

Doctrine of the Publican

1. A Publican was a subordinate collector of indirect taxes, import and export dues, road money, bridge tolls, harbor dues, etc. The New Testament publicans, mentioned only in the Synoptic Gospels, are to be distinguished from the Roman Publicani, the name Publicani never appears in the New Testament.

2. The actual collection was usually performed by native employees who would bid for the right to collect the indirect taxes. Zacchaeus, was called "a chief publican" (an **Architelones**), he may have been the contractor for the revenues of Jericho with collectors under him. At least he supervised a collecting district.

3. Tax farmers (Publicani) were used to collect taxes from the provincials on owned wealth. Taxes were levied against land, homes and other real estate, slaves, animals, personal, items and monetary wealth. Rome, in eliminating its own burden for this process, would put the collection of taxes up for auction every few years. The Publicani would bid for the right to collect in particular regions, and pay the state in advance of this collection.

4. Most of the New Testament publicans, like Levi, were customhouse employees. They might have their "place of toll" at city gates, on public roads, or bridges.

4.1 Levi's post (**Telunion**) at Capernaum apparently was near the sea on the important trade route entering Galilee from Damascus.

5. The publicans were hated and despised by the scribes and people alike. The hostility is evident in the expressions.

- "publicans and sinners"

Mat 9:10 And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many **publicans** and **sinners** came and sat down with him and his disciples.

Mar 2:15 And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many **publicans** and **sinners** sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him.

Luk 5:30 But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with **publicans** and **sinners**?

Luk 5:31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.

Luk 7:34 The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of **publicans** and **sinners**!

Luk 7:35 But wisdom is justified of all her children.

Luk 7:36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

Luk 7:37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,
Luk 7:38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

Luk 7:39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

Luk 15:1 Then drew near unto him all the **publicans** and **sinner**s for to hear him.

Luk 15:2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

Luk 15:3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying,

Luk 15:4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

- "publicans and harlots"

Mat 21:28 But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard.

Mat 21:29 He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.

Mat 21:30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.

Mat 21:31 Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the **publicans** and the **harlots** go into the kingdom of God before you.

Mat 21:32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the **publicans** and the **harlots** believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

6. This antagonism came from several circumstances. They were victims of the ingrained human dislike of paying taxes. Customhouse officials are never popular. The very nature of their work offered many opportunities for extortion, their chief sin as recognized by John the Baptist.

Luk 3:12 Then came also **publicans** to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?

Luk 3:13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

Luk 3:14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

7. Since the payment of taxes to a foreign power was hateful and commonly regarded as unlawful; the publicans were regarded as traitors to their nation, willing tools of their oppressors.

7.1 This hatred of publicans was also strengthened by religious considerations. Since their work threw them into constant touch with Gentiles, they were considered ceremonially unclean, hence, to be shunned.

8. Christ's association with the publicans was not intended to clear their character altogether of current evaluations.

Mat 5:46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the **publicans** the same?

Mat 5:47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

Mat 5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

9. Their extortion and oppression was as abhorrent to Him as the formalism and hypocrisy of the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees. They too stood in need of His salvation.

Luk 19:8 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

Luk 19:9 And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

Luk 19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

10. Although to eat with them was regarded incompatible with the character of a rabbi, Jesus justified His association with the publicans on the basis of their need.

Mat 9:11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with **publicans** and sinners?

Mat 9:12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

Mat 9:13 But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

11. The bitterest complaints were hurled against Christ because of this association with publicans.

Luk 7:34 The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of **publicans** and sinners!

Luk 7:35 But wisdom is justified of all her children.

11.1 Jesus illustrated the behavior of the Pharisees from the games of children which he had probably played as a boy. If someone proposed that they "play wedding," the others would not dance; if one suggested that they "play funeral," the others would not mourn. No matter what was suggested, they would not be pleased. They called John crazy because he abstained from luxuries; they accused Jesus of being a glutton and a reveler because he attended feasts.

11.2 The ministry of John was more like the latter: those who wanted the mournful music. He came with a very solemn message, calling upon people to recognize the seriousness of their condition as sinners needing a Savior, but the Pharisees turned away with a sneer and said “John, hath a demon.” Jesus came with a more joyous message, mingling with publicans and sinners, as He proclaimed salvation to all who would trust Him; but the legalists turned coldly away, declaring Him to be a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But Jesus said, “Wisdom is justified of all her children, both the ascetic and the antinomian.

11.3 Our Lord made clear there is room for all-- and that is true wisdom. Or as the song writer said “there is room at the cross.” Yes Jesus said “He will be glorified in both messages and in whoever accepts His kingdom message will be saved.

12. Christ found the publicans, though said to be unclean, refreshingly free from the hypocrisy and self-righteousness of the Pharisees.

Luk 18:9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

Luk 18:10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a **publican**.

Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

Luk 18:12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

Luk 18:13 And the **publican**, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful (**Hilaskomai** means to be placated, conciliated or be appeased and propitiated) to me a sinner.

Luk 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

13. Whatever morality they had was real, not conventional. His choice of Matthew as one of His disciples made a deep impression, although there is no trace of offense on the part of the disciples at the call of this publican.

Mar 2:14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

Mar 2:15 And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many **publicans** and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him.

Mar 2:16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with **publicans** and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with **publicans** and sinners?

Mar 2:17 When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

14. Abhorred by others, the publicans were attracted to Jesus because He showed Himself "a friend of publicans."

Luk 7:34 The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!

Luk 7:35 But wisdom is proved right by all her children."

Luk 15:1 Then drew near unto him all the **publicans** and sinners for to hear him.

Luk 15:2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.