TALKS TO MEN

ABOUT THE BIBLE AND THE CHRIST OF THE BIBLE

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TENTH TALK

INFIDELITY: ITS CONSEQUENCES AND CURE

In our last address we saw that the causes of in­fidelity were—first, misrepresentations of Christianity on the part of its professed adherents; second, ignor­ance of the Bible, and of history, and of science; third, conceit; fourth, sin; and fifth, resistance to the Holy Spirit.

We are today to take up the consequences and cure of infidelity.

II. Consequences of Infidelity.

1. *The first consequence of infidelity is sin.—*Infidelity breeds sin, there is no doubt of that. It is caused by sin, and in turn it begets a progeny like unto its ancestry. Sin first entered into human history through questioning God’s Word. When the devil sought to lead Eve into disobedience to God, he began by throwing out an insinuation that the Word of God was not true. He first said, “Hath God said,” and then he flatly denied what God said. The devil was the first infidel lec­turer. He had an audience of but one, but he reached millions through that lecture. He saw at once the effectiveness of this mode of attack upon man’s moral integrity. From that day to this the devil has been trapping men into sin by sowing the seeds of unbelief in their hearts. He well knows what sort of a crop that seed brings forth. When a young man or young woman falls into infidelity, look out for their morals. Infidelity forms a very rickety foundation for an upright character. A former President of the British National Secular Society, a man well known here in Bolton, who in fact was elected to Parliament from the Bolton district, said, “I have seen the dreadful effects which infidelity produces on men’s characters; I have had proof of its deteriorating effects in my own experience; its tendency is to utter debase­ment.” Occupying the position that he did, Joseph Barker certainly knew infidelity and knew its con­sequences, and this testimony of his to its destruc­tive effects upon character is beyond question true.

2. *The second consequence of infidelity is anarchy.—*Anarchists are necessarily always infidels. It is impossible for a man who believes in the Bible to be an anarchist. When the miserable French vaga­bond and anarchist Vaillant stood upon the gallows, he boasted of his infidelity. His infidelity and his anarchy went hand in hand. Louis Blanc, one of the great leaders of anarchy, is reported to have said, “When I was an infant, I rebelled against my nurse; when I was a child, I rebelled against my tutors and my parents; when I was a man, I rebelled against the Government; when I die, if there is any heaven and I go there, I will rebel against God.” The acceptance of Christianity would do away with anarchy on the one hand, and it would do away with the oppression of the poor by the rich that leads to anarchy on the other hand.

3. *The third consequence of infidelity is wretchedness and despair.—*God has created us for fulness of joy, and has made fulness of joy possible for each one of us; but fulness of joy such as God intends for man, and which alone can satisfy a soul made in God’s image, can only come from a living faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and in the Bible as the Word of God. Infidels are never profoundly happy. There may be surface joviality, but it is not, as every one knows who knows them well, deep and satisfying. One night as I closed an address in a New Zealand town a man somewhat beyond middle life passed in front of the platform as he made his way out of the building. He looked up at me and scowled and said, “I am an infidel.” I replied, “You do not need to tell us that, your face shows it. You are one of the most miserable-looking men I have ever seen.” I received a letter from him next day saying that he was miserable. Did you ever know a joyous old infidel? Jolly they may be, at least at times when in company, but did you ever see in them that deep, continuous, overflowing joy­fulness that is so characteristic of the aged Chris­tian? On the day of the death of a noted American infidel I was with a friend of his, and we got to talking about him. He said to me, “Every time of late when I have gone to see him, his wife has said to me, ‘Don’t tell him that he is growing old, it makes him very angry.’” But it does not make the aged Christian angry to tell him he is growing old, for he knows he is but ripening for a better world.

