

“ HOLINESS TO THE LORD.”—THE BADGE OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

S E R M O N ,

PREACHED AT MONTREAL,

ON WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 8TH, 1838,

AT THE

V I S I T A T I O N

OF THE

RIGHT REVEREND

THE LORD BISHOP OF MONTREAL ;

BY

GEORGE MACKIE, B. A.

EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF MONTREAL, AND

CURATE OF QUEBEC.

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1838.

S E R M O N .

39th Chapter of Exodus, part of 30th verse,
HOLINESS TO THE LORD.

In the times of that infant dispensation when it pleased the All-Wise to address himself to His people, through the medium of types and emblems, and in “the shadows of good things to come,” dimly to trace out the glories of “the better covenant,” singularly appropriate as was every part of the Divine economy, and fraught with meaning as were *all* the appointed rites and ceremonial observances, there were few tokens more expressive than the vestments which the High Priest was commanded to wear when engaged in the service of the sanctuary. Of those garments of Aaron, “to consecrate him,” how significant each several portion!—that girdle of fine linen with which his loins were girded about—that breast-plate with its Urim and Thummim of light and perfection—that mitre of authority, all seemed to mark out the ambassador of God, clothed with favor to propose, and with wisdom to negotiate, and with power to ratify a treaty of peace, between the offended Creator and his rebellious creatures. Resplendent over all was that “plate of the holy crown of pure gold,” with the inscription upon it, “like to the engraving of a signet :” “Holiness to the Lord.” Here however, God seems to have dispensed with the mystery of symbols, as though it could not be too plainly declared, that this one essential qualification, lacking all other gifts and graces are as nothing worth.—And was it so under the Law? And shall the Priests of God, under a ministration more glorious, fail to realize in the inward apparel of a holy life and conversation, the spiritual

meaning of these garments, “for glory and beauty”? If, under a system of foreshadowed sanctification, it was straitly enjoined upon the sons of Levi that they should be “clothed with righteousness,” how much more when He, the Great Refiner of his people, has *purified* the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord “an offering in righteousness”—when the Spirit which He had earned for His Church, has been poured down in such rich profusion from on High,—and the assured legacy of peace is their’s, and the abiding portion of the Comforter? Or shall it be, My brethren, of the ministry, that *now* when precept and example supply to us the place of emblem and prophecy, and nothing of darkness remains to obscure the way in which we should go, and nothing of encouragement is wanting to smooth our path, and to strengthen the feeble knees, and to support the hands that hang down; that now when by reason of “exceeding great and precious promises,” the ministration of death is become “a savor of life unto life,” and the thralldom of fear is converted into “a labor of love”—shall it be, that with such hopes,—such prospects,—such pledges of success, we fail to “purify ourselves even as He is pure?”—nay, *can it indeed be* that we *have* heard the voice of a Saviour calling—*have been moved* by His Spirit to follow,—and remain unholy still?—“Unholiness”—you are ready to exclaim: “This be far from us!” And to such an expression of your feelings I do respond with the Amen of devout acquiescence. Yes! Unholiness,—“Let it not be once named amongst us as becometh saints.” Still while we loathe all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and *touch not the unclean thing*, let us be very careful that we do not mistake the character of that holy service required at our hands, nor underrate the extent of its claims in relation to our own peculiar calling.

Then give me your attention, and while we meditate upon these things, may an Uction from the Holy One descend and rest upon us.—May He, Who out of the mouths of very “babes and sucklings” can “perfect praise,” Himself commend the words spoken this day, with a wisdom not their own, that benefit may accrue to His Church, and honor redound to the praise of the glory of His grace—Grant it gracious Lord—even so for Thine own Name’s sake !

“Holiness to the Lord.”—Let us first consider what this thing meaneth—My brethren, of the ministry, if in the strictness of the letter we were required to be holy as God is holy, or if, the extent of our duty commensurate with the extent of privileges conferred, we were bound to exhibit such a conversation as really “*becometh* the Gospel of Christ.”—Who amongst us, but would be constrained to cry out in the bitterness of his soul : “Enter not into judgment with Thy servant O Lord, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified ?” Yet must our conversation be *becoming* in its character. Such a conversation as is not *unsuited* to the solemn proprieties of our station ; Such a conversation as shall be conformed to the Divine Will “not only for wrath but also for conscience sake,”—Such a conversation, in fine, as when failing to observe the law, shall consent to its demands that they are good.—Doubtless, this holiness of living will include all things, “acceptable to God and approved of men,” yet is it essentially distinct in its nature from the received system of morality ; it fosters and cherishes all private, domestic, and social virtues, but it recognizes nothing in them of inherent intrinsic excellence—laying deep its foundation in a Saviour’s righteousness, it knows no other motive to action than

