

CAPITOL STUDIES

APRIL 28, 2021 • WEEK 16



SEVEN DEADLY SINS AND CIVIL SERVANTS: SPECIAL TOPICS

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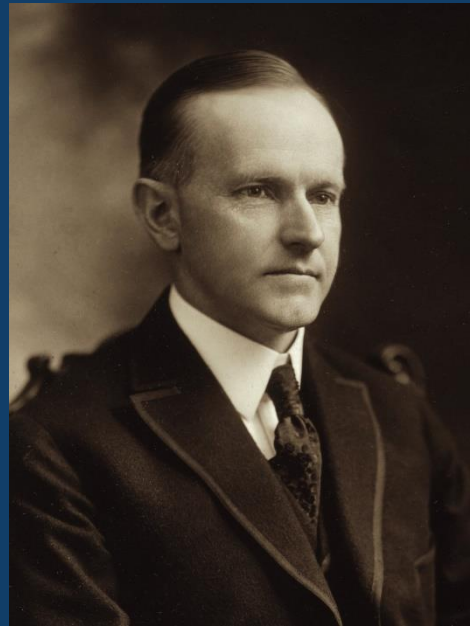


Verse of the Week

Luke 5:31-32

And Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

Over-Taxation and Greed



THE ONLY U.S. PRESIDENT born on July 4 was no verbal cherry bomb. Calm, quiet caution characterized the phlegmatic governor from Massachusetts who entered office as the 30th President in 1923. Few things could make John Calvin Coolidge—nicknamed “Cool Cal”—angry, but among them were big-government wastefulness and larcenous over-taxation. In one of his most famous quotations, “Silent Cal” spoke up to hotly contend, “The collection of any taxes which are not absolutely required, which do not beyond reasonable doubt contribute to the public welfare, is only a species of legalized larceny.”¹

Rev. Perry M. Gauthier, V. D. M.

(This study is adapted from an earlier series by Rev. Gauthier, 1960–2020.)



INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of human government, most people have felt they were “taxed enough already,” but the Bible presents taxation as necessary for civil government. Romans 13:6 explains, “Because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing [—ruling and punishing evil as ministers of God].” However, the deadly sin of greed enters the realm of human economics at every level. In Luke 16, we see a classic case study in individual greed with the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, and in Luke 18, we see the Savior saddened over the greed of a prosperous politico in the story of the Rich Young Ruler. However, in Luke 5, the greed gripping a Galilean named Levi was a hybrid of governmental, individual, and capitalistic greed. Jesus came to cure him of this spiritually deadly disease.

1. JESUS RECRUITS LEVI, THE TAX FARMER

Luke 5:27-32

After healing a paralytic Jesus went out from there and fixed his gaze on a tax collector named Levi sitting elevated in the tax booth, and He said to him, “You must follow Me!”²⁸ And Levi threw everything down, jumped up from his seat, and started the process of following Jesus.²⁹ And Levi created a big reception for Jesus in his house; and there was a big crowd of tax farmers and “other people” who were reclined feasting at the table with those two.³⁰ The Pharisees and their own teacher-scribes began grumbling at Jesus’ disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?”³¹ And Jesus answered and said to them, “It is not those who are healthy who need a doctor, but those who are sick.³² I’ve not come to call the self-righteous but sinners to mind change.”²

In these six verses, Dr. Luke will stabilize the faith of the wealthy Theophilus by showing him that Jesus is a Savior for every sinner—even those most despised in culture. We will see **Evil Restrained**, **Health Regained**, and **Community Maintained**—how the **Prideful Complained** and how **Jesus Explained** His role as a Soul Doctor. Levi’s **Mind** was to be **Retrained** just as Jesus came to do for all who will humbly see their need of Him as their Healer.

2. EVIL RESTRAINED

Luke 5:27

After healing a paralytic Jesus went out from there and fixed his gaze on a tax collector named Levi sitting elevated in the tax booth, and He said to him, “You must follow Me!”

Luke 5 details Jesus’ many ministry duties in the northern Israelite region of Galilee, its sea, and its chief seaport—Capernaum. Jesus called three famous fishermen in His first miracle over nature. He then performed His first physical healing of ten lepers and later, of a roof-lowered paralytic. Jesus then cast His recruiting gaze at Levi, a Jewish tax capitalist (or publican) at work in his tax franchise on the Great Sea’s



northwest shore. Also known as Matthew, he worked for the hated, occupying, oppressive Roman government.

