

# Have We Cast The First Stone?

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There is much controversy in the last several years about capital punishment in the United States. Most states have abolished it as we know, calling it cruel and unusual punishment. However, Ancient Israel practiced capital punishment.

Let's go to Leviticus 20:10 as one example. There are many in the Old Testament. God instituted capital punishment with the nation of Israel.

***Leviticus 20:10.*** *And the man that commits adultery with another man's wife, even he that commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. (KJV)*

God authorized capital punishment.

In the U.S. there is great controversy today about how to administer capital punishment. A century ago they had firing squads and hangings and, of course, the electric chair. Now lethal injection is the most common among those states that have capital punishment. It is currently under attack as cruel and inhumane.

Ancient Israel administered capital punishment by stoning.

Let's go to Deuteronomy 17:2-7. There were very specific instructions from God as to how this should be done. There were obviously various crimes that warranted capital punishment in God's eyes.

***Deuteronomy 17:2:*** *If there be found among you, within any of thy gates which the LORD your God gives you, man or woman, that has wrought wickedness in the sight of the LORD thy God, in transgressing his covenant, (KJV)*

This is the guideline.

- 3) *And has gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded;*
- 4) *And it be told to you [you hear of this], and you have heard of it, and enquired diligently, and, behold, it be true, ... (KJV)*

An investigation is made and it is determined that this cursing God be true.

- 4b) *... and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel:*
- 5) *Then shall you bring forth that man or that woman, which have committed that wicked thing, unto your gates, even that man or that woman, and shall stone them with stones, till they die.*

6) *At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.*

7) *The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall put the evil away from among you. (KJV)*

God gives a Biblical safeguard here to protect the innocent, because you can't do it with one witness. If one man had a grudge against another or wanted to eliminate this person, then by manipulating the crowd he could get this person stoned. So it had to be at least two witnesses.

A second safeguard is that the one doing the accusing had to throw the first stone. The message was that you better be sure of your accusation because you're going to be right in front and you will throw the first stone. Also the accuser, if he has any kind of conscience, he thinks he is going to throw the first stone and if the accuser wrongly accused this person or got a second witness to be in collaboration, he would have to think about that for the rest of his life.

Also if someone down the road found out about it, then he would be stoned. So God put in safeguards to make sure that this was administered only when a true crime has been committed.

It's not like today with capital punishment, because capital punishment is administered remotely off in some prison in some dark room in the basement and is done by others that were not involved in the offense. God made sure that the capital punishment was administered in front of everyone that was involved or saw it or the tribe or clan or village that was involved.

They were stoned outside of the camp as Israel was traveling or outside of the village or hamlet after they settled in the Promised Land.

Let's go to Leviticus 24 and read verses 10 through 17. The whole local congregation was involved in this. This is a specific account.

***Leviticus 24:10.*** *And the son of an Israelitish woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel: and this son of the Israelitish woman and a man of Israel strove together in the camp; (KJV)*

They had an argument. Maybe some blows were exchanged. We don't know.

11) *And the Israelitish woman's son blasphemed the name of the Lord, and cursed. And they brought him unto Moses: (and his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan:)*

12) *And they put him in ward [NKJ says: "in custody"], that the mind of the LORD might be showed them.*

13) *And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying,*  
14) *Bring forth him that has cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head ... (KJV)*

Affirming the decision that he was going to die.

14b) *... and let all the congregation stone him. (KJV)*

We see here that he was taken outside the camp or village or hamlet and he was stoned by those directly involved and they were all involved in the stoning. Also their children saw what was going on.

15) *And you shall speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curses his God shall bear his sin.*

16) *And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death. (KJV)*

God didn't make any differentiation of their racial background or where they came from. If they were with Israel, they had to abide by the law.

17) *And he that kills any man shall surely be put to death. (KJV)*

So capital punishment, in this manner, was a graphic, physical demonstration of the end result of sin.

