

# Who is the Universe are You?



Bro. Ricky Cunningham  
James 4:11-12

## Scripture

***"Don't speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, 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. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?"***

I read this week of a captain who logged into the ship's log these three words: "Mate drunk today." When the mate realized what the captain had put in the log, he tried with all of his power to get the captain to realize that didn't really characterize who he was. Never before on the ship, never before in his life, had he used alcohol to the point that he got intoxicated and couldn't fulfill his duties. The captain told him, "Facts are facts. You are drunk today. I am leaving it in the log." What really worried the mate was that he knew when this journey was over the owner of the ship (who was not on the ship) would examine the captain's log and see that he was

drunk. Ultimately, he could lose his job, yet he didn't believe that what happened on this one occasion really characterized who he was, but he couldn't get the captain to erase that from the log. A couple of months passed and the mate had the duty of keeping the ship's log that day. So at the end of the day, he just wrote three words to characterize the day: "Captain sober today." Wow! It is amazing how powerful words are. Words can cause us to characterize, draw opinions of, others and their actions.

For the fourth time in four chapters, James is going to talk about our tongue. He is going to talk about our speech. Each time, it just seems to go a little deeper, a little deeper, and a little deeper. Scholars wonder why James didn't do what we do today and put all of this information about the tongue together into one unit of thought. We don't know why, but James just won't quit talking about the speech and the words that come out of the mouth of a Christian. As I researched this passage the last several weeks, I saw that some scholars believe these two verses are a transition from one thought to a new thought. Some scholars actually believe that these verses start a new thought that will not be concluded until the end of the letter. When I read these, I think they are continuing what James has been talking about. He has been talking about how that you and I as believers should not be friends with the world, but that we should have a friendship with God. How each one of us as a believer should submit to God and resist the devil. By the way, the word "devil" here literally means the slanderer. We should draw near to God knowing He will draw near to us. We should cleanse our hands, but not just our hands outwardly, but also purify our hearts. Then he tells us some of us really need to be confessing and repenting and not being happy about what we are doing.

Now, right before James says what he is going to say in verse 11, he says that we are to humble ourselves — humble ourselves before God knowing what? Knowing that if we humble ourselves before God He will ultimately exalt us. We were told at the beginning of that lesson that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. So imagine this, you and I, knowing that God opposes people who are prideful, arrogant, and exalt themselves, ought to be opposite that. We ought to be a people who

humble ourselves under God knowing, ultimately, He will be the one to exalt us.

Then, James launches into another talk about our conversation. Now, I want to outline this for you first because it's so important that you see this. This is one of those messages that you will turn off if you don't want to hear it — you will think I am talking about someone else, so at least see the structure. The first thing that James does here is command us what *not* to do. I want to submit to you that I think that this command of what not to do is flowing out of him just telling us that we are to humble ourselves before God. If we are truly humbling ourselves before God and waiting for Him to be the one who exalts us, then James wants to make sure that we understand we will not be doing this...what will we not be doing? We will not be speaking evil against one another. Then he calls us brothers. Notice when he began this fourth chapter and he talked about friendship with the world, he actually called some in the church (whether they are saved or not, we don't know) adulterers. If you are friends with the world then you are actually committing spiritual adultery. Then when he talked about the sinful actions in the church, some people had such a sinful lifestyle that he didn't address them as saints, but he addressed them as sinners! Now, he comes back and he is talking to brothers and sister — he is talking to the church! He is talking to those who know they are saved. He says don't speak evil, some translations say don't slander one another. So the command is a negative. He commands us NOT to do something.

I want you to watch this, he does not talk much about the "what" of what not to do, but he talks about the "why" of what not to do. Just as soon as he tells us what not to do, and this is a command, the tense of the Greek leads us to believe that James believed many in the congregation were doing this repeatedly. It was an ongoing activity in their lives and he wanted it stopped. Then he tells them why they need to stop it, and he is going to labor on this. As a matter of fact, here is the third thing I want you to note: he spends a great deal of time talking about why not. He wants us to understand why we cannot do this if we are part of the church

of Jesus and he labors here. Guys, this is deep! Here is the whole point — when we talk about other people in a negative way, we are not revealing to others who THEY are (the person we are talking about). James says we are revealing who WE are. Whoa! Did you hear that? I want to make sure you get this. If you don't get anything else, get this. The next time, privately or publicly, you get ready to speak evil against somebody, remember this...according to James you are not revealing who they are. You think you are, but you are not; you are really revealing who you are.