Infidelity not infrequently begets despair and suicide. Even the best of pagan writers taught the propriety of suicide. For example, Epictetus says, “The door is open. When you will you can leave off playing the game of life.” Mrs. Amelia E. Barr, who has made a study of suicide, says, “The advent of Christianity made self-destruction a crime.” She further says that the infidel revival in France at the time of the Revolution caused the abolition of the civil and canon laws against suicide. She still further says, “The great underlying cause of the advance of modern suicide is the advance of lax or sceptical religious views.” Infidelity leads logically to pessimism and despair. Ingersoll him­self wrote an editorial in a New York paper in defence of suicide. This editorial was followed in New York and the neighbourhood by a harvest of suicides. The man who wrote the editorial was directly responsible for its consequences, and it is not to be wondered at that the editorial raised a storm of protest and indignation; but his article was the logical outcome of his infidelity. There came to Chicago at the time of the World’s Fair a poor but brilliant young woman from one of the Southern States. Her intellectual gifts were so great that she was introduced into the best society, where she spoke upon the new woman. She was led into infidelity by an able advocate of unbelief in Chicago, but her career as an infidel was but brief. She soon met a suicide’s death in an eastern city, and one branch of the infidels of America to­day meet annually at her grave to commemorate her death. Her broken-hearted father also died by his own hand. Such is the legitimate fruit of unbelief.

4. *The fourth consequence of infidelity is a hopeless grave.—*Colonel Ingersoll once said, “The pulpit has cast a shadow ever the cradle and a gloom over the grave.” If this is true, it is a most remarkable fact that people, even professedly infidel people, are so anxious to have Christian preachers conduct their funerals. There is a gloom over the grave by nature and by sin, but the Bible dispels the shadow. Throw away the Bible and you do not get rid of the gloom, but you do get rid of the light that illumines it. Infidelity shrouds the grave in gloom, and the only rays of light are those stolen from Christianity. Colonel Ingersoll, at his brother’s grave, delivered an address, eloquent in words, but sad beyond descrip­tion. As he drew towards the close of that address he said, that through the darkness hope sees the glim­mering of a star, but he was not honest enough to say that that star was the Star of Bethlehem. On the other hand, D. L. Moody, at his brother’s grave, sounded forth a note of joy and exultation. Look­ing into the grave he cried, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Two men died the same year in America, Colonel Ingersoll, the acknowledged leader of American infidelity, and D. L. Moody, the leader of Christian activity. Compare the deaths and funerals of these two men, and see for yourselves whether the Chris­tian’s death or the infidel’s is the gloomy one.

The death of Colonel Ingersoll was sudden, and without a ray of cheer and brightness, his funeral unutterably pitiful. His wife and daughter, who loved him, could not bear to have the body taken from the house until the beginning of corruption made it an absolute necessity. It was all they had, and despairingly they clung to that body, now decay­ing. The scene at the crematory, as described in the daily papers, was enough to make the heart of any one ache, no matter how little one might be in sympathy with the views of the unfortunate man who had passed into eternity. On the other hand, the death and funeral of Mr. Moody were triumphant in every detail. Early on the morning of his departure from this world his eldest son was sitting beside his bed. He heard his father speaking in a low tone of voice, and he leaned over to listen, and these were the words that he heard: “Earth is receding; heaven is opening; God is calling.” “You are dreaming, father,” said the son. “No, Will, this is no dream. I have been within the gates. I have seen the children’s faces.” The family were summoned. Mr. Moody rallied. A while after he began to sink again, and he was heard to say, “Is this death? This is not bad; there is no valley. This is bliss. This is glorious.” “Father,” said his daughter, “you must not leave us. We cannot spare you.” The dying man replied, “I am not going to throw my life away if God has any more work for me to do, I will get well and do it; but if God is calling, I must up and off.” He rallied again. He gained sufficient strength to arise from the bed and walk over to the window, and sat down in a chair and talked with his family. He began to think he would recover, and was contem­plating sending for his pastor to pray for his re­covery, but beginning to sink again, he asked them to help him back to the bed. As he was sinking his daughter knelt by the bed and commenced to pray for his recovery, but he said, “No, no, Emma, don’t pray that. God is calling. This is my coronation day. I have been long looking forward to it,” and the heroic warrior swept up into the presence of the King. At the funeral all was triumphant. His son said to me before the ser­vice, “Remember there is to be nothing of sadness in the service. We want nothing but triumph here today.” The body was borne to the church by students from one of the schools that he had founded. It lay in an open casket in front of the pulpit. Right in front of it, with unveiled faces, sat his wife and daughter and sons listening with peaceful faces to the words that were spoken, and joining in the hymns of gladness and praise and victory. When others had ceased speaking, the eldest son arose and gladly gave a testimony for his father and the power of his faith. Is it Christianity that throws a gloom over the grave? Is the Christians grave the gloomy one, and the infidel’s the bright one? Who ever heard of a Christian repenting on his deathbed that he had been a Christian? It is not at all uncommon for infidels to repent on their deathbed that they had been infidels.