**Romans 6:23.** *For the wages of sin is death ... (KJV)*

So man, woman, child could visibly see the end result of sin. It wasn't a fast death. It was a bloody death and it impressed upon the people that there are certain things that God will not tolerate.

With all of that in mind, we want to turn to an incident that happened to Jesus Christ in John, chapter 8. I know you are familiar with this.

**John 8:1.** *Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.*

2) *And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them.*

3) *And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery... (KJV)*

They were in a group and they dragged this woman, probably threw her down onto the ground and said, "This woman just committed adultery."

It's interesting to note from the Jamison, Fausset and Brown Commentary; it says, "It is allowed that adultery was exceedingly common at this time, so common that they ceased to put the law in force against it." The priests, the Sanhedrin, the council did not enforce the death penalty against adultery as God prescribed, but because it was so common they would have to probably put half the males to death.

It sounds like today. Nobody will go to jail for committing adultery. That was not true a hundred and fifty years ago or two hundred years ago. Let me give you an example of my grandfather, Cole Railston. He was the foreman of one of the largest ranches in New Mexico. It was the B Cross T. In the center of the state is the Black Range of mountains and the ranch ran seventy miles north to south and thirty-five miles east to west. As the foreman he got to know a lot of cattlemen and bankers. The ranch was owned by wealthy men in Chicago. He did the negotiations with the bank and the railroads to get the cattle shipped back east, and he was wholly responsible. As a result, he got to know a lot of people and became good friends with a prominent banker in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This banker lived on the top floor of one of the best hotels in Albuquerque. He was married to a woman who was much younger than him. When my granddad would come into town, they would have dinner, a few drinks and play poker. So my granddad knew this man and his wife quite well. One time he went to Albuquerque and heard of this account. The banker went on a trip. Of course, there were no telephones, no texting or cell phones. He said he would be back on a certain day, but for whatever reason he came back a couple of days early. He went up to his suite and found his wife in bed with another man committing adultery. The people wore firearms back then. He walked in and saw what was going on and he pulled out his gun and shot the man and killed him. Then he calmly put his gun in his holster and took out his knife and cut the man's testicles off. Then he stabbed his wife through the heart and wrapped the testicles around the handle of the knife. He went to the basin and washed his hands. He went to the sheriff and told him what he had done. Guess what. There were no charges made because he was upholding that law at that time. You don't commit adultery and if you do, you are going to forfeit your life.

Now today as with the time of Jesus Christ, nothing happens at all. With that in mind, this woman had been thrown in their midst who had committed adultery and Christ knew that the priests didn't enforce that law at the time and so, obviously Christ knew something was afoot.

*3b) ... and when they had set her in the midst,*

*4) They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.  
(KJV)*

That should set off a red flag or two.

*5) Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what say you? (KJV)*

In the introduction we read a scripture that talked about capital punishment for adultery, but let's go to another. This is specific, the law of Moses. It was supposed to be upheld, was not upheld and everybody knew this scripture.

**Deuteronomy 22:23.** *If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her;  
24) Then you shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and you shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city [she didn't resist]; and the man, because he has humbled his neighbor's wife: so you shall put away evil from among you. (KJV)*

So here is the group and Christ was talking to them. They dragged this woman in and threw her down. They said, "We caught her in the very act." Christ knows the law. The first thing that comes to mind is ... where is the man? The law says both of them should be punished. Well, the man wasn't there. This was obviously a set-up. A man coerced this woman into committing adultery. The man disappeared, probably paid off by the hierarchy and then she was dragged in front of Jesus Christ. Back to John 8.

**John 8:6.** *This they said, tempting [to test or to try] him, that they might have to accuse him ... (KJV)*

You see the scribes and Pharisees wanted to put Christ in a "no win" situation so no matter what way He chose, death or life, they would have reason to accuse Him. If Christ said that she should die, here's the problem that they reasoned that Jesus Christ would have. The Romans had taken away the authority to administer capital punishment from the Jews. Only Pilate could authorize capital punishment. He had taken that away when Judea was conquered.

