

The Law Courts Among The Greeks

In this section Paul is dealing with a problem which specially affected the Greeks. The Jews did not ordinarily go to law in the public law-courts at all; they settled things before the elders of the village or the elders of the Synagogue; to them justice was far more a thing to be settled in a family spirit than in a legal spirit. In point of fact the Jewish law expressly forbade a Jew to go to law at all in a non-Jewish court; to do so was considered blasphemy against the divine law of God which he possessed.

It was far otherwise with the Greeks; the Greeks were naturally and characteristically a litigious people. The law courts were in fact one of their chief amusements and entertainments. Going to law was integrally bound up with Greek life. We know the details of Athenian law and when we study them we see what a major part the law courts played in the life of any Athenian citizen; and the situation in Corinth would not be so very different from that at Athens. If there was a dispute in Athens the first attempt to settle it was by private arbitrator. In that event one arbitrator was chosen by each party, and then a third was chosen by agreement between both parties, to be an impartial judge.

If that failed to settle the matter, there was a court known as the Forty. The Forty referred the matter to a public arbitrator and the public arbitrators consisted of all Athenian citizens in their sixtieth year; and any man chosen as a arbitrator had to act whether he liked it or not under penalty of disfranchisement. If the matter was still not settled it had to be referred to a jury court which consisted of two hundred and one citizens for cases involving less than about £50 and four hundred and one for cases involving more than that figure.

There were indeed cases when juries could be as large as anything from one thousand to six thousand citizens. Juries were composed of Athenian citizens over thirty years of age. They were actually paid three obols a day for acting as jurymen. An obol was worth about three halfpence. The citizens who were entitled to act as jurymen assembled in the mornings and were allocated to the cases on trial by lot. It is plain to see that in a Greek city every man was more or less a lawyer and spent a very great part of his time either deciding or listening to law cases. The Greeks were in fact famous, or notorious, for their love of going to law. Not unnaturally, certain of the Greeks had brought their litigious tendencies into the church; and Paul was shocked. His Jewish background made the whole thing seem revolting to him; and his Christian principles made it even more so. "How," he demanded, "can anyone follow the paradoxical course of looking for justice in the presence

of the unjust?" (William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* in *The Daily Study Bible*, pp. 55-56. The second edition was published in 1956).

Homosexuality In The Greco-Roman World

We have left the most unnatural sin to the end -- there were those who were homosexuals. This was the sin which had swept like a cancer through Greek life and which, from Greece, invaded Rome. We can scarcely realize how riddled the ancient world was with it. Even so great a man as Socrates practiced it; Plato's dialogue *The Symposium* is always said to be one of the greatest works on love in the world, but its subject is not natural but unnatural love.

Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors practiced unnatural vice. At this very time Nero was emperor. He had taken a boy called Sporus and had had him castrated. He had then married him with a full marriage ceremony and took him home in procession to his palace and lived with him as wife. With an incredible viciousness Nero had himself married a man called Pythagoras and called him his husband. When Nero was eliminated and Otho came to the throne one of the first things he did was to take possession of Sporus.

Much later than this the emperor Hadrian's name is forever associated with a Bithynian youth called Antinous. He lived with him inseparably, and when he died he deified him and covered the world with his statues and immortalized his sin by calling a star after him. In this particular vice in the time of the early church the world was lost to shame; and there can be little doubt that that was one of the main causes of its degeneracy and the final collapse of its civilization. (Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* in *The Daily Study Bible*, p. 60).