

# STONES, SPECKS, PLANKS, GNATS AND CAMELS

J.J. Turner, Ph.D.

Roy was with a group of Christians, who after Sunday morning church services, were having lunch in a popular local restaurant. As the conversations switched from topic to topic, one of the church leaders began to talk about a couple's marriage. One lady chimed in, *"Poor Edith, I don't know how she has put up with Charlie as long as she had."* Several shook their heads in agreement.

One man remarked, *"I've played golf with him, and from remarks he made, I knew the marriage was in trouble. Those poor children."*

*"I'm a close friend of Edith,"* an older lady said, *"she has confided in me that Charlie has a drinking problem and dabbles in gambling. Their marriage is headed for a divorce."*

Soon the conversation was aflame. Charlie and Edith's marriage was consumed faster than the bread. Satan was having a field day.

Roy just sat there taking it all in. He didn't say a word. He couldn't believe this group of pious church goers, who had just attended church, was gossiping about the marriage of their brother and sister in Christ. Questions ran through his mind: *"What should I do?" "Should I dare and say anything?" "This is wrong!"* Looking around the table he noted several of those who were engaged in the gossip had major issues in their lives now, some had issues in times past. He remained quiet and said a silent prayer for the group. What would you have done?

## The Tipping Point

Roy was caught in a tipping point. On the one hand he could have joined in the gossip about the marriage; on the other hand he could have condemned those who were gossiping about the couple, or choose, as he did, to pray about the situation. It was a tough moment to be in.

Whether by intent, accident or spiritual maturity, Roy avoided being guilty of an attitude condemned by Jesus. It would have been easy to be a judge and juror in condemning the gossipers and the couple's marriage. Roy made the right choice.

Here is what Jesus warned about relative to arbitrarily judging a person's motives, status, and behavior:

1. Early one morning while teaching in the temple, the clergy of the day—the scribes and Pharisees—brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They quoted Scripture to Jesus in an attempt to see if He believed it and would obey it. They thought they had finally trapped Jesus. *So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, ‘He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first’* (John 8:7). Amazingly, these dogmatic legalist had enough conscious to accept what Jesus said—they were sinners too—and slip away (John 8:9-13). There are still rock throwers.
2. It is a known psychological truth, as well as a commonly observed truth, that one way people build themselves up in their own eyes, and hopefully in the eyes of others, is by finding fault with others by discrediting a physical feature, a certain behavior, or status in life. After giving a powerful lesson on the wrong of judging others, Jesus said: *“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! FIRST remove the plank from your own eye, THEN you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother’s eye’* (Luke 6:37-42). There are speck detectives today.
3. It is so easy to miss our own faults and needs, but it is easy to see them in others. The scribes and Pharisees, the “holier than thou” religions leaders among the Jews, carried a magnifying glass in order to see and point out even the little wrongs in the behavior of others. A common practice in the first century was to use a piece of linen cloth to strain out gnats and substances from water, grape juice and wine. To the masters of this practice, Jesus said: *“Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!”* (Matthew 23:24). If we can see the little wrongs in a person’s life, surely we should be able to see the “big wrongs” in our lives. There are gnat strainers today.

To the sinful tendency of man to find and point out flaws, weaknesses, and wrongs in others; these three portions of Scripture declare it is wrong and unacceptable to the Lord. When we fall into the status of judging, we set up a reciprocity system of reaping what we have sown. Here are the words of Jesus: *“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge,*

*you WILL BE JUDGED; and with what measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:1, 2).* When you throw dirt in the fan it will blow back on you.

### **Some Ways Stone Throwing, Speck Finding, and Gnat Straining is Practiced**

In our tendency of pointing out the flaws, weaknesses, and sins of others, it is a way to take the spotlight off those same qualities in our lives. Here are some of the numerous ways stone throwing, speck finding, and gnat straining occurs:

1. Belittling a person who is not able to defend himself or herself.
2. Verbalizing what another person ought to do, even though that person is not present: “You know John ought to...”.
3. Speaking about a person with words you would never want anyone to say about you.
4. Smoldering inside without overtly expressing it to the other person.
5. Continually making negative remarks, in a clandestine way, about a person. “Cutting the person down inch by inch.”
6. When something positive is said about a person, you are quick to discredit it by making a negative remark.
7. In subtle ways strategizing and pursuing ways to undercut or sabotage a person’s reputation; finding ways to get them dismissed or replaced by finding faults.
8. In a pious gesture of concern about a person’s problem by saying “We need to pray for...”. Making a prayer request on behalf of another, but revealing hurtful truths.
9. The perpetual attitude of always finding fault with others: waitresses, clerks, cab drivers, police officers, teachers, leaders, classes, or races of people.
10. By passing judgment on their eternal destiny—heaven or hell. Questioning a person’s relationship with God. Being a judge of “faithfulness.”

### **How to Avoid Stone Throwing, Speck Picking, and Gnat Straining**

If these attitudes have become habituations they will be more difficult to stop than occasional practices. A dyed-in-the-wool habit doesn’t die an easy death. It has become part of “who we are”. It is our normal self—“that’s just the way I am.”

While it is not easy to stop arbitrary and judgmental behavior, it can, with God’s help and power, be overcome. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Remember there is a difference between offences that are real against you, than ones you've imagined. Jesus gave instructions on how to deal with real issues with other people (cf. Matthew 18:15-20). Go to the person!
2. Spend some quiet time and honestly analyze whether or not you are a stone thrower, speck observer, or gnat strainer. This is tough but absolutely essential.
3. Ask your spouse, parents, a close friend, etc. if they see any of these tendencies in you. Don't argue or refute—listen prayerfully. Truth has nothing to fear.
4. After you have practiced one of the three attitudes, ask yourself: (1) Why you needed to do it? (2) What benefit did you gain? (3) How did it build the other person up?
5. Continually pray for strength and wisdom to stop the habit (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17). God will help (Ephesians 3:20).
6. Start making it a practice to kindly stick up for the person who is being judged. Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
7. Remember that judging the behavior of others doesn't change our lives for the better. In fact, it brings God's displeasure which isn't encouragement to continue judging.

When the woman was taken in adultery, and those who had condemned her had slipped away, Jesus didn't lecture or sermonize her about sexual immorality, dangle her over the fires of hell, or tell her how she was. Relative to condemning her, Jesus said, *"I don't accuse you either; go and sin no more."* Therefore, you can be aware of sin and wrongs without throwing a rock at the person. Encouragement and forgiveness are the higher roads to walk as a Christian.

How do you intentionally keep from being a stone thrower, speck hunter, and gnat strainer?