

# TALKS TO MEN

ABOUT THE BIBLE AND THE CHRIST OF THE BIBLE

BY

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## NINTH TALK

### INFIDELITY: ITS CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES, AND CURE

THE profession of infidelity is very common in our day. I am constantly meeting with those who give as their reason for not being Christians that they do not believe in the Bible. There are many preachers, most excellent and gifted men, who think that infidelity is not worthy of attention, that the proper way to treat it is to ignore it. I do not agree with them. Infidelity is common enough, and active enough, and destructive enough to demand attention. While I do not for a moment think that the cause of Christ or the Bible has anything to fear from infidelity, I do know that individuals and communities are being greatly injured by it, and we owe it to them to expose its real character, to point out its consequences, and to show its cure. I have had no greater joy now for some years than to be able to lead many men out of the confusion and wretchedness of infidelity into the clear light and abounding joy of an intelligent faith in Christ and the Bible.

#### I. CAUSES OF INFIDELITY,

What are the causes of infidelity?

1. *The first cause, and one of the commonest, is misrepresentation of Christianity by its professed disciples.*

There are two kinds of misrepresentations, Misrepresentations in doctrine. Misrepresentations in daily living. Let us look first at the misrepresentations in doctrine. Take, for example, what has been preached as Christianity for generations in France, Spain, Italy, the Philippine Islands, Mexico, and the South American Republics. Of course we know that this is only the grossest caricature of the Christianity of the Bible, but the common people of these lands do not know this. They suppose that the Christianity preached by the priests is the Christianity of the Bible; and is it any wonder that they reject it and become out and out infidels? If what is thus preached as Christianity were Christianity, I would reject Christianity myself. But many so-called Protestant representations of Christianity, if not so grossly false, are still false. There is a wide difference between the God of the Bible and the God of much of the so-called Protestant teaching, between the Christ of the Bible and the Christ of much of the so-called Protestant teaching, and between the Christian life as set forth in the Bible and the ethics set forth in the pulpit. But the grossest misrepresentations of Christianity on the part of its professed disciples are the misrepresentations in daily living. The life of many professed Christians is so widely at variance with the life taught in the Bible that it leads many observers into rank infidelity. Take, for example, the professed

Christian who oppresses his employees in their wages. How many a professed Christian employer there is today who grinds his employees almost beyond endurance. Is it any wonder that these employees say that they have no use for Christianity? Look at the professed Christians in business who are dishonest in trade, who misrepresent their goods, who use all manner of dishonourable means to get ahead of their competitors in business and to drive them to the wall. Is it any wonder that people looking on are led to give up Christianity thus misrepresented? On one occasion, at the wedding of a young man in business in the city of Chicago, after the ceremony I began to speak to him about becoming a Christian, but he replied, "You need not talk to me about that. I work for —— and —— . These men are very prominent in the church, and we know how they carry on their business, as we are in their employ. I have no desire to be a Christian."

Look at the professed Christian who rolls up his millions and lives in lavish luxury while the poor are starving at his doors. You may say to me that these misrepresentations of Christianity are no sufficient excuse for infidelity, that men and women ought to learn to distinguish between real Christianity and its counterfeit, and this I admit. Of course a really intelligent man never refuses good money because there is counterfeit money in circulation; but many men do not distinguish. They do not read the Bible for themselves, and their only idea of Christianity is from what they see in the lives and teachings of its professed disciples, and they say, "If that is Christianity I do not want it," and so they become infidels. One of the most noted infidels of modern times claimed that it was the inconsistent living of his own father, who was a Baptist preacher, that first led him into infidelity. Whether his picture of his father's character is true or not, or whether to defend his own infidelity he was guilty of gross misrepresentation of his own father, as I have heard it alleged that he was, I cannot say, but this I do know, that beyond a question in many instances the inconsistencies of professedly Christian parents have led their children into utter infidelity. Misrepresentation of Christianity by its professed disciples in their teachings, and especially in their lives, has done more to manufacture infidels than all the writings and speeches that all the Paines and Voltaires and Ingersolls ever gave to the world.