The Romans farmed out the direct taxes and customs-duties to capitalists, on their payment of a certain sum *in publicum*, into the public treasury, whence they were called *publicani*, publicans.... They were often chosen from the dregs of the people, and were so notorious for their extortions that they were habitually included in the same category with harlots.³

In that system, Levi found plenty of room for larceny, extortion, exploitation, loan sharking, and employing thugs to physically intimidate people into paying—beating up those who refused. Graft had greatly gripped the greedy soul of Levi.

TAX/TOLL COLLECTORS WERE DESPISED AS VILE, CORRUPT SNOOPS—THE EQUIVALENT OF HARLOTS, PIMPS, AND INFORMANTS.

Levi's evil, covetous professional choices added insult to the injury of extreme Roman taxation, which Coolidge might have called legalized larceny. Further, R.C. Sproul noted:

The Jews (whom God chastised nationally for robbing Him of their tithes) were the most heavily taxed people in all of world history at that time. Jesus approached Levi at his table and said, "Get away from all this nonsense and follow Me."⁴

Jesus' all-knowing eyes detected that Levi was weary and worldly worn and sensed a genuine compunction. He commanded that Levi *must* follow Him, leaving his evil choices behind.

3. HEALTH WOULD BE REGAINED

Luke 5:28

And Levi threw everything down, jumped up from his seat, and started the process of following Jesus.

Levi left; Levi had levied some big bucks as a non-Christian extortionist, but "The way of the wicked is hard" (Proverbs 13:15). Greed rode Levi hard and put him up wet, leaving him feverishly bone-chilled with a conviction that he really needed *help*. He needed *health*. He needed moral *healing*.

In hope for healing, Levi reasoned: "Jesus of Nazareth has just healed ten lepers and a bed bound paralytic. If He really *is* God, then He can help my suffering, sin-sick soul. God knows I need it! After all, the Lord says of Himself in our Jewish Scriptures in Exodus 15:26, 'I am the Lord that heals you.'"

Luke's verbs are descriptive. Negatively: Levi decisively threw down and left everything (a detail only Luke gives us). Levi left ledgers, boxed up balanced books, and tossed his TurboTax. Positively: he decisively rose from his seat. He began the process of following with the disposition of a ready disciple.





4. LEVI'S COMMUNITY WAS MAINTAINED

Luke 5:29

And Levi created a big reception for Jesus in his house; and there was a big crowd of tax farmers and "other people" who were reclined feasting at the table with those two.

Some call Levi's party his "farewell feast to his associates." He actually intended the opposite. He threw a welcoming party to celebrate that he had left his wicked ways because he had chosen a new Lord—Jesus, the friend of sinners. Though newly jobless, he would use his ample wealth and big house to entertain a big crowd of crooked cronies, tax "strategists," and "others" (Luke's polite label for the next verse's notorious sinners).

Levi had not quickly forgotten the many sins of which he had been forgiven nor the sinful state of his coworkers and associates. He wanted them too to meet Jesus. This dinner party was literally "a receiving." This was not a bawdy beer bash with all his bad boys; Levi paid a price (financially and socially) to host a big "come, meet, and follow Jesus" reception.

**"A CONVERTED MAN WILL NOT WISH
TO GO TO HEAVEN ALONE." – J.C. RYLE⁵**

The Jews customarily reclined at their feasts. "Broad couches were provided, each of which was large enough to accommodate several persons; each person lay on his left side resting on the elbow and taking the food with his right hand."⁶ Throughout the world, shared-table meals meant shared values, shared intimacy, and acceptance—community was maintained.

5. PRIDEFUL SINNERS COMPLAINED

Luke 5:30

The Pharisees and their own teacher-scribes began grumbling at Jesus' disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?"

Usually, when heartfelt, effective ministry is happening, either malcontents infiltrate to disrupt community or outside complainers lob in grenades of grumbling. The Pharisees chose the latter. These devout, Jewish lay leaders followed professional, seminary-level teacher-scribes. Bible bullies with big egos and small hearts, they peered into this party, grumbling their disapproval. Dr. Luke used a verb that tells us much:

The verb for grumbling, "**egonguzon**" (ἐγόγγυζον), is a graphic, emotive verb whose pronunciation sounds like the action. One can almost hear the grumbling described by "**egonguzon**" ...Luke reserves this word... for complaints about Jesus' relationship to outsiders.... It was also used in the Old Testament to describe Israel's complaining against God in the desert [wilderness], so that often the term describes inappropriate grumbling.⁷



True to form, they also lacked the courage and integrity to speak to the leader (Jesus) or the host (Levi). They did an end-run with their judgmental complaints, attacking Jesus' disciples—mere stage props⁸ at this juncture. They could not hold their tongues like “Silent Cal” Coolidge, so they lobbed a purely rhetorical question into the reception: “Why does your group extend community acceptance to such nasty sinners?” Their haughty disdain for the riffraff inside prevented them from attending Levi's reception. These holier-than-thou, salvation-by-separation religionists failed to diagnose themselves as the sickest of the sick.