the love of God in Christ Jesus, It makes His glory the end and aim of all its requirements, and loudly proclaims that all works that spring not from this source and are not directed to this end, though they possess the *semblance* of virtue are but forms and shadows after all, that they lack the very principle of life, and cannot abide the just judgment of God. A work wrought in us by the power of the Spirit, internal sanctification, will not fail however to show itself to sense and to conscience by many infallible proofs, and if there be a living principle within, it *will* work and its fruits *will be manifest*, as “love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against which there is no law.” but inasmuch as these graces may be counterfeited by the cunning craftiness of Satan—inasmuch as the apples of Sodom fair without, but dust and ashes within, may be presented to us as the fruits of the Tree of Life,—and if there have been experienced no real hungering and thirsting after righteousness, the eye may rest upon their beauties, content if only they be pleasant to the sight, and careless whether they be good for food,—inasmuch as from the sluggishness of the mind to enquire and the slowness of heart to believe, the amiabilities of life may be mistaken for the workings of the Spirit of God, and the soul may whisper “Peace, Peace,” simply because, thus deceived and lulled into a perfidious security it has never examined whether there *do* exist any grounds of enmity between itself and its Maker and Judge.—It will therefore concern us much, if we would ascertain whether we are Holy to the Lord, first to try and prove our own selves whether we be in the faith—to discover what manner of Spirit we are of, and in the estimate of all our actions, ever to revert to the *principles* from which they proceed, and never to rest satisfied in the work of our

Salvation, but in a well grounded hope that God *is* working in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure.—On one point indeed we can *hardly* be mistaken—if fruits plainly differing in their nature from those above mentioned, those for instance described as “the works of the flesh,” do show forth themselves in our lives, it is certain that we are not only “barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” but like “the earth which beareth thorns and briers, nigh unto cursing whose end is to be burned.”

“Holiness to the Lord” ! Without this “no man shall see God”—shall receive any “token for good,” of His presence here, or rejoice in the unclouded light of His countenance hereafter. To “be perfecting holiness,” then how needful to every child of man ;—how especially needful to them above their fellows, who stand to minister before the Lord ! *They* appointed to declare “the whole counsel of God,” and *this* the very bond of union and communion between them and the Master whom they serve. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant,” but “to the wicked, saith God, “What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth.” Again, “O ye priests, this commandment is for you.—If ye will not hear and if ye will not lay it to heart to give glory unto my name saith the Lord of Hosts, I will even send a curse upon you and I will curse your blessings.” Essential therefore to their own personal acceptance with God—this gracious disposition of heart should seem to be still further essential to their acceptance with him, in their official capacity, as His ministering servants, and by consequence, to the faithful and successful discharge of the work whereunto they are called.—Not that I would be here understood to

assert that the Spirit of God is straitened in His energies by the unworthiness of the instruments employed, or that the Gospel may not prove "the power of God unto salvation," though unhallowed lips be the channel through which the message is conveyed. No—The Spirit of our God is "mighty in operation," and there is an inherent force in truth which can commend it to the hearts of men under every disadvantage, and in spite of every intervening obstacle. On this account Saint Paul could rejoice, yea and did rejoice that Christ was preached, "even of envy and strife," for the faithful exhibition of Christ crucified, is, under whatever circumstances, the light of the world, and the wrath of man can be made to give glory to God. Judas the cast away! Who shall yet say of him that he may not have been useful in bringing souls to a knowledge of the truth! and are we not assured that "to many who have prophesied in the name of the Lord, and in His name have done wonderful works," it shall be professed by the Judge of all that he never knew them! Under ordinary circumstances, nevertheless, and agreeably to the general scheme of God's moral government—we are emboldened to declare that it is *essential* to the success of the Christian Minister that he be found Holy to the Lord, for on no other grounds is he warranted in expecting a blessing from Him who can alone give the increase. Moreover shall it be said of men "ordained in things pertaining to God," and separated to this *end* that they "should bear witness to the truth," that in *spite of them* and the practical testimony of their lives, the word of God does yet "grow and prevail"—that what would have been, under the Divine blessing, the *natural result* of their faithful exertions, is but a tribute extorted from their hypocrisy and overruled to the glory of God! Ah surely—if *woe* be the portion of the world in general because of offences—fearful must

their portion be who are chosen out of the world, if “by them the offence cometh!” True, as respects every, the meanest individual, it is *emphatically* true of the Christian Minister that he stands not alone—powerful for good or for evil must his example ever prove, and in his spiritual welfare how many important interests are involved !