In addition to that, Roman law at the time did not authorize capital punishment for adultery. It was not a capital offence. So they could accuse Christ to Pilate if Christ said that she should die. They would accuse Christ to Pilate saying, "This man has taken over your authority to decide life and death in a local matter."

On the other hand, if Christ said that she should live then the scribes and Pharisees could accuse Him of breaking God's law which we just read. They could accuse Him of condoning adultery which was the crime this woman was accused of and which is against the law of God. Never mind that they never enforced it, but they could accuse Him no matter which way Christ went. So the brilliance of Christ comes out in the answer in the latter part of verse 6.

*6b) ... But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.*

*7) They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" (NLT)*

*8) And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. (KJV)*

It's obvious that He was communicating to the scribes and Pharisees by what He wrote on the ground. It was obvious that they knew that He knew their sins. We don't know exactly what was written, but it's pretty obvious that's what occurred.

9) *And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience ... (KJV)*

They knew that Jesus knew what they had done in their past.

9b) *... went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.*

10) *When Jesus had lifted up himself ... (KJV)*

She was standing and He was kneeling. He stood up eye to eye with no one else around. They were by themselves.

10b) *... and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are your accusers? has no man condemned you?*

11) *She said, No man, Lord ... (KJV)*

I'm speculating, but it's interesting the wording, "No man, Lord." I believe she deeply understood by then who she was talking to. Is this the Messiah? This man behaves like no other man I've ever seen.

11b) *... And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn you: go, and sin no more. (KJV)*

This is one of the most beautiful examples in the Bible of mercy and forgiveness, but it ends with an admonition; *"I forgive you, but don't do it again. Stop your behavior."*

In verse 7, this is the key as we get to the subject.

7) *... He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. (KJV)*

This begs a question for us today. Have we ever cast the first stone, or have we even been eager sometimes to cast the first stone? Have we been in that position?

To study this, the first item we want to bring out is the fact that all of us have sinned, every one of us, the scribes, the Pharisees, this woman. Only Jesus Christ has not sinned.

Turn to Ecclesiastes 7:20. These are basic. We want to establish before we get into the meat of the sermon that all of us have sinned. All of us are guilty if we do not repent of those sins. Thankfully they can be wiped away by the blood of Jesus Christ.

***Ecclesiastes 7:20.*** *For there is not a just man upon earth, that does good, and sins not. (KJV)*

This tells us that no matter how good we are or how hard we try we still sin because we are human.

Let's go to Romans 3:23. I think this was the first scripture I ever memorized when I came into the church. In Romans 6:23 says, *the wages of sin is death*, and Romans 3:23 are tied together.

**Romans 3:23.** *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (KJV)*

Then finally in 1 John 8. John leads us to point number two because if we ignore our sins then we have a problem.

**1 John 8.** *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves ... (KJV)*

We are self-deceivers.

*8b) ... and the truth is not in us. (KJV)*

If we convince ourselves that we have no sin. With the fact in mind that all of us have sinned, let's ask the question:

### **How can we cast the first stone?**

We're going to talk about four ways. How can we cast the first stone?

#### **1. The first way we can cast the first stone is by ignoring or diminishing our own sins.**

John said that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. If the scribes and Pharisees had ignored their sins, they would have stoned this woman, but by Christ writing on the ground, He would not let them get away with that. It's easy to ignore our sins. It's easy to diminish our sins when we focus on the sins of someone else. When we focus on someone else's sins, our sins get blurred and pushed away.

Let's turn to Matthew 7. The Sermon on the Mount. Christ is bringing in the basic principles of Christianity that were amplified throughout the New Testament over and over. This applies directly that we cannot ignore and cannot diminish our own sins.

**Matthew 7:1.** *Judge not, that you be not judged.*

*2) For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete [administer], it shall be measured to you again. (KJV)*

In verse 3, we get to the crux of the matter.

*3) And why behold the mote [speck] that is in your brother's eye, but consider not the beam that is in your own eye? (KJV)*

So focused on somebody else's sin and so ignorant or diminishing one's own sins.

