



The Letter of James  
**Bible Study Session 10**  
**James 4:11-12**

Study By  
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**Greek NT**

4:11 Μὴ καταλαλεῖτε ἀλλήλων, ἀδελφοί. ὁ καταλαλῶν ἀδελφοῦ ἢ κρίνων τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ καταλαλεῖ νόμου καὶ κρίνει νόμον· εἰ δὲ νόμον κρίνεις, οὐκ εἶ ποιητὴς νόμου ἀλλὰ κριτὴς. 4:12 εἷς ἐστὶν [ὁ] νομοθέτης καὶ κριτὴς ὁ δυνάμενος σῶσαι καὶ ἀπολέσαι· σὺ δὲ τίς εἶ ὁ κρίνων τὸν πλησίον;

**Die Gute Nachricht Bibel**

11 Liebe Brüder und Schwestern, verleumdet einander nicht! Wer seinen Bruder oder seine Schwester verleumdet oder verurteilt, verleumdet und verurteilt damit das Gesetz Gottes, das ein solches Verhalten untersagt. Anstatt das Gesetz zu befolgen, wirft er sich zum Richter auf. 12 Aber nur Gott, der das Gesetz gegeben hat, darf richten. Er allein kann verurteilen oder freisprechen. Für wen hältst du dich, dass du deinen Mitmenschen verurteilst!

**NRSV**

11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?

**NLT**

11 Don't speak evil against each other, my dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize each other and condemn each other, then you are criticizing and condemning God's law. But you are not a judge who can decide whether the law is right or wrong. Your job is to obey it. 12 God alone, who made the law, can rightly judge among us. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to condemn your neighbor?

**The Study of the Text:<sup>1</sup>**

**Context of our passage:**

STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT  
 Of James<sup>2</sup>

PRAESCRIPTIO		1.1
<b>BODY</b>		1.2-5.20
Facing Trials	1-15	1.2-12
God and Temptation	16-24	1.13-18
The Word and Piety	25-37	1.19-27
Faith and Partiality	38-55	2.1-13
Faith and Works	56-72	2.14-26
Controlling the Tongue	73-93	3.1-12
True and False Wisdom	94-102	3.13-18
Solving Divisions	103-133	4.1-10
Criticism	134-140	4.11-12
Leaving God Out	141-146	4.13-17
Danger in Wealth	147-161	5.1-6
Persevering under Trial	162-171	5.7-11
Swearing	172-174	5.12
Reaching Out to God	175-193	5.13-18
Reclaiming the Wayward	194	5.19-20

**Literary & Historical Contexts:**

As the above outlines illustrates, this short pericope has very limited literary connection to the preceding passage

<sup>1</sup>With each study we will ask two basic questions. First, what was the most likely meaning that the first readers of this text understood? This is called the 'historical meaning' of the text. That must be determined, because it becomes the foundation for the second question, "What does the text mean to us today?" For any applicational meaning of the text for modern life to be valid it must grow out of the historical meaning of the text. Otherwise, the perceived meaning becomes false and easily leads to wrong belief.

<sup>2</sup>Taken from Lorin L. Cranford, *A Study Manual of James: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publications, Inc., 1988), 285. **Statements** indicate core thought expressions in the text as a basis for schematizing the rhetorical structure of the text. These are found in the Study Manual and also at the James Study internet site.

of 4:1-10. And even less connection to the subsequent passage of 4:13-17. The basic theme of speech serves to link it to the other passages where various kinds of speaking are a major topic: 1:19, 26; 3:1-12; and 5:12. But the emphasis here is distinct from any of the others, and it is defined by the verb καταλαλέω, which means literally 'I speak against.' The general sense of its usage has to do with intentionally destructive, malicious criticism, and especially that which misrepresents the character of the person being spoken against. For this reason, the Greek verb is often translated as 'I slander.'<sup>3</sup>