Indeed, indeed My brethren of the Ministry, much, very much, does depend upon our consistency of conduct ; and “thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself,” is a charge which if substantiated against us, will certainly expose our profession of godliness to shame and contempt, and seriously compromise the undying interests of those committed to our care, by strengthening the evil bias of their hearts and confirming it in unbelief. Nor is it sufficient that we be not *justly amenable* to this charge, we must not be *readily suspected* of such a flagrant apostacy from every thing that is high and holy in principle.—No doubt we have many difficulties to contend with. There is in every congregation, a prevailing desire to discredit the sincerity of those who speak in the name of the Lord—from the earliest days of the Church it was even so—for men are naturally disinclined to believe that others can feel strongly the truths which they themselves despise. St. Paul, you will remember, thought it necessary again and again to appeal to the rectitude of his life in proof of his sincerity ; and in an age when the pathway of gain in the Church (now alas ! what a beaten highway !) was scarcely tracked and marked out—he was content to labour with his own hands, for the supply of his necessities, if *thus* to convince gainsayers, that he sought not “their’s but them.” Now, if St. Paul deemed it the wiser part thus to act, at once to the disparagement of his own just claims, and the partial detriment of the Church of God, robbed of no invaluable

portion of his time ; if he considered that it was before all things necessary to the success of his labors, to vindicate his uprightness of intention, and singleness of desire to win souls unto Christ, and to count all other things but loss ; it will scarcely be deemed inexpedient in *us* to take good heed to our ways, and to make full proof of our ministry. For these are times ⁱⁿ which we shall find our sincerity questioned at everystep. Is it, for example, our own steady conviction, and the honest expression of our real sentiments, that we have been separated to our work by God the Holy Ghost ? Men in general will treat these words as *words of course*, as a simple declaration that we are willing to embrace a reputable profession, or are ready at most to sacrifice some prospect of gain, for a more pleasing gain *in kind* ; the credit which is attached to the profession of a clergyman. Nor can we wonder at this—since it is matter of awful notoriety, that the clerical garb is frequently assumed as that which a gentleman may not be ashamed to wear—as a passport of admission to good society ; as the seemly guise of a literary leisure, or an earnest of easy preferment—assumed in fact with *any* intention, rather than that of “enduring hardness” and “doing the work of an Evangelist.” And where much of distinction or profit can hardly be anticipated, as in the case of ourselves, the Ministers of a Missionary Church, yet the adjunctive of *Reverend*, is, on many accounts an agreeable title, and is at least a guarantee to the world, that we have received the advantages of a liberal education.

Whether these considerations have had any and what influence upon you, is a point which rests between God and your own consciences. For myself, I frankly avow, and bless the mercies of an overruling Providence, that, in all human probability, had the clerical calling been other than it is my education had been otherwise ordered, and I had not

been here this day to address you in the name of the Lord Jesus. Probably, with all of us there is some alloy of motive ; we must not then be surprised, if keen to detect our failings, men be forward to distrust our pretensions. Rather be it our aim to disarm and to conquer this distrust, by so living and so acting, that they “ who are of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of us.” Rather let us show, by our walk and conversation, that though we may not have risen above the reach of earthly attractions, we are not under their control ;—that though malign influences may cross our path, and impede us in our labor of love, they cannot divert us from it—that though things of sense may shake, they cannot undermine and subvert our integrity of purpose. Let us prove that our intentions are without guile—that the main study of our lives is to give glory to God—our hearts’ best desire, that souls may be saved—or at least let us convince men, that we can lightly esteem the pleasures of the world ; that “ silver and gold we have none,” for sensual gratification and idle parade ; that we know no lawful ambition distinct from the advancement of the Redeemer’s Kingdom ; and that if “ needs be,” we can suffer reproach for His Name.