*4) Or how will you say to your brother, Let me pull out the mote out of your eye; and, behold, a beam is in your own eye? (KJV)*

This 2x4 is sticking out of your eye and you want to get up close and pull this little speck out of somebody else's eye.

*5) You hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of your own eye; and then you shall see clearly to cast out the mote out of your brother's eye. (KJV)*

It's a red flag for when I'm counseling, that the mark of a converted mind is when there is a problem, they look at themselves first. "What have I done? How have I contributed to this problem?" That's the mark of a converted mind.

The mark of a mind that ignores or diminishes one's own sins doesn't say that and focuses on the sins of the other. A converted mind looks first at the self. That's what Christ is saying here. It's so easy to ignore or minimize our own sins when we focus on other people's sins. But, as we just read, all of us have sinned. It's so easy to ignore our sins when people offend us. When people offend us, it gets our emotions involved and that just blots out our own sins. We shouldn't be doing that. It's so easy to ignore our sins when we're in the process of condemning someone else. When we get up a head of steam, the emotions get involved and the adrenalin starts going and we are railing on someone else and there is not thought for our own sins.

When we ignore our own sins, guess what? We become like Satan. The philosopher and author, George Santyana, who lived from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s. He lived to be 91 years old. He said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." So if we ignore or minimize our own sins, we are more likely to sin again, because we are diminishing our own sins. The fact is, we need to learn from our sins and we need to not repeat our sins. That is only possible when we admit our sins and we go to God and Christ and ask for forgiveness and ask for the power of His holy spirit to keep us from doing it again.

God always gives a solution. Any time there is a problem, He brings out a principle in scripture that we have to pay attention to, He always gives us a solution. Here is a solution to minimizing or ignoring our own sins and, thereby, we cast the first stone. We focus on this at Passover time, but this is something that should be done daily.

***2 Corinthians 13:5. Examine yourselves ... (KJV)***

We examine ourselves relative to Jesus Christ and His example.

*5b) ... whether you be in the faith; ... (KJV)*



Put yourself to the test. Put yourself on trial.

*5b continued) ... prove your own selves. Know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates? (KJV)*

The first way we can cast the first stone is by ignoring our sins.

## **2. The second way we can cast the first stone is by allowing ourselves to fight.**

I grew up in west Texas in El Paso. That's right on the Mexican border. The southern tip of the Rocky Mountains ends at El Paso and the Rio Grande down at the foot of the mountain. It's about a 7,000 – 7,500 foot mountain. It's not like mountains here in the northwest. There isn't a tree on that mountain. There is cactus and scrub brush, but it's mostly rock. El Paso was built in a "U" shape around the tip of the mountain and then the Rio Grande and then Mexico. Out from that is pure desert with jack rabbits, sage brush, tumble weeds, heat and lots of dirt and rocks. As kids growing up, rock fighting was common. Somebody would build a fort and pile rocks in there and some wood shields. Another group would storm the fort and throw rocks back and forth, and occasionally somebody would get hurt and blood would flow, but that was just entertainment back in those days. There was no T.V. or anything like that, so rock fighting was common.

When we fight, we figuratively, not literally, cast the first stone. Later we will talk about what happens when someone throws the first stone at us. Right now we are talking about casting the first stone, starting a fight.

Let's go to Isaiah 1:15. Christ, the God of the Old Testament is condemning Israel. He is condemning them for their mind and the fact that they fought.

*Isaiah 1:15. And when you spread forth your hands ... (KJV)*

This is a phrase that implies prayer. In other words, they prayed most often by going down on their knees with their head toward the ground with their hands spread out on the ground. So this is the implication.

*15b) ... I will hide mine eyes from you: yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear ... (KJV)*

Now He tells why He won't hear.

*15 continued) ... your hands are full of blood. (KJV)*

Today we're not going out with swords and hacking people up, but the fact is that our mind can be full of blood. Our mind can be full of fighting. Our mind can be full of vengeance and getting even.

The Apostle James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ, talks about the source of this fighting. This is a familiar scripture.

