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**A0744 – November 4, 2007 – Jas 4:11-12 – The Immorality Of
Autonomous Standards**

James 4:11-12 Μὴ καταλαλεῖτε ἀλλήλων, ἀδελφοί. Ὁ καταλαλῶν ἀδελφοῦ, καὶ κρίνων τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, καταλαλεῖ νόμου, καὶ κρίνει νόμον· εἰ δὲ νόμον κρίνεις, οὐκ εἶ ποιητῆς νόμου, ἀλλὰ κριτῆς. ¹²Εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ νομοθέτης, ὁ δυνάμενος σῶσαι καὶ ἀπολέσαι· οὐ δὲ τις εἶ ὃς κρίνεις τὸν ἕτερον; (BYZ)

James 4:11-12 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who is speaking against a brother and judging his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law, but if you judge the law you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹²There is One Lawgiver and judge, He who is able to save and to destroy, but who are you that you judge another?

(Author's Translation)

James 4:11-12 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge *of it*. ¹²There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? (NASB95)

Now, this section is difficult because of the words “law”. It immediately draws us to think of the Mosaic Law. But here James has in mind another “law”. The problem here was that some of these believers were exalting a standard of law above the word of God. They were making themselves out to be the standard. We call that *autonomy*, from two words, *auto-* meaning “self” and – *nomos* meaning “law”.

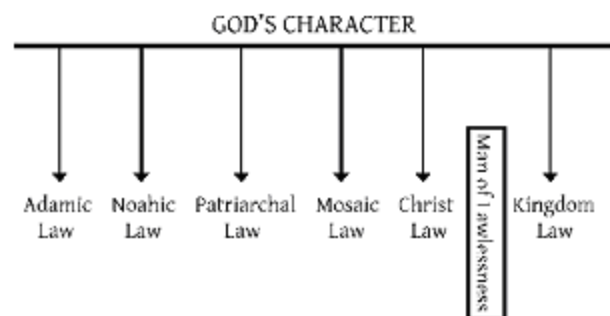
Autonomous Man



“We don’t want God to make the laws, we want to make the laws, we want to decide right and wrong, we want to decide what’s true and false,” and we have no such right. We are creatures who are limited, remember man’s limitations. On top of that we are sinners. So, we are not an adequate source of law. We can make laws but those laws have to be compared to God’s laws to see how closely they approximate His standard. So, He’s the standard. He is *autonomous*, He is the law, law is rooted and grounded in a Personal-Sovereign God. But when we make ourselves out to be the law we’re grounding what’s right and wrong, true and false, in ourselves.

Now, the word of God is a revealed standard of law, it comes from God and there are various bodies of law in the Scripture. We can talk about Adamic Law, Noahic Law, Patriarchal Law, the Mosaic Law, Christ’s Law, Kingdom Law, several bodies of law. There’s so much law that arguably the Bible is a legal document. It may not turn you on but the Bible is basically a legal document. What do we call the two major divisions of the Bible? Old and New Testaments. What’s a testament? It’s a testimony and where do you give your testimony? In the court of law. And this simply reflects who God is, He’s Holy, and if He’s holy, many theologians break this down into saying God is righteous and just. That is, His character is the standard for what is right and wrong in the cosmos and His attitude toward evil is uncompromising. So, the Bible is given into a hostile situation. Basically, it’s a book written by a Holy God to sinners, those who are in rebellion against the source of universal laws. So, it’s a legal treatise written by God and delivered into a hostile environment. And anyone who’s read the Bible knows it’s a pretty bleak commentary on man. It’s not your typical, “Man comes out on top story,” which just evidences the fact that man didn’t dream up these things. Someone else, standing outside of the cosmos wrote this and He made sure that it didn’t get marred, didn’t get all chewed up by man because He’s in control, not man, we can control a few things, the details of our lives, but when God says this is going to happen this way you better get out of the way

or get in line because no one and no thing is going to get in God's way. I don't care who you are. And so this book comes down into a very hostile environment, an environment full of sinners, carnal, worldly people at enmity with God, hostile toward God the Scriptures say repeatedly. And God is holy so His justice has to act. He can't compromise His character. He's not going to be partial. Sin has to be dealt with; it can't just be swept under the carpet. So we have the word of God as essentially God's declaration of the legal steps He's going to take to deal with the sin problem. Sin has corrupted everything, not just man, but also nature. So, what we're arguing is that the word of God is basically a legal document, Old and New Testaments, God's testimony against man and nature and how that is solved in Jesus Christ so that God's character is never compromised. This is why, when you read the last two chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21-22 what does it remind you of? What other chapters of the Bible does it sound a lot like? Gen 1-2. Because God made this thing very good, no problems, no sin, no death but a permutation got introduced into the equation that's thrown the whole thing off. And to get everything back to the original you've got to bring another permutation into the equation that nullifies the first. And once you've done that then you can get back to something like the original. So, God is the standard, He is the law, His character determines the various bodies of law that are given. And there are at least seven bodies of law, they all fall out of His character, they are all binding at different times on different peoples but, if we are ever going to find out what law James is talking about, and he mentions law in three different places in his epistle, then we have to know what our options are. What are the bodies of law revealed in Scripture?



