nature, let's compose a simple summary. Taking points "a" through "f" above, compose a summary of the sinful nature using twenty words or less.

3. Based on what you have learned; would you say that human beings are basically good or bad? What reasons drew you to this conclusion?

### Hitting Home

1. We've learned the characteristics of the sinful nature and composed a brief summary. Let's take the opportunity to hone our understanding further by applying what we have learned to a list of activities. Given the effect of the sinful nature, am I able to complete the tasks below? Next to each item, write "Y" for yes, and "N" for no.

- \_\_\_ Vote republican or democrat.
- \_\_\_ Believe that Jesus is the Son of God.
- \_\_\_ Pick a tie to wear.
- \_\_\_ Ask Jesus to come into my heart.
- \_\_\_ Get married or remain single.
- \_\_\_ Believe in God as a higher power.
- \_\_\_ Open my own eyes to see Jesus as my savior.
- \_\_\_ Cooperate with Jesus in my salvation.
- \_\_\_ Study at Notre Dame or Purdue.
- \_\_\_ Believe that God exists by looking at nature.

2. In His overwhelming love and mercy, God has chosen to solve the problem of our sinful nature with the work of His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit uses the Bible, Holy Baptism, and the Lord's Supper to change lost sinners into saints. Below is our list of

characteristics of the sinful nature. Each is followed by a verse describing the work of the Holy Spirit. Compare them. How does the Holy Spirit answer each characteristic?

a. I am not able to understand the things of God. This requires the work of the Holy Spirit.

- **2 Corinthians 4:6** <sup>6</sup> *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

b. I cannot do the good I want to do because there is nothing good in me.

- **1 Corinthians 6:11** <sup>11</sup> *And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

c. I am by nature God's enemy.

- **Romans 5:11** <sup>11</sup> *More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

d. I need the Holy Spirit to trust in Jesus.

- **1 Thessalonians 1:5** <sup>5</sup> *because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.*

e. We are always working against the efforts of the Holy Spirit.

- **Psalms 51:10** <sup>10</sup> *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

f. I am dead in my sins.

- **Romans 6:11** <sup>11</sup> *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

3. Learning what we have, we realize we cannot always trust our own advice. We must check it against the Bible. Our sinful nature affects our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. We are firstly interested in serving our own needs. On the other hand, God's thoughts, attitudes, and actions are perfect. Read the passages below. What are five words you would choose to describe God's thoughts,

attitudes, and actions? Underline the words or phrases in the verses which led to your five chosen words.

- **Galatians 4:4-5** <sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.
- **Romans 5:5-6** <sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.
- **Philippians 2:7-9** <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

## Wrapping Up

### Summary Cinquain

A cinquain is a French poem style which has five lines. The first line is one word, the second two, the third three, the fourth four, and the fifth, one. Below are two cinquains regarding our lesson this week. Read them aloud in review of what we have learned.

Sinful  
By Nature  
Wandering Resisting Dying  
Troubled Sad Desperate Needy  
Helpless

Forgiven  
God's Work

Bible      Baptism      Communion  
Peaceful    Satisfied    Loved      Grateful  
                                 Sanctified

### **The Extra Mile**

In this lesson we have read and meditated upon various Bible verses. This week, choose one and memorize and/or display it in a prominent location in your daily life, i.e., refrigerator, car, desk at work.

## Helps for the Leader

### Lesson Two: Do I want advice which reflects what I hear in the world?

#### ❖ Getting Started

Before beginning, make sure you have a few Bibles and writing utensils for those who may have forgotten to bring these items. Welcome everyone warmly into the study space and thank them for returning. Give each person a copy of the study. If there are any new participants, have everyone introduce themselves.

Have students turn to lesson number three. Ask a student to read the introductory portion under “Setting Our Sights.

**1.** (About four minutes.) Move the group to the exercise under “Getting Started.” Invite a participant to read introductory paragraph number one. The goal of this portion is to allow participants to share his or her experience with worldly advice which they encountered through the week. Review the five rules you composed last session regarding worldly and spiritual advice. If you don’t have that list, read the rules below. Invite two to three participants to share, depending on time. When finished, thank those who participated and remind the group that reading the Bible is the best way to learn the difference between worldly and spiritual advice.

- Spiritual advice comes from God’s Word.
- Worldly advice contradicts God’s Word.
- Spiritual advice teaches that Jesus is the Son of God and that He was crucified for our sins.
- Worldly advice is designed to support our thinking and actions.
- Worldly advice teaches that God’s first goal is that I have a happy and comfortable life in this world.

**2.** (About five minutes) Move the group to portion number two and invite a participant to read the introductory paragraph. A major teaching point in this lesson is the sinful nature of humanity and how this affects the degree to which we can trust our own advice. The goal of this short debate is not to settle the question, but rather to pique interest and set the group thinking about the topic.

Invite a participant to read the debate talking points. Below are three suggestions to make the debate as successful as possible.

- You may need to make the opening remark yourself. Don't hesitate to share your opinion. Use the talking points.
- Don't allow boisterous participants to dominate. Intentionally invite quieter participants to share his or her thoughts.
- Discontinue the debate on time. If things become too intense, wrap up early and move to the next section.

## ❖ Digging in

1. (About five minutes.) Invite a participant to read paragraph one. Make sure that the participants understand the directions for this activity. Lead the group to pair up. Allow participants two or three minutes to complete the activity, and then reconvene to share answers. The correct answers are listed below. The goal of this activity is to present the basic characteristics of the sinful nature. To summarize this activity read aloud the paragraph included below.