**James 4:1.** *From whence come wars and fighting among you? Don't they come, even from your lusts that war in your members?*

2) *You lust, and have not: you kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain ... (KJV)*

Of course, there is a spiritual and physical ramification. You can kill physically, but you can also kill spiritually. We can commit murder in our mind.

2b) *... you fight and war, yet you have not, because you ask not. (KJV)*

You're asking for the wrong things. You want power, position, material goods or whatever it might be.

3) *You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts. (KJV)*

The motivation in the prayer was to satisfy lusts. The motivation for our prayers should be to satisfy God and do the will of God. They had it all wrong.

4) *You adulterers and adulteresses ... (KJV)*

He's talking spiritually here. When we put something before God, we are committing idolatry and we're violating the marriage covenant between Christ and the church.

4b) *... Don't you know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? [It's the enemy of God] Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. (KJV)*

He said, "You have your mind on the wrong things, and as a result, you're caving into your lusts and you're fighting."

5) *Do you think that the scripture says in vain, The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy?*

He is quoting Genesis 8:21. The margin says, "*lusts enviously.*"

If we have the human spirit, Satanic spirit in us, it lusts enviously, to want something that someone else has and to take it for ourselves. Where you see fighting, Satan is there. He is in the middle of a fight. It doesn't make any difference if it's between spouses or within a local church or the churches of God. Satan is there. Remember Isaiah 14: "*I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be the most high.*" He fought to gain what he did not have. We see the scars of that fight in the solar system to this very day. So where fighting is, Satan is there.

As I said before, God always gives us a solution. He gives us a solution to fighting and thereby casting the first stone.

*6)... But he gives more grace. Wherefore he says, God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble. (KJV)*

The humble mind says, "I don't deserve that. I don't need that. It's not good for me."

*7) Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil ... (KJV)*

This is a promise.

*7b) ... and he will flee from you.*

*8) Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded.*

*...*

*10) Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. (KJV)*

Submit, draw close to God and humility. That is part of the solution.

He gives us another solution in 1 Thessalonians 5:15. Here is how we eliminate fighting. It's very simple.

**1 Thessalonians 5:15.** *See that none render evil for evil unto any (man)... (KJV)*

If somebody does evil to you, don't return it with more evil. Christ said the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount.

*15b) ... but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all. (KJV)*

So the antidote for fighting is to return evil with good.

Peter says the same thing with a little different words in 1 Peter 3:9. He talks about evil, but he also talks about slander. In the King James, it's translated *railing*, but it means someone talking badly about someone else.

**1 Peter 3:9.** *Not rendering evil for evil ... (KJV)*

It's the same thing Paul said and the same thing Christ said.

*9b) ... or railing for railing ... (KJV)*

This means if someone slanders you, don't slander them back. Here Peter goes even further.

*9 continued) ... but contrariwise blessing; knowing that you are thereunto called ... (KJV)*

We are called to return evil with good.

*9 Continued) ... that you should inherit a blessing. (KJV)*

If we return evil with good, we inherit a blessing and that blessing is eternal life in God's Kingdom.

So the way we can cast the first stone is by fighting and engaging in those kind of battles. We've seen all too much of that in God's church over the years.

### **3. The third way we can cast the first stone is by judging our brothers and sisters and judging others.**

Let's continue in James.

***James 4:11.** Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaks evil of his brother, and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law, and judges the law: but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge. (KJV)*

The Greek word here for "judges" is Strong's 2919 and it means to condemn or sentence someone in your mind. We've all done it. We've condemned people, we've found them guilty in our own mind and we have judged them and in too many cases, we've gossiped about them or slandered them.

In condemning others, we elevate ourselves and that is part of human nature that we must look out for. Remember the parable in Luke 18 about the Pharisee and the publican. When you read the whole account, there is a room where they were standing and the publican was in the shadows in the corner. He had his head bowed down and he was beating his chest and he said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

Now the Pharisee is most likely in the middle of the room with light all around him, he is looking up to God as though he is right there with God and he says, "God, I am so thankful that I'm not like this creep over here in the corner. I fast twice in the week, I pay tithes of everything I have. Aren't I wonderful! I know you love me and I know I have favored status with You and I am head and shoulders above this tax collector over here in the corner."