5. *The fifth consequence of infidelity is eternal ruin,*—We are told in Mark xvi. 16, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned.” We are told in John iii. 36, “He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life, but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” We have all sinned, and the only way to find pardon is by the acceptance of the Sin-bearer whom God has provided. If we prefer to be infidels and reject Him, there is no hope. Jesus is the only Saviour who has ever proved competent to save men from the power of sin here, so we may rest assured He is the only One who will prove competent to save men from the consequences of sin hereafter. But there are many who do not profess to be infidels, who are not theoretically so, but are practically so. All who reject Christ are practically infidels, and they will be lost. As Ethan Allen, a brave soldier but hopeless infidel, stood at his daughter’s deathbed, she turned to him and asked whether she should accept his unbelief or her mother’s faith, and the humbled man advised her to accept her mother’s faith in that trying hour.

III. The Cure for Infidelity.

We come now to the cure for infidelity.

1. *The great cure for infidelity is Christian living on the part of professed Christians.—*There is no argument for Christianity like a Christlike life. Many a sceptic and infidel has been won by the life of one who not merely intellectually believed in Christ, but who lived like Him in his daily walk. McAll lay dead in his coffin in Paris. A workman of Paris, a former anarchist, stood by his coffin weeping. “Are you a relative?” “No.” “Why, then, do you weep?” “He saved me.” “What did he say?” “He said nothing,” replied the former anarchist, “it was his face.” The Christlike character shining out in a Christlike countenance had saved this man. I was once asked to call upon a woman of brilliant gifts who was an un­believer. “But,” she said, “there is one thing I cannot get around, that is my father’s life.” Not long after, by the power of the truth as exemplified in her father’s life, leading her to a deeper study of the Bible, she came out as an openly professed follower of Jesus Christ.

2. *In the second place, the cure for infidelity is a surrendered will on the part of the infidel.—*Jesus says, “Whosoever willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God or whether I speak from Myself” (John vii. 17, R. V.). Any man afflicted with the malady of scepticism can find a remedy if he wishes in this simple prescription. Noth­ing so clarifies the spiritual vision as a surrendered will. By the simple act of the surrender of the will to God, many a man has found the mists of his unbelief scatter in a moment. When I was in New Zealand a well-known and well-educated com­mercial traveller came to me and said, “My friends wish me to speak to you. I am an agnostic, but I know that you cannot help me.” I told him that I thought that I could, but he was sure that I could not. “What do you believe?” I said. “I don’t know as I believe anything.” “Do you not believe that there is an absolute difference between right and wrong?” “Yes, I do.” “Will you take your stand upon the right to follow it wherever it carries you?” “I think I am doing that now.” “Will you definitely here today take your stand upon the right to follow it wherever it carries you, no matter what it costs? “He said, “I will.” “You do not know that God does not answer prayer?” “ No, I do not know that God does not answer prayer.” “Well, here is a possible clue to knowledge. Will you follow it? Will you pray this prayer? Oh God, if there is any God, show me if Jesus Christ is Thy Son, and if you show me that He is, I promise to accept Him as my Saviour and confess Him before the world?” “Yes,” he said, “I will do that, but it won’t do any good.” “Now John tells us in John xx. 31, ‘These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.” Will you take the Gospel of John and read it? Read carefully, slowly and thoughtfully. Do not try to believe it nor do not try to disbelieve it, simply be willing to be convinced of the truth. Before you read kneel down and ask God to show you what of truth there may be in the verses you are about to read, and promise Him that whatever He shows you to be true you will take your stand upon.” This he also agreed to do, parting from me, assur­ing me that nothing would come of it. Some weeks after in Dunedin this man’s wife came to me and said, “I have had a letter from my husband which I do not understand. He said I might show it to you.” In the letter he said that he thought he was converted, but he was not quite sure yet, that she could show this letter to me and to the minister, but not to any one else until he was perfectly sure of his position. He afterwards came out fully as a believer in the Bible and in Christ.