**Romans 7:18 -b**

**1 Corinthians 12:3 -d**

**1 Corinthians 2:14 -a**

**Ephesians 2:1 -f**

**Acts 7:51 -e**

**Romans 8:7 -c**

*In the Garden of Eden God created Adam and Eve. He created them perfect, without sin. In their thoughts, words, and actions they obeyed God. Even their will and desires were always in line with God's. When they disobeyed God, they came to have a sinful nature as we learned above. Now they were spiritually blind and dead, enemies of God. We have inherited that sinful nature, and are conceived with it. This means that without the work of the Holy Spirit we are unable to know and love God, choose Jesus as our Savior, or live peaceably with our neighbors. No matter how we try, we will always struggle with sinning.*

**2.** (About seven minutes) Invite a participant to read paragraph two. The goal of this activity is that the participants would distill and summarize what they have learned in portion one. Participants are to complete this activity individually. Explain that the summary need not be long (Twenty words will go quick!) or include every characteristic of the sinful nature. Allow three to four minutes to complete this activity, then reconvene to share summaries. If case participants struggle, offer one or all the example summaries below.

- *God created us to live in harmony with Him and all people. Now my nature is to work against God.*
- *I was conceived with a sinful nature. I cannot choose Jesus, look for Him, or even want to do so.*
- *My nature is to sin in my thoughts words and deeds. I will always struggle with sinning.*
- *Because I am dead in my sinful nature, I am not able to do the good that God wants me to do.*

**3.** (About five minutes) Invite a participant to read the two questions under number three. The correct conclusion which participants should draw is that human beings are basically bad. While even unbelievers can resist the temptation to do wrong, and are able to do things to help others, we are basically bad because we have lost the image of God. We are no longer who He created us to be. Read the summary paragraph below to summarize this portion.

*Human beings are basically bad. Remember that God created human beings to be absolutely perfect. We have fallen from that perfection. We do see in the world that even those who don't believe in Jesus can avoid doing evil and even make the world a better place. However, this is not out of love or obedience to God. Compared to others you may seem better or worse, but remember that God compares us to Himself, His own perfect righteousness. We are basically bad because we have lost God's perfect good.*

## ❖ Hitting Home

1. (About five minutes) Invite a participant to read the introductory paragraph. Complete this activity as a group. Work through this exercise, having participants read each action and then respond with “Y” or “N”. The answers are given below. Students need to understand that we have free will regarding everyday choices, but we are not free to choose Jesus or know the true God. To clarify and summarize, read aloud the paragraph below.

- Y  Vote republican or democrat.
- N  Believe that Jesus is the Son of God.
- Y  Pick a tie to wear.
- N  Ask Jesus to come into my heart.
- Y  Get married or remain single.
- Y  Believe in God as a higher power.
- N  Open my own eyes to see Jesus as my savior.
- N  Cooperate with Jesus in my salvation.
- Y  Study at Notre Dame or Purdue.
- Y  Believe that God exists by looking at nature.

*Our sinful nature leaves us able to make choices related to everyday life in the world, but given that we are blind, dead, enemies of God, we are unable to choose to believe in Jesus or come to the true God. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, we will always choose against God. Note that we can understand that there is a “god” or “higher power” from this created world, but are unable to come to the one, True God through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

2. (About seven minutes) Invite a participant to read the introductory paragraph. The goal of this activity is that participants would recognize how the Holy Spirit answers each characteristic of the sinful nature specifically, by comparing each characteristic to the corresponding Bible verse. Lead the group through each item, “a” through “f”. An explanation is given below by letter in the exercise. If participants struggle to reach the correct conclusion, read each explanation aloud.

- a. The Holy Spirit has taken us out of the darkness of sin and shined the light of the Gospel into our hearts and minds.
- b. The Holy Spirit has brought to us the Gospel and created faith in Jesus, that through this faith we are washed clean of sin and made holy, set apart, in God's sight.
- c. The Holy Spirit has shown us Jesus, Who through His perfect life, innocent death, and resurrection has made peace for us with God.
- d. Through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit has enabled us to recognize Jesus as our Savior, and to trust in Him for the forgiveness of sins.
- e. Where before in my sinful nature I was always resisting and working against the efforts of the Holy Spirit, He has changed my heart to accept the things of God.
- f. Through the Gospel message of Jesus' resurrection, the Holy Spirit has raised me from spiritual death to life.

3. (About seven minutes.) Invite a participant to read the introductory paragraph. Having understood the sinful nature and the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify sinners in Jesus Christ, participants will, by working with these verses, come to see God's sanctified thoughts, attitudes, and actions, and appraise Him as the perfect, loving, merciful God that He is. Invite a participant to read each verse, and then give the group three to four minutes to underline words that describe God's thoughts, attitudes, and actions, and to compose his or her list of five words. Below are the three verses with example portions underlined, and list of possible words. Use these in case participants need help. To clarify and summarize, read aloud the paragraph below.

Self-sacrificing, Redeemer, Giving, Heavenly Father, wise, perfect, loving, merciful, humble, servant.

- **Galatians 4:4-5** <sup>4</sup> *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*
- **Romans 5:5-6** <sup>5</sup> *and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*
- **Philippians 2:7-9** <sup>7</sup> *but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,*

*What great comfort and peace to know that we have been saved by God Who is perfect in thoughts, attitudes, and actions. We see this perfection as He redeems us through Jesus and makes us holy by the work of the Holy Spirit. Although, even as Christians, we cannot always trust our own advice, we can be certain of God's perfect advice which He gave us in the Bible.*

## ❖ Wrapping Up

Invite a participant to read each of the two poems. If time allows, invite participants to share his or her favorite of the two, and why.

## ❖ The Extra Mile

Before dismissing the group, direct participants back into the lesson to the verses used. Encourage them to follow the directions given in the lesson to memorize and/or display.