And having begun, let us never relax in this same godly jealousy over ourselves, nor forget that if we “ preach Christ Jesus the Lord,” we preach to adverse hearers—and where we may be spared the fiery ordeal of direct and active hostility must be prepared to encounter the chilling influences of apathy and unconcern.—Indeed, this latter mode of opposition to the Gospel how extensively prevalent, in these our days ! and what multitudes of so-styled *regular* and *steady Churchmen*, who treat the ordinance of preaching, with the most consummate indifference ! The preacher himself, they regard as one paid and retained

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to deliver a certain message, which he may be expected to deliver well or ill, according to the measure of his ability, or sense of self-esteem, and love of applause.—But as to whether he proclaim *high* or *low doctrines*, “the Gospel of God” or “another Gospel;” this they consider, a *mere accident of schooling*, or a *matter of taste*.—Now it is only by such an illustration of Christian faith as holiness will afford, that we may hope to rouse such men into reflection, and incline them to believe, that there is a *reality* in the doctrines which we preach—that we ourselves owe what we are to their blessed influence; that while nothing else *can* produce a saving transformation of heart and life, the truth of God when rightly received, and cordially embraced, *cannot fail* to produce it. Oh then let us by such a manifestation of the truth, commend it to every man’s conscience in the sight of God; and then, if unhappily our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost—but we have delivered our souls!

Yet further, not only must we exhibit the beauty of holiness in all its distinctive features of excellence—not only must we bear about with us “the marks of the Lord Jesus,” but must carry the inscription—“Holiness to the Lord”—engraven as it were on a pure crown of gold, to be seen and read of all men.—The chosen of a peculiar people—The holy Priesthood of a holy nation—It is not enough that there be assigned to us *a* station among the followers of the Lord,—Our’s must be an eminent, a conspicuous station! —Cities set upon a hill—Our conduct cannot but be seen from every side, and must court enquiry and challenge observation. The light of the world—Not only must we be as beacons to guide them that are afar off into the paths of righteousness; but burning and shining lights to gladden those that are enlightened, and to speed them on their way

rejoicing. The welfare of the Church of God, "over which the Holy Ghost hath made us overseers," requires this at our hands. Nay—the children of the world will expect it from us—even their standard of clerical responsibilities is higher, far higher than might be imagined; and men who regard the yoke of Christ as heavy, and would not themselves touch it with one of their fingers, will consider no burden too grievous to be imposed on the shoulders of their ministers. Unmindful of their own broken pledges, they demand consistency in those appointed and paid to watch over the flock of Christ; and be assured, My brethren of the Ministry, should you need this assurance, that in no way will you more effectually secure the contempt and derision of the ungodly, than by yielding to their solicitations, and partaking of those things in which they freely allow themselves.

Alas! after all our best endeavours, how much of inconsistency will yet remain to vex and perplex our souls!—and how frequently will the sin, that doth so easily beset us, show that we are but *earthen vessels*, and like our brethren, the creatures of frailty and imperfection! Still let us beware how we take shelter from the higher claims of our calling, and bring ourselves down to the level of others, under a plea of common infirmities.—Charitable towards all beside, let us be rigid censors when sitting in judgment on ourselves. "Sirs, we are men of like passions," is a language which may be employed, when our fellows would do us reverence, but can never justify us in descending from our rightful position as ensamples to the flock.—Oh! rather let it be our confident boasting, when men would seduce us into *questionable* compliances: "The temple of the Lord—the temple of the Lord—the temple of the Lord are we." True, we *do* experience the com-

mon weaknesses and wants of a fallen nature—but, what then? Have we not professed our belief that we have received no *common* measure of grace to support and to sustain us under them. Else *wherefore* did we promise to be for an *example* to believers, “in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity,” and “in all things” to approve ourselves “patterns of good works?”—Examples to others, we must ourselves excel; and appointed to lead, must not be content to follow.

And now as it respects our own peculiar case;—My brethren of the Ministry, we certainly do labor under many local difficulties of position, and in good truth the land in which we live is an ungenial soil; and godliness—the stunted plant of a sickly growth. The very climate is made to conspire against it. A summer, how transient! grasps all the energies of our trading population, and concentrates them into one focus of intense exertion—while a protracted winter, closing up the ordinary channels of commerce, furnishes a convenient pretext for the not less engrossing pursuit of a laborious dissipation. And if we examine the materials of which the community is composed; here we see the *many* fast bound in the trammels of a strong delusion—worshiping, they scarcely know what—yet careless to seek—or fearful to enquire what “the truth as it is in Jesus” may mean. In the palpable obscurities of their religious system, what wonder that we find a corresponding vagueness of moral duty—while they, whose conduct ought to stand out in bright relief—alas! how have they suffered in their estimate of “things honest, just and of good report,” from the influence of surrounding darkness! In another division of the community, we see the wholesome restraints of discipline almost set at nought—a free trade in religion proclaimed, sect outbidding