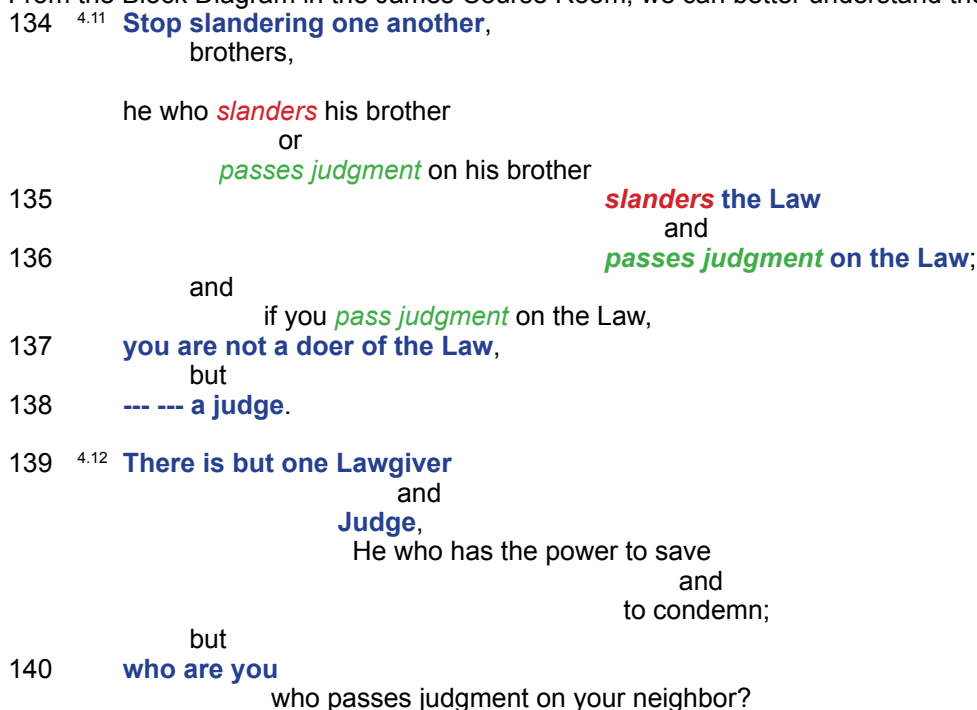
From the wide array of words dealing with slander and insult of other people, one can easily conclude the importance of this topic as well as the tendency of the first century world to engage in such negative speech.<sup>4</sup> Thus James is addressing a major problem in the ancient world that had surfaced within the Christian communities of faith.

**Exegesis of the Text:**

In the original Greek the text is contained in a single Greek sentence, which is very creatively constructed with numerous word plays that tie the core concepts together.

**1. What did the text mean to the first readers?**

From the Block Diagram in the James Course Room, we can better understand the structure of James' thoughts:



**Summary of the Rhetorical Structure:**

The rhetorical structure of this very short pericope is well defined and compact. Essentially it revolves around two structures: (1) an admonition [statement 134] and (2) a defense of the admonition [statements 135 - 140].

The admonition in statement 134 is simple and short, although in the interpretation section we will discover a high

<sup>3</sup>It is a part of a larger word group in biblical Greek that has to do with slander and insult of other people: καταλαλέω, καταλαλία, κατάλαλος, όνειδίζω, όνειδισμός, ύβρίζω, ένυβρίζω, ύβρις, ύβριστής, λοιδορέω, λοιδορία, άντιλοιδρέω, λοιδορος, εκβάλλω τó όνομα, διάβολος, δυσφημεω, δυσφημία, κακολογέω, βλασφημέω, βλασφημία, βλάσφημος. (Cf. Louw-Nida, *Greek Lexicon*, topics 33.387-33.403 for details.)

<sup>4</sup>In the OT several Hebrew words are used for evil talk intended to damage or destroy a neighbor (cf. II Sam. 16:1-4; 19:24-30; I Kings 21:8-14 for classical examples, though the word itself does not appear). The close relationship of slander to the Ninth Commandment is seen in Lev. 19:16 (see TEN COMMANDMENTS). Such "character assassination" typically marks the man who has rejected God's law and stands under judgment (Pss. 50:20; 101:5; Jer. 6:28; 9:4; Ezek. 22:9). The tongue is regarded as an especially vicious instrument of evil (Ps. 57:4; Prov. 17:4-11 [cf. Jas. 3:1-12]; Jer. 9:8).