3. *The third part of the cure for infidelity is the study of the Word of God.—*Men do not need to study books of Christian evidences. The Bible is its own best proof. Let any candid seeker after the truth, any one who sincerely desires to know the truth, and is willing to obey it whatever it costs, get down to the earnest study of the Bible, and he will soon become convinced that it is the Word of God. In my first pastorate there was a member of my church who had a brother, a lecturer on scientific subjects, but an infidel. Sometimes he would lecture on the contradictions between science and the Bible. She came to me, and asked if I would pray for him that he might be converted. This I agreed to do. Some time after this she came to me and said that her brother had written her a letter, saying that he had become a Christian. In this letter he gave her the reason for his conversion. It was this, “I have been recently studying the Bible, and have become convinced that it is the Word of God.” It would have been well if he had studied the Bible before he lectured upon it and the contradictions between it and science.

In one of my pastorates I had a friend who lived across the street from me who was an agnostic. Though he was an agnostic and I a Christian mini­ster we were intimate friends, for I believe that a Christian and a Christian minister should rub up against all classes of men. I do not believe at all in the division of society into men, women, and ministers. I think a minister should be a man among men. How can we expect to influence men unless we touch elbows with them. Our Master was not too good to associate with all kinds and conditions of men, even the most depraved and outcast. Ought we to be better than our Master? I read in my Bible that Christians are the salt of the earth. How on earth can we expect the salt to exert its preservative influence upon the meat if we put the salt in one barrel and the meat in another? So I have always cultivated the friend­ship, not merely of orthodox Christians, but of all kinds of “heretics” and unbelievers. This man and I were good friends. We often met and talked together. One night we were standing together on his front lawn just as the sun went down, when he suddenly said, “Mr. Torrey, I am sixty-six years of age. I cannot live many more years. I have no one to leave my money to, and I cannot take it with me. I would give every penny of it if I could believe as you do.” I replied, “That is very easy. I can tell you how.” We went into the house, and I asked his wife for a sheet of paper, and I wrote upon it the following words: “I believe that there is an absolute difference between right and wrong (I did not say I believe that there is a God, for this man was an agnostic, neither affirming nor denying the exist­ence of God, and you have to begin where a man is), and I hereby take my stand upon the right to follow it wherever it carries me. I promise to make an honest search to find if Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and if I find that He is, I promise to accept Him as my Saviour, and confess Him as such before the world.” Having written this out, I handed it to my friend and said, “Will you sign that?” He replied, “Why, anybody ought to be willing to sign that.” You only ask me to agree to do what my own conscience tells me I ought to do. Anybody ought to be willing to sign that.” “Will you sign it?” I asked. “Why,” he added more earnestly, “anybody ought to be willing to sign that.” “I said, “Will *you* sign it?” Still more earnestly he said, “Any­body ought to be willing to sign that.” Will you sign it?” “I will think about it,” he said. He never signed it. He died as he had lived, without God, without Christ, without hope. He went out into the darkness of a Christless eternity. He told the truth about one thing. He did not take one penny of his money with him. They laid him in a Christ­less grave. He is now in a Christless eternity, but whose fault was it? A way was shown him out of darkness into light, a way that he admitted his own conscience told him he ought to take, and he would not take it. Men, the same way has been shown to you. Follow it, and it will lead you as it has led thousands of others out of the uncertainty and the restlessness and the ultimate despair of unbelief into the certitude, the joy, the victory, and the ulti­mate glory of an intelligent faith in the Bible as the Word of God, and in Christ as the Son of God.