Then, James asks this question, and I am going to paraphrase it in Dexter/Hardin language, ok? Just who in the universe are you to do that? To do that, what he is saying is, you think you are the 'who' of the universe, you think you are on the same level of God. Wow! I want to tell you that James is writing to a political party, he is writing to a business, he is writing to a football coach, but he is writing to the church — "Do not speak evil against one another." The words, "speak evil," are literally a compound word made up of two words, to "speak against" and it is sometimes translated by the word, slander. So he is saying don't slander one another. Don't speak against one another. Don't put down other people. We think to slander somebody is when we tell something that is not true and it hurts them or it hurts their reputation or it hurts their character, or it paints a wrong picture of them. Therefore, I think some of us believe as long as we are telling the truth about someone it is ok to tell something about someone. Not according to James. As Christians, we should not be speaking against people, speaking things that hurt people, things that cause harm to people, things that erode confidence in people based on what we are saying about them.

Now, please keep this in context. Why does someone normally do that? Why does someone normally put someone else down? Why does someone normally want to speak badly about someone? They want to put someone down because in putting them down they are lifting themselves up. Did you catch that? Don't take what I am saying out of context. The context here is there is a need in some people's lives to put other people down, because in putting them down, it makes them feel better about themselves

or it makes them look better in the eyes of someone else. But in order to make themselves look good, in order to lift themselves up, they have to put someone else down. That contradicts being a Christian, because being a Christian means we are ultimately trusting who to lift us up? We are ultimately trusting who to exalt us, to defend us? We are ultimately trusting God. He is sovereign over my life, so I am going to humble myself before Him and walk humbly with my family, knowing that when time is right He will lift me up. He will exalt me. I don't have to do that myself. Putting others down so that I can lift myself up is ultimately a form of pride and James says God opposes the proud. Now, I want to tell you what this does not mean. This doesn't mean we are not to have spiritual discernment about people. The Bible is clear — we are to have spiritual discernment about people. The Bible is clear — by our fruits, we can know people. The Bible is clear — there are times when we must remove ourselves from fellowship with people. There are times when we must get out of situations because of what someone else is doing, but even then, God does not want us in the family speaking evil against one another.

Now, context, big context, Bible context — God sets up authority — government authority, church authority, and family authority. If we want to do it in order, He sets up family authority, then government authority, and then church authority. This doesn't mean that if you see your sister doing something wrong that is going to be harmful to her you don't go tell your mom and dad. You should go tell your mom and dad, but *only* tell your mom and dad. Does that make sense? You don't go tell everyone else what your brother or sister did; that is harming them. That is hurting them and we don't do it. It is the same way with government. If you see somebody doing something that is harming themselves or someone else, yes, you call the police. Yes, you tell the government authority, but you don't go tell everybody else to make them look bad, to harm them, to hurt them, and in some sense, make you look good. We don't do that. By the same token, God has ordained church authority. When you know one of our people is doing something that they should not be doing, you don't go tell all your friends in the church. You go to the church and you share that, but then we don't continually speak evil against that person. We should not want to

harm them. We should not want to hurt them, so James says don't speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. He is appealing to us being a family.