In the NT, καταλαλέω, "to speak evilly" of one's neighbor (I Pet. 2:1; καταλαλία in II Cor. 12:20), includes not only untruthfulness, but perhaps primarily lovelessness. It is an identifying characteristic of the heathen world (cf. I Pet. 2:12; 3:16), intolerable within the household of faith (Jas. 4:11-12).

The RSV translates διαβολος (see SATAN) in its original meaning, "slanderer," in I Tim. 3:11; II Tim. 3:3; Tit. 2:3. Similarly, βλασφημία (see BLASPHEMY) is translated "slander" when verbal abuse of men is indicated (cf. the "catalogues of sin" in Matt. 15:19; Mark 7:21-22; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8-9; I Tim. 6:4-5)." (Source: iPreach > Biblical Reference > Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible > THE INTERPRETER'S DICTIONARY of the BIBLE > DICTIONARY ENTRIES > S > SLANDER)

level of ambiguity in it.

The defense of the admonition in statements 135 through 140 built on a very tightly formed logic that ends up declaring that the one slandering another person is in reality trying to play God. The unfolding thought structure surfaces in sets of twos (135-139) and ends with a rhetorical question (140)

**Compare Jas. 4:11-12 to 1:26 and 3:9-10. What distinctive insight on speech does each passage provide?**

<p>Jas. 4:11-12 (NRSV). 11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?</p>	<p>Jas. 1:26 (NRSV). 26 If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless.</p>	<p>Jas. 3:9-10 (NRSV). 9 With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.</p>
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The Greek verb *katalalew* here translated as ‘slander’ along with its noun equivalent *katalalia* and adjective *katalalo*”, -on, show up only a few times in the Bible. Study these instances in the NRSV for additional insight in what James is talking about.

<p>James 4:11. Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.</p>	<p>1 Pet. 2:1. Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.</p>	<p>Rom. 1:30. 29 They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.</p>	<p>Psalm 101:5 (LXX 100:5). One who secretly slanders a neighbor I will destroy. A haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not tolerate.</p>
<p>2 Cor. 12:20. For I fear that when I come, I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish; I fear that there may perhaps be quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.</p>	<p>1 Pet. 2:12. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.</p>	<p>1 Pet. 3:15b-16. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; 16 yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.</p>	<p>Psalm 78:19 (LXX 77:19). They spoke against God, saying, “Can God spread a table in the wilderness?”</p>

**Compare Jas. 4:11-12 to Matt. 7:1-5, Luke 6:37-38, Rom. 14:4, 13. Do these passages argue against forming and expressing opinions about others?**

<p>Jas. 4:11-12 (NRSV). 11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?</p>	<p>Matt. 7:1-5 (NRSV). 1 “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. 2 For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. 3 Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your neighbor, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.</p>
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<p>Luke 6:37-38 (NRSV). 37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; 38 give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”</p>	<p>Rom. 14:4, 13 (NRSV). 1 Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. 2 Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. 3 Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. 5 Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. 6 Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. 7 We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. 8 If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. 10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.” 12 So then, each of us will be accountable to God. 13 Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another.</p>
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Compare 4:11-12 to Matt. 7:15-20 and 1 Cor. 5:9-13. How does James relate to Jesus and Paul in regard to critical opinion about certain individuals in the community of faith?

<p>Jas. 4:11-12 (NRSV). 11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?</p>	<p>Matt. 7:15-20 (NRSV). 15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? 17 In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will know them by their fruits.</p>	<p>1 Cor. 5:9-13 (NRSV). 9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons — 10 not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? 13 God will judge those outside. “Drive out the wicked person from among you.”</p>
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**2. What does the text mean to us today?**

1) When you talk about fellow Christians, how do you characterize them?

2) How opinionated about other people are you?

3) Do you tend to look first for the good or the bad in other people?