When we judge others, our brothers and sisters, in essence, that is what we are doing.

Let's go to 2 Corinthians 10. We've read it many times before out of the King James. I'm going to read it from the New Living Translation because it's a little more sarcastic and it brings out the point. Paul is saying:

**2 Corinthians 10:12.** *Oh, don't worry; we wouldn't dare say that we are as wonderful as these other men who tell you how important they are! But they are only comparing themselves with each other, using themselves as the standard of measurement. How ignorant! (NLT)*

None of us deserves anything. None of us deserve salvation. None of us deserves to have our sins forgiven. It's only through God's mercy and the blood of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for us that this happens.

So when we are busy condemning our brother or sister, we get our mind off of our own sins, we diminish our own sins and faults and shortcomings. As I said, Christ offers a solution. One that comes to mind is Luke 14:11.

**Luke 14:11.** *For whosoever exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself ... (KJV)*

Maybe not in this life, but ultimately ...

*11b) ... shall be exalted. (KJV)*

Humility is the antidote for judging, because when we focus on somebody else's sins, we set ourselves up here just like the Pharisee who said, "I wouldn't do that, but look at these people. They did that." So we elevate ourselves.

So the third way we can cast the first stone is by judging.

#### **4. The fourth way we can cast the first stone is by holding onto a grudge and not forgiving our brother.**

I know people, even ministers to this day who can remember what someone did or said to them twenty or thirty years ago and it was like it was yesterday and the grudge and bitterness is still there. I mentioned this before, but my mother told me when she was reflecting back when my mom and dad got married in the thirties. They had only been married a year or two and she wanted to buy a dress and Dad wouldn't let her. I don't know why. Whether they didn't have the money or whether he was just being selfish, I have no idea. To her death bed she remembered that and she would not let it go. It was just like it happened the day before.

Let's turn to James 5:9. This is a scary admonition. It is something we all need to pay attention to.

**James 5:9.** *Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned ... (NKJV)*

None of us wants to be condemned.

*9b) ... Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! (NKJV)*

Now we're two thousand years down the road from when that was written, and the judge is standing a lot closer to the door now than He was back then. It's something that we need to be very careful about. Unchecked grumbling leads to something that is very hard to get rid of, and that is bitterness.

I know people that have been attacked fairly or unfairly. They won't let it go. They grumble and eventually if they don't get rid of it, the person gets bitter.

With that in mind, let's go to Ephesians 4:31. We see here that Paul is clumping together some characteristics that are all related to each other. Remember, grumbling can lead to bitterness. Paul says:

**Ephesians 4:31.** *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: (KJV)*

So we see here that evil speaking is linked with anger and bitterness because one leads to the other. We get angry, we get offended, we speak evil and then if we hang onto it and don't get rid of it or don't do a Matthew 18, it leads to bitterness.

In Hebrews 12:15 we see that the kernel of corn has a root that goes down and we can see here that bitterness has a very deep root also.

**Hebrews 12:15.** *Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; (KJV)*

The Greek word for "bitterness" is interesting. It's Strong's 4088. We know what it's like to bite into something very bitter. The Greek word means *biting or irritating to the feelings, especially poison*. There is the old saying that, it's not the snake bite that kills you, it's the venom circulating in your system. So by having a root of bitterness, it goes down deep into the center of our being and can be a poison that stays and stays. I've seen people who were offended and they cannot let it go and it poisons their life and their outlook. So we see that holding a grudge is like having poison, not forgiving and not forgetting.

Once again, God has a solution for this. When He said earlier to let all bitterness and anger and clamor be put away from you with all malice ...

**Ephesians 4:32.** *And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another ... (KJV)*

Why should we forgive?

*32b) ... even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. (KJV)*

If we want to be forgiven, we must demonstrate forgiveness, and God will forgive us to the extent or to the degree that we forgive others.