sect in the mart of popularity, and religious novelties freely administered to itching ears by teachers, who flit about too often but to unsettle, those whom they know not, or care not, to build up. What wonder then, if here the most complete indifference prevail as to decency and order—and what wonder that men, if they think it necessary, to make any *profession* at all, unite themselves to *Religious Societies*, as the term is, with much of the same feeling with which they would choose any one of the prevailing trades and callings of life, and regard the Sacrament of Baptism itself, as of somewhat the same importance as the *Temperance Pledge*, or *subscription to the rules of a charitable association* ! Now these, things may well cause us pain, who do attach a value to the pure doctrines of the Cross, and the claims of primitive order, and would fain see them go hand in hand together ; but how we may *so* contend for “the faith once delivered to the Saints,” as at once to preserve a discreet moderation, and to eschew every thing which may savor of accommodation to error, is a point on which I ask not, and seek not to prescribe ; this only would I again repeat, that we may all, under whatever difficulties of situation, bring forward one *intelligible argument*, which shall be read and approved of all men :—the witness of our own lives, that a purer faith does beget a higher tone of morals—a steadier discipline does ensure a more equable and uniform consistency of conduct.

Nor, among our peculiar discouragements, must it be forgotten, that we are a little band—scattered hither and thither, over the surface of a country, thinly settled, and not to be traversed but with extreme difficulty ; and thus can enjoy but scant opportunities, of strengthening each other’s hands, and taking sweet counsel together in seasons of

need—while some of us conceive themselves obliged, from the slender pittance of a Missionary's income, to eke out a modest livelihood, by the secular pursuits of farming, or the instruction of youth :—occupations, which *do* seriously trench upon our Master's time, and in which he who is jealous for the cause of God, can hardly engage but with fear and trembling, and under the constraint of the clearest necessity.

But yet—Oh yet, if the discouragements of the Ministers of Christ in general, and our own in particular, are many and great—how more than consoling the encouragement, that “in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” ! Tho' all things may seem to be against us, assuredly the Lord is not unfaithful to His promise ; and if for a time, he withhold His blessing—either that He may quicken us to greater diligence, or that he may humble us in the dust, on account of our own unworthiness, and show us how utterly vain are all efforts, unless he give the increase, yet will He not withhold it altogether ; if the priesthood be *holy*—the people shall be *peculiar* ; and “a covenant shall be with them of life and peace,” for “the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” Then let us even under our manifold discouragements, both seek and expect great things ; and without presuming to dictate to Him the fitting times and seasons, let us “tarry His leisure,” in the devout posture of those servants, who “are up and doing,” who with loins girded, and with lamps burning, wait for their Lord, and with an implicit confidence, that He will prosper the work of our hands, and at his coming receive us to Himself with exceeding joy.

My brethren of the Ministry, I have yet many things to say, but I forbear,—My own so recent admission to the service of the sanctuary, and my limited experience in it,

alike warn me of my slender claim to admonish you on the one hand, and of the slight probability that I could do so with effect on the other ; yet, as one who wishes you well from the bottom of his soul ; yet as one whose interests are closely blended with your own ; and further as one who trusts that he could listen in a spirit of meekness to your godly counsel and advice ; I do entreat you to hold me excused if I again venture to remind you, that our's is a solemn and a sacred calling. Faithful to our trust—and how great, how transcendent the dignity to which we are raised!—Honors are now within our reach, which the world can neither give nor take away ! and then that promise beyond the skies, that we shall shine like stars in the firmament of heaven ! Untrue to our vows,—and how are we fallen!—Oh to have presented the false credentials of a heartless profession, and thus to have obtained the privilege of ministering at the altar, and living of the things of the altar. What is this, but to have compassed the wages of unrighteousness ! What is this, but to eat the bread of dishonesty ; and to be clothed upon with a cloak of covetousness ! Surely such a situation were worse than contemptible ! and surely no pit in the nethermost hell were too low for such presumptuous enemies of the Cross of Christ. Forbid it, that *we* be found faithless ! Forbid it, that influence for good which we may exercise on those around us ! Forbid it, the awful result of our deficiencies to our brethern and the Church of God—Forbid it, that wrath of a despised Saviour—Forbid it, each hope of a blessed immortality—Nay, forbid it, every feeling of honesty—every demand of plighted truth—It may not—it must not, and the Lord being our helper—it shall not be—No, from henceforth we devote ourselves—body—soul and spirit, to Him who hath loved us and bought us with a price ; and counted worthy of

this Ministry, are determined to know nothing but Christ and “him crucified”—to esteem it our privilege to be servants of all for His sake—and to glory in this as the badge of our service, “Holiness to the Lord.”!—