I want to say something here that I believe with all of my heart. I am sixty years old, but I can promise you there is one person in this building who has never spoken a negative word against me, and that is my sister, Regina. I promise you that. It is not because I am a great guy who has never done anything wrong. My sister knows those few things that I did do wrong growing up as a kid, but she didn't broadcast it to everybody. If you told me that my sister said something against me, I would call you a liar because I know it is not true. And she knows that there is not a one of you here who can ever say you have heard me say anything against her. I can't tell you how many times I have heard somebody brag on somebody in their family, and before it is over, that person who is being bragged to starts talking down about their sibling. Are you kidding me? What is it inside of us that has to put somebody else down in order to lift ourselves up? It is a person who is prideful. It is a person who is arrogant, not a person who is humble before God. Why do my sister and I not speak evil against one another? It is because we have the same mom and dad and we had the benefit of being reared really close together. We are only fourteen months apart. We are blood. We are kin. We are family! And we (the church) are family! We have the same Father! We have the same Savior! We have the same Holy Spirit living inside us! Therefore, there should not be a need for us to talk someone down in order to lift ourselves up. We should not want others to see how we think somebody really is, unless we know that concealing that is going to really, really hurt them.

Please hear me. When you have a problem with what someone has done to you, this is not saying you cannot come to me or Brother Joey and get help. It's not saying that. But it is saying that, we cannot be speaking, privately or publicly, against another family member. Why? Look again at verses 11 and 12, because you won't believe me unless you read it for yourself. Beginning with the second sentence in verse 11, it says, "The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the

law and judges the law.” This is not my words; this is the Word of God. When you speak against a brother or judge a brother, you are really not speaking against them; you are speaking against the law. You are not just speaking against the law; you are judging the law. Whoa!

Can we be honest with each other? On Highway 94, there is a 55 mile per hour speed limit. There is one stretch of Highway 94 that is completely straight and there is hardly ever anybody on it. I have to be honest — sometimes I disregard the 55 mile per hour speed limit. There have been times when I have said to myself that I cannot believe the speed limit on this road is 55 miles per hour. Now, you have done that too, right, maybe not on Highway 94, but on your road. The reason I am speaking against that is because I have made a judgment — whoever set that law of 55 miles per hour on Highway 94 does not know what they are talking about! They have never driven the road. They just arbitrarily set a speed limit that they know nothing about. That is what I am doing in my mind. Therefore, when I make that judgment that 55 mph is not right and I speak against it, I am letting my feelings known about the law by my actions. Does that make sense? I shouldn't do this, but I am going to do this. Are any of you struggling with the mask mandate? I know, some of you think I am silly to make us wear a mask to attend church, sit six feet apart, and come in one door and out the other. We cannot even eat donuts at church now! It is just a guideline; it is not a law...but can I ask you a question? How many of you have heard people speak against the mask mandate? Does anyone want to confess that you have done it yourself? Now, the reason we speak against it is because we have made a judgment. We have made a judgment that whoever came up with this didn't know what they were talking about...*It is just not effective. There is really not a need. I mean, there is a need for some people to do it, but not a need for me.* Do you get my point?

Now, this is not about speed limits or masks. This is about you and I speaking against other brothers and sisters, and when we do that, what we are speaking against is the law from God and we are judging what God says we should do and should not do every time we do it. Basically, when

we speak evil against a brother or sister, to put them down, to lift us up, what we are doing is saying to God... *You don't know what you are talking about. I know better than you.* I have to be honest, I never thought of it that way because I have never really told anything that was not true about somebody, but I have told some things that were true about some people — but it doesn't mean I should have told it. And when I told it, here is what James says — I just revealed to the person I was telling that I am not a doer of the law; I am a judge of the law... *Whoa! Brother Ricky, the judge! Brother Ricky, who knew the very moment he said that he wasn't basing it on an opinion but he had so thoroughly researched it he knew everything about it, and he was qualified to make a judgment and tell someone else something about someone else!* I mean, we all want to be judges, right, because we are always right! I mean, we have that ability to always take the time and get all of the information before we open our mouths! Didn't you love it, that the Supreme Court that you back and believe in finally gets to make the decision on the case that you have already made your mind about, and then they rule against what you believe? On the case that they ruled on that agreed with you, you thought that they did the right thing — but on the case they ruled against, you thought that they were wrong? How can that be?? Judges are right, right? Do you see what James is doing? He is trying to say when we speak evil against brothers and sisters, spiritually we are no longer keeping the law, we are no longer doing the law.