Final scripture in this fourth way to cast a stone is in Colossians 3:13. This is something we have to do. The fact is that all of us have our idiosyncrasies. All of us have our quirks and unique things we do that maybe no one else does. We're just human. This is what we have to do.

**Colossians 3:13.** *Forbearing one another ... (KJV)*

The Greek literally means *to put up with*. Sometimes we have to do that. We just have to put up with each other. Maybe they think a little different from me and I wouldn't do it this way and we just put up with each other. It's not a salvational issue. It's not something that's going to make or break anybody's life, and it's certainly not worth fighting over.

*13b) ... and forgiving one another ... (KJV)*

We all make mistakes. We all sin.

*13 continued) ... if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do you. (KJV)*

So here we see the antidote or the answer to holding a grudge and not forgiving.

We've seen four ways that we can be involved in casting that first stone.

That leads to an interesting question that I mentioned earlier.

### **What do we do if someone throws the first stone at us?**

We are the recipient of the first stone. Remember that rock fight I told you about in west Texas as kids growing up. Between where we lived and the school there was a giant vacant lot. It was probably 3/4 of a mile by 3/8 of a mile and it was just tumble weeds, sage brush, rocks and dirt. We had to go through that to get to school. Quite often on the way home from school, you'd be walking and suddenly you hear a stone being thrown at you. What you do is drop your books, look for the biggest stone you can find and find who is hiding behind a tumble weed and you go after him and you get into a rock fight. That's just the way it was. When somebody threw a rock at me, I would throw a rock right back, maybe more than one.

What do we do when somebody casts the first stone at us? We can figuratively cast a stone back to them thereby returning evil with evil. If somebody slanders us, gossips about us, insults us, offends us, we can return evil with evil. Why? Because that is human nature. Human nature wants to strike back. Human nature wants to get even. Human nature wants to return to them exactly what they did to us. Of course, God knew that when He said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" with a carnal nation such as Israel.

Christ brought a different way as we all know in the Sermon on the Mount. Returning the first stone with a second stone is just human nature at its rawest and Christ said, "You cannot do that."

**Matthew 5:38.** *You have heard that it has been said [quoting Lev. 24:17-20], An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: (KJV)*

I'm sure they all nodded when He said that.

*39) But I say unto you, That you resist not evil ... (KJV)*

Don't fight back.

*39b) ... but whosoever shall smite you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.*

*43) You have heard that it has been said, You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.*

*44) But I say unto you, Love your enemies ... (KJV)*

I think that is the hardest commandment in the Bible. Love your enemies. When somebody hates you or is maliciously out to get you or wants to see you stumble and fall or wants to embarrass you or stomp you into the ground, Christ said, "Love them."

*44b) ... bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you ... (KJV)*

That's hard to do. When somebody brings evil upon us, Christ is saying, "I want you to not just ignore it, I want you to do good back to them. I want you to do good to those who hate you."

*44 continued) ... and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; (KJV)*

That is so hard to do. It's a measure of our conversion when we can obey this.

*45) That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven ... (KJV)*



The implication is if we return evil with evil, God does not consider us His children. We're somebody else. We're brats. We're outcasts. We belong to someone else other than Christ.

*48) Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (KJV)*

When Christ was taken captive and went through all He went through, He said, "Forgive them. They don't understand what they're doing." Even if it's someone in the church, they may not be exercising God's holy spirit. They may not even have God's holy spirit, so forgive them because they don't know what they're doing.

With that in mind, let's go to Romans 12, because Paul follows this same admonition, but he adds to it in a very interesting way. Here is almost the same wording as Jesus Christ. The apostles understood this and they taught it.

**Romans 12:17.** *Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.*

*18) If it be possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men. (KJV)*

What does he mean by that? The fact is that it takes two people to fight. If one stops fighting, there is no fight. He said, "If it's possible, walk off the field of battle. If you can, just leave the fight. Get out of the boxing ring. Walk off the football field, so to speak. Therefore, you won't fight.