*2. The second cause of infidelity is ignorance; ignorance of what the Bible contains and teaches, ignorance of history, and ignorance of true science.* The average infidel knows almost nothing about the Bible. He has caught up a few difficulties here and there from the writings or speeches of other infidels, but of the real contents of the Bible he knows practically nothing. I once asked a man if he would become a Christian; he replied, No, that he was an

infidel. "Why are you an infidel?" "Because the Bible is so full of contradictions." "Well," I said, "if the Bible is full of contradictions, please show me one." "Why," he said, "it is full of them." "If it is full of them, you ought at least be able to show me one." "Why, it is full of them." "Well, show me one." "Well, it is in the book of Psalms." I handed him my Bible to find it, and he began looking for the Psalms in the back part of the New Testament. "Let me find the book of Psalms for you." When I found the Psalms for him, he began to fumble around for awhile, then he said, "If I had my Bible here, I could show it to you." "Will you bring your Bible tonight and meet me here at the close of the meeting?" He promised that he would. The appointed hour came, and I was at the appointed place, but my infidel friend did not appear. I had taken the precaution of taking his address, and went to the address he had given, and found it a public-house, but did not find my man. Months afterwards, in one of our after-meetings, one of my students called to me and said, "Come here—here is a man who says the Bible is full of contradictions." I went over, and behold it was the same man. The man evidently thought I would not recognise him, but I did, and said, "You are the man that lied to me." He dropped his head and said, "Yes." Another smart young infidel once said to me, "I don't believe the Bible." I asked him why not. He replied, "I don't believe that passage where it speaks about Christ calling down fire from heaven to destroy His enemies." When I assured him that there was no such passage in the Bible, he would not believe me. An infidel in Edinburgh asked me to explain the passage where it said, "Cain went into the land of Nod and *took to himself* a wife." When I said "the Bible does not say so," he offered to bet me £100 that it did. Colonel Ingersoll, the high-priest of the cheaper and more superficial infidelity of the day, is an illustration of this ignorance of the Bible. He said in one of his lectures, "There is not a single kind and loving sentiment attributed to Christ but was uttered by Buddha at least 500 years before Christ was born." I would like to know where he finds any utterance of Buddha similar to John xiii. 34, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." Or John xv. 12, 13, "This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Or Matthew xx. 28, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." In another place Colonel Ingersoll said, "If Christ ever lived on the earth, He was an infidel in His time." I would like to know what Colonel Ingersoll does with such statements as that of John x. 35, "The Scripture cannot be broken"; or Matt. v. 18, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Or Mark vii. 13, where, speaking of the law of Moses, He calls

it the Word of God. Or with Luke xxiv. 27, 44, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself. . . . And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Me." If this is infidelity, then I am an infidel. But all intelligent men know this is not infidelity, and that Colonel Ingersoll was simply parading his ignorance when he uttered his statement. One of the leaders of English infidelity some years ago in an article in one of the secularist journals, spoke of Matthew as a "dispenser of liquors." He knew so little of the Bible that he supposed the word "publican" used of Matthew in the Bible meant publican in the sense of a keeper of a public-house. Perhaps the most prominent exponent of materialistic infidelity among the Germans is so ignorant of the historic discussions of Christian doctrine that he speaks of the virgin birth of our Lord as "the immaculate conception"; and one of the most prominent exponents of infidelity in England does the same thing.

3. *The third cause of infidelity is conceit.* Many men tell us that they are infidels because they find things in the Bible which they cannot understand, and because there are in it apparent contradictions which they cannot reconcile. To say that a thing cannot be true because I cannot understand it, to think that God could utter nothing that would be beyond my understanding, is the most consummate conceit. It is to assume that I know all things, that I know as much as God knows, and that therefore God could not possibly utter anything that I could not understand. To think that because I cannot find the solution of a difficulty that therefore none can be found, is to think that I know all things, that my mind is infinite; it is to think that I am God. Suppose I should take my little child out about sunset, and say to the child, "Do you see the sun yonder?" "Yes." "Well, my child, that sun is over 92,000,000 miles away." Then suppose the child should look up into my face in her mature wisdom of nine years and say, "Father, I know that is not true. The sun is just behind the barn yonder." Would this be a revelation of the child's wisdom, or its ignorance and conceit? The oldest, wisest philosopher compared with the Infinite is less than a child compared to the wisest of men; and for us to challenge our Father's statements because they seem to us untrue, does not reveal us to be philosophers worthy of admiration and applause, but to be foolish children who ought to be sent to bed. If we find difficulties in the Bible that we cannot explain, a moderate degree of modesty on our part would lead us to say, "If I knew a little more, I might be able to readily explain this difficulty," rather than lead us to say, "This Book that contains a difficulty which I cannot explain surely cannot be from God."

When in Birmingham, a man who parades his infidelity by having quotations from various infidels at the head of his notepaper wrote me saying that the Bible could not be the Word of God, as it was full of contradictions; that he could send me hundreds of them, but one or two would suffice, as they could not be answered. The difficulties sent were very easy of solution, and I wrote him the solution, but instead of being staggered in his conviction that the difficulties he held were insoluble, he wrote that he was sorry that he had been so unfortunate in his choice of difficulties before, but would now send me some more. These were quite as easy of solution. But this did not seem to suggest to him that his other apparently unanswerable difficulties would be as easy of solution as these formerly unanswerable difficulties, if he only knew a little more.

