

## An Advanced Experience

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...Five times over the Apostle speaks of 'inheriting the Kingdom of God.' Four times he reminds his readers that evil-doers will not inherit the Kingdom (I Cor. vi 9, 10; Gal. v 21; Eph. v 5); once he says that flesh and blood cannot inherit it (I Cor. xv 50). In all these places he has in view the Messianic Kingdom of the saints in glory. And it is in the same sense that he encourages the Thessalonians with the hope of being 'counted worthy of the Kingdom of God,' for which they were suffering (2 Thess. i 5). This is the purified and spiritualized Christian form of the current Messianic expectation.

There are however two passages which go beyond this. One is in Romans (xiv 17), where it is said that 'the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.' And the other is in I Corinthians (iv 20), where the Kingdom of God is described as not being 'in word but in power.'

In both these cases the Apostle is thinking not of anything future but of the present, not of any catastrophic change, but of the actual experience of Christian men. Where were they to look for the coming of the Kingdom? What were to be the signs of its coming? The signs are—not any change in the Levitical order, a new list of clean and unclean, new regulations as to abstinence or the like, but a new spirit permeating the life, a new attitude and temper of mind, a new relation of the soul to God—righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

What a beautiful description in those few strokes! What an advanced experience of the best gifts of religion! How undreamt of by Pharisee or Sadducee or Essene or Zealot! There was only one school where the Apostle could have learnt that lesson—the school of Jesus. If we had only that one verse it would suffice to tell us that the teaching of Jesus had really sunk into his soul.

(St. Paul's Equivalent for the 'Kingdom of Heaven' by William Sanday, The Journal of Theological Studies, 1 No 4, 1900, 483, Text and Paragraph Structure Modified)