*19) Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves ... (KJV)*

One of the prime motivations of fight is that we want vengeance. We want to get back. We want to put them in their place. We want to shut them up and embarrass them or whatever.

*19b) ... but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Eternal. (KJV)*

I have to fight that. Sometimes you see in the church where good people are being persecuted by somebody with an un-Christian attitude, maybe even in the church by someone without a converted mind. Mentally, I want to get them in a boxing ring and just pound on them. You want to teach them a lesson. You want to get back. You want to stand up for the person that's being abused. We have to remember that God says, "I will take vengeance. I will straighten it out in My course, according to My timetable, not your timetable." Therefore, God will take care of it:

*20) Therefore if your enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing you shall heap coals of fire on his head. (KJV)*

What on earth does that mean? Clarke's Commentary has an interesting take on this.

*“You shall heap coals of fire upon his head,” is a metaphor taken from smelting metals. The ore is put into a furnace and fire is put both below and over the kettle, that the metal may be liquefied and leaving the dross (impurities).”*

I took a foundry class in college and we did exactly that. We heated lead and it turns silvery and liquid and then all the black crud comes to the top and you skim it off and then you have pure lead.

Clarke’s Commentary continues:

*“Then the pure metal may fall down pure to the bottom of the furnace. This is beautifully expressed by one of our own poets in reference to this explanation of this passage.”*

Poem:

*“So artists melt the sullen ore of lead  
By heaping coals of fire upon its head.  
In the warmth the metal learns to glow  
And pure from dross the silver runs below.”*

This is something we may not have thought about. Clarke goes on to say:

*“It is most evident from the whole connection of the place and the apostles’ use of it that the heaping of coals upon the head of an enemy is intended to produce not evil, but the most beneficial effect. The following verse is an additional proof of this.”*

What he is saying by, “coals of fire on someone’s head,” is that as with the liquid metal, “I want you to be purified. I want the dross to go away.” I want you to be, as Paul would say, a pure lump in another analogy.

We see in verse 21, we do that by not being overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. When someone does evil to us and we do good back to them, you have a chance of them seeing the difference, making a positive impression and finally the lightbulb goes on and they say, “Oh, this is how it should be handled.” If we return evil with good.

We cannot cast a second stone. Like me in the desert, when somebody throws a rock, you don’t even think. You just pick up something and fire back. We cannot do that. Christ wants us to return evil with good. If necessary, if the person throws another one and another one, you just get off the field of battle. You just run away. By running away, what we do by leaving the field of battle, we put distance between ourselves and somebody who wants to fight.

We've had to do that in the church. You just have to put distance between yourself and somebody, no matter what you do and how good you are, they still want to fight. You just have to put distance. Don't fight back. Just put space between you and the individual.

Let's conclude now. In this example of the woman taken in adultery and was brought to Christ. He was asked the question, He brilliantly brought the scribes' and Pharisees' accusations and their plot against Him to nothing. This just isn't a sweet story.

There are lessons to be learned about this example:

- We cannot cast stones. We cannot cast the first stone or the second stone.
- We can't ignore or diminish our own sins.
- We cannot fight.
- We cannot judge or condemn others.
- We cannot hold grudges and not forgive.
- We can't fight back when someone starts a fight against us, thereby returning evil for evil.

Let's be thankful for Christ's example. I speculate that the woman when she said, "No man, Lord," and Christ said, "Neither do I condemn you. Don't do it anymore." I think she probably understood. She probably had heard rumors about Christ, about the Messiah and suddenly she is face to face with this man that doesn't act like a mere man and obviously there is a power and spirit behind Him like nothing she has ever seen. Some day we will find out. Some day we will talk to this lady. My speculation is that she was a changed woman. She went home and took to heart what He said and she sinned no more. Maybe she even became part of the group of women that followed Christ around until the time that He died. Then after that, maybe she was one of the group of women that followed the apostles around until she died. Christ's example probably changed her life forever.

Here's the key for us, Christ's example should change our life forever.