Now, what is the law here? If we are going to stick to the context of this book, James has talked about the law of liberty and he has talked about the royal law. If you go back to chapter 1 where he uses the law of liberty, he is talking about us being a doer of the word and he launches in about this law of liberty and us looking into the mirror. He is using the law of liberty as a phrase to describe those of us who are under the Word of God. It is like a law to us. We base our morality, ethics, and behaviors on God's Word. It frees us to be who God wants us to be. That is why he refers to it as the law of liberty — it is not restrictive, it is not binding, it is not keeping you from not being who you are; it is setting you free to be who you are.



Then in chapter 2, he talks about the royal law. What is the royal law? It is that we love our neighbor as ourselves. He is saying when we take it upon ourselves to judge someone and speak against them we are violating the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. At that moment, we are not loving our neighbor and desiring redemption for our neighbor, but we are wanting hurt, we are wanting harm, and we are wanting revenge. We are wanting them to be revealed for who they are, because in some way that justifies our actions. I promise you, if you live your life under the control of God's Holy Spirit and submit to God, the day will come when that will be revealed, but it will be in God's time not your time. When we speak against people, we want to speak against them because we want to reveal that what they are doing is breaking God's law. But in speaking against them, according to James, we are the one breaking God's law, the greater law, the royal law, the kingly law of love your neighbor as yourself. Do you remember when Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment? He said to love God, the Lord your God, with all you heart, all your soul, and all your might, but then He said there is another one and it is just right parallel with it, and that is to love your neighbor as yourself.

Now please, I have to say this. This does not mean there will not be times when you will have conflict with somebody and you are going to have to come to someone like me or another authority figure and you will have to share what you believe is happening. When you do that, you have to trust that the spiritual church person in your life, when they listen to you, they are going to also listen to them. When they listen to both of you, they are going to tell you what they believe. When they tell you what they believe, we have to trust their judgment. You cannot do what you do at a ball game! Isn't it amazing that the referees are always against us when we lose? I have never heard anyone say they really believe that referee made that call because he believes he is making the right call. From our perspective, he made a wrong call! Why did he make a wrong call...*Because he is against us! His fifth cousin had a fifth cousin who went to that school and he was prejudice against us!* We don't trust God's authority, we don't trust God's government, we don't trust God's church,

and we don't trust God's family because we have set ourselves up to be a judge.

Now, look how James finishes this. He says this in verse 12, "There is only one lawgiver and judge, He who is able to save and to destroy." He knows he does not even have to name who this is. We all know who this is, right? It is God. God gave the law. Here is where we have a problem in our country. I think we have the greatest form of government known to man, hear me say that, but we have an executive branch, a legislative branch, and a judicial branch, and ultimately, the Supreme Court is the final arbitrator, the final judge. All three of them have to make decisions based on the Constitution of the United States of America, but from time to time, the legislative branch gets it wrong, and from time to time, the executive branch gets it wrong. I know what some of you are going to say as Christians, there are times when the judicial gets it wrong, because we are all fallible. The only thing that makes our system work at all is that it is based on a constitution, so every law, every executive action, and every judgment should be based on the Constitution. Agreed? But ultimately, there is just one law giver, and it is based on the constitution of who He is — a HOLY, HOLY, HOLY God. He gives the law, executes the law, and ultimately judges the law. So James just asks this question...if you believe that about who He is, that He is the only one who can ultimately save or destroy, who in the universe are *you* to judge your neighbor? It isn't saying that you cannot or should not have spiritual discernment. It is not saying that you should not have an opinion. But it is saying that you better be really, really careful when you exercise the role of a judge because you are taking into your hands the ability to destroy or the ability to redeem. Please be careful! So before we speak, here is what we better make sure is happening...*I really, really love this person and what I am going to say would be a reflection of what I would want done in my life if I was in this same situation.*

James has already told us if you really want to see who a person is just listen to what they say, just listen to their mouth. Now he is saying when you hear people talking about other people, they are not revealing who

those other people are because they don't really know them, but they are revealing who they, themselves, are and what they believe about God as judge and about God as law giver. Please, let's not put down or tear down others because we have a need to lift ourselves up, because we need to look right in this situation and not wrong. Let's just do right and let's leave the judging to God. Amen?