6. “DR. JESUS” EXPLAINED

Luke 5:31

And Jesus answered and said to them, “It is not those who are healthy who need a doctor, but those who are sick.”

Jesus tackled their end-run gripe with a statement soaked with irony. Acknowledging the spiritual sickness of Levi's party mates, Jesus offered a medical metaphor for His ministry. The Pharisees, Jesus said, were literally “hygienic,” spiritually germfree with the cleanest noses in town (or so they thought). They surely would not mind if He, a physician of souls, gave His attention and care to those who literally “had the crud.”

**A PHYSICIAN ENTERS A SICKROOM
NOT BECAUSE HE DELIGHTS IN DISEASE
OR REJOICES IN SUFFERING.**

Jesus was a healer of souls and had blazed the path here for all soul-winners, reminding us that the self-satisfied are the hardest to reach. They even resist and resent efforts to get them to the office of the Great Physician.

7. MINDS MUST BE RETRAINED

Luke 5:32

I've not come to call the self-righteous but sinners to mind change.

Jesus was indeed “the God that heals” His people—any who are willing to come to Him and drop their sin, guilt, and misery. Levi left his sinful situation and found healing and forgiveness because Levi changed his mind; Levi repented. Jesus told the Pharisees why He came to earth, to Israel, to Galilee, to Capernaum, and to Levi's party mansion. He came with a psychological-spiritual goal: to change lives by changing minds. Lives like Levi's—and lives like ours—are messed up because our minds are messed up. Jesus' mission focused on repentance (literally mind changing) which always leads to life change.

**“RIGHT LIVING COMES FROM RIGHT THINKING, AND RIGHT THINKING COMES FROM THINKING RIGHTLY ABOUT GOD.”
– DR. EARL RADMACHER⁹**





CHANGING OUR MINDS ABOUT JESUS

Dear Senator: Take comfort knowing this about ourselves and about our great God:

- LEVI WAS GREEDY.
- NOAH GOT DRUNK.
- ABRAHAM LIED.
- MOSES MURDERED.
- DAVID FORNICATED.
- JONAH FLED.
- PETER DEFECTED.
- PAUL PERSECUTED.
- WE REBELLED.

JESUS REDEEMS.

A fellow sinner for whom Christ died,

Rev. Perry M. Gauthier

FOOTNOTES

1. Calvin Coolidge, *Inaugural Address*, 1924, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/inaugural-address-50>.
2. All Scripture quotations are from my own translational paraphrase, based on the *New American Standard Bible 1995 Update*, made carefully, reverently, and respectfully after diligent study work in the original Greek Scriptures.
3. Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament: Volume 1*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901, pgs. 282-283.
4. R. C. Sproul, "The Call of Levi," sermon preached on September 26, 2015, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/call-levi/>.
5. J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, "Commentary on Luke 5," Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860, <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/ryl/luke-5.html>.
6. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel*, Augsburg Publishing House, 1946, pg. 308.
7. Darrell L. Bock, *The Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament*, "Luke 1:1 – 9:50," Baker Books, 1994, pg. 496.
8. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997, pg. 245.
9. Earl Radmacher was paraphrasing a part of the *Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship Report, Volume I: The Nature of God and His Purpose for the World*, Longmans, Green and Co., 1924, which originally said, "All right living depends on right thinking and... all right thinking means thinking rightly about God," https://www.google.com/books/edition/Commission_Reports/14ZbAAAAAMAAJ/.

Personal Study Notes

Verse of the Week

Luke 5:31-32

And Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."



WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Meets during the 107th Legislature's First Session

SENATORS

6:45–8:00 A.M. Wednesdays
Room 1022, Facilitated by
Sen. Clements & Sen. Arch

STAFF

12:00 P.M. Wednesdays
Room 1022, Facilitated by
Joel Hunt



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