4. *The fourth cause of infidelity is sin.* This is the commonest and most fundamental cause of infidelity. Sin causes infidelity in two ways; first, men sin and betake themselves to infidelity to find comfort in their sin. There is no book that makes men so uneasy in sin as the Bible, and if they can only make themselves believe that the Bible is not true, it gives them some solace in the pursuit of sin. Men tell you that they have many objections to the Bible, but with the great majority of them their greatest objection to the Bible, if they would confess the truth to themselves and to others, is that it condemns their sin, and makes them uneasy in their sin. Second, sin blinds men's eyes to the truth of the Bible, and makes it appear foolishness. There is nothing that blinds the mind to truth like sin. I was once called to deal with an infidel. I sat down, and he told me that the reason that he could not be a Christian was because of a difficulty he had with the Bible. I asked him what his difficulty was. He replied that he could not see where Cain got his wife. I said, "Will you come to Christ if I tell you where Cain got his wife?" "Oh," he said, "I will not promise that." "But," I said, "if that is your difficulty that keeps you from coming to Christ, and if you are an honest man and I remove that difficulty, you will come to Christ." "No, I will not promise that." I then went at the root of the matter. I found out that his real difficulty was not about Cain's wife at all, but about another man's wife. It is surprising how often young men who fall into sin and into lax ways of living fall also into infidelity. I have found through conversation with young men who entertain infidel views, that there are two specific sins which are the commonest cause of unbelief. My former colleague, Prof. W. W. White, was speaking one time in Chicago on the "Mistakes of Ingersoll." At the close of the lecture a fine-looking man approached him and said, "Professor White, you have no right to say what you have said today. You are a Christian, and I am an infidel. I have just as much right to my opinion as you have to yours." Professor White then put to him a pointed question, "Is your life pure?" "The man replied,

“That is none of your business. My life is just as pure as yours is.” Then Professor White asked him his name. The man said, “That is none of your business.” “But,” said Professor White, “I want to look up your record.” The man declined to give it, and began to back out. But there were those in the company that gathered around that knew the man’s name, and gave it to Professor White. Within two years from that time that man was found dead in a Boston hotel, side by side with a young woman, not his wife, whom he had beguiled into infidelity, and who had gone off with him to lecture on infidelity. They were found dead together in this Boston hotel with the gas turned on. Gentlemen, the statement of this fact will make some of you angry, but look into your own hearts and lives and see if there is not some sin at the root of your infidelity. I do not say that all infidelity comes from sin, but I do say, after long and careful observation, that a very large share of the current infidelity of the day has sin for its ultimate cause.

5. *The fifth cause of infidelity is resistance to the Holy Spirit.* This is a very common cause of infidelity. The Spirit of God moves upon the hearts of men, inclining them to accept Christ. They will not yield to the Spirit of God. They resist the Holy Ghost, and the light which He gives to the soul is darkened, and they fall into scepticism or unbelief. In one of my pastorates there was a lawyer of excellent abilities, who was a most bitter opponent of Christianity, doing what he could to oppose it by bringing infidel lecturers to the town. I looked into this man’s previous history. I found that there was a time in the very church of which I was pastor when he was under conviction of sin, and hesitating as to whether he should come out and accept Christ, and when pressed upon the subject he replied, “No, I cannot be a Christian and succeed in my business, and I must support my family.” The light that was dawning upon his soul went out, and darkness and unbelief settled down upon him, exercising such a blighting influence over his life that he lost the confidence of his fellow-men, lost his law practice, and the last I knew his wife was teaching school to help support the family, while he was doing such odd jobs as came to him.

In one of our western colleges there was a revival of religion. Two young men in the college set themselves against it. They were determined not to yield. They made an agreement together to meet on a certain evening and go into the chapel and blaspheme the Holy Ghost. They met at the appointed hour, but the heart of one of the young men failed him, and he was afterwards converted. The other went into the college chapel alone. What he did in there no one knows, but he came out white as a sheet. He drifted into infidelity, and became a leader in one of the secular societies in one of our large cities. Oh, you men who are resisting the Holy Spirit, if we come back five years from now, we will most likely find you infidels, and if we come back ten

years from now, in all probability we will find you drunkards. In the city of Melbourne more than one man came to me, a moral wreck, who said that his fall was due to the influence of the noted infidel in that place.

In our next address we will take up the consequences and cure of infidelity.