The seventh body of law we might conceive of is the whole of Scripture itself since it is a legal document.¹ I throw in the “man of lawlessness” to show that there is always law except for during the future Tribulation when God says “Fine, have it your way, you don't want Me, go ahead, see what the world's like without Me.” And He just let's them have it. Now, that reminds us of one

of the functions of law. What does law do? It tends to restrain. We may rebel against God's laws but they still tend to restrain sin. In the tribulation that restraint will be removed and God's wrath will be unleashed. You want to see what hell on earth is like, take God's law away, take God's restraint away and the whole thing will come crumbling down in a very short period of time. But here we have the various bodies of law and we want to know which one James is referring to. To figure this out let's turn to two previous contexts where he mentioned "law". Turn over to James 1:22-25. This is the section where he commands us to be doers of the word and not hearers only. By which he means its one thing to be orthodox in doctrine but it's another thing to be orthodox in application. If we are going to advance to spiritual maturity we must not only know the word of God but we must apply the word of God, be a doer of the word. Spiritual maturity is not gained solely by studying the Scriptures. It is gained by applying the Scriptures. That's one of James' major points in this letter. You can study the Scriptures all day long, all week, all month, all year but the opportunities for growth come in the daily life circumstances God sends you. How are you going to respond? What are you going to do when the heat is on, the stress factor goes up and frustration starts to kick in, this or that goes wrong, your plans don't happen? What are you going to do with the doctrine you know? Are you going to put it to work or not? Are you going to apply what you've learned or not? And he wants us to apply it because when we do that when the growth happens. You don't grow if you don't apply. So, with that concern he says, in verse 22, "But prove yourselves doers of the word," literally "Become" "Become a doer of the word". And what is "the word"? It is the word of God, Scripture, the very breath of God, "and not merely hearers who delude themselves." In other words, don't think you've done your duty to God by showing up for the sermon or reading the Scriptures. You have to do it, apply it; the word of God has to dominate your life, it has to control you. "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty," or just simply the perfect law of liberty. If a believer looks intently, he stoops down to peer into the law, he makes a careful analysis of the law "and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does." Now, what does he mean by law here? What is the "perfect law of liberty"? Contextually. Think of the verses we've read all the way back to v 22. What are we to be a "doer"

of? The word, the word of God. So, the law here is simply the word of God. We can't be much more precise here than that, but we can over in 2:12. In verses 8-12 he's really nailing them on their partiality. They haven't been upholding the "royal law", now that's a particular law, the law of loving others, where we put others ahead of ourselves, but we're not interested in that particular law at this time, we're interested in what we see in verse 12. Here it is again, "the law of liberty" and James says we're going to be judged by it. Now, we're NT believers, aren't we? What body of law are we judged by? Whether it's in this life, you now, temporal judgment or discipline or the the judgment seat of Christ. Either way, what body of law are we judged by? Are we going to be judged by the Adamic Law? No. Are we going to be judged by the Mosaic Law. No. That's done away with (Rom 10:4). Which one then? The Law of Christ. So that's what James is talking about when he says "law" generally speaking in his epistle. Now, I call it the law of Christ because that's what Paul calls it in a couple of places (1 Cor 9:21 and Gal 6:2). Turn to 1 Cor 9:20-21. We want to look at just one of these. Here's Paul explaining to what extent he goes to proclaim the gospel, and he says, "To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law," now, he's referring to the Mosaic Law there and he says, "I'm not under that" and neither are Church age believers. Why does he do all this? "so that I might win those who are under the Law; ²¹to those who are without law, as without law," probably referring to the Gentiles there, and then what does he say about himself, "though not being without the law of God" [myself], in other words, "Hey, I'm not under the Mosaic Law but I am under law. What law? "but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law." He says he's under the law of Christ. So, there is a body of law that is binding for the NT believer and that's what Paul calls "the law of Christ". I think that's what James is referring to because that's what we're judged by, that's what we're under, you can't be judged by something you're not under. American's aren't judged by Moroccan law. Italians aren't judged by Chinese law. You're judged by the law your under so that's what James is referring to throughout James so that when he comes to James 4:11 we can understand. Now that was all introduction to this section. Keep in touch here and let's read the verses again.

James 4:11-12 "Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges

the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge *of it*.¹² There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

See the point now, James is saying, “You guys are setting yourself up as the law, you guys are erecting a standard of ethics above the law of Christ. Just who do you think you are?” Now, Christians are so confused on this point. If I’ve heard it once I’ve heard it a thousand times. Christians shouldn’t judge. Oh really? Then what do you do with 1 Cor 5:12-13? Turn there. Here you’ve got an intense situation of sexual immorality in the church and what does Paul say? “Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside God judges” and then he commands “Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.” That sounds pretty judgmental to me. “Oh, that wouldn’t be Christian.” Sounds clear to me that Paul’s telling Christians to judge fellow Christians but not non-Christians, you leave that up to God. “Oh, but Matt 7 you say, turn there, the Sermon on the Mount, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged,’ a clear prohibition to judging, oh no, you can’t judge, it’s not Christian.” But what do you do with verse 6? “Do not throw what is holy to dogs.” Sounds pretty judgmental to me. If you’ve categorized someone as a dog that’s a judgment. Besides, this is in the context of the Mosaic what? MOSAIC LAW. How do you have law without judging? How do you have law if you can’t execute the law? What good is the US Constitution if you can’t carry it out? You know, that’s where we are in America. You go into the courtroom to apply the law of the US Constitution and rather than applying the law what do they do? They make a new law because “We don’t like the old interpretation.” So, we throw out the old standard and invent a new one and try to justify it by saying, “Oh, we got a living document here, we can interpret it any way we want, gotta deconstruct the text, read our own meaning into it, gotta stretch the language with a little imagination here.” Has the Constitution been upheld? No. And the Pharisees did the same thing to the Mosaic Law. “We don’t like that, we can’t live up to that, so, we’ll just re-interpret it, we’ll just bring it down here where us sinners can follow it.” Did they uphold the law? No, they lifted up a new standard. “Oh, now we’re the standard, we’re the lawgiver’s we’re the judges.” “Oh really” Jesus is saying in verse 2. “Well, you can’t even live up to your own standards, you think you measure up to God’s?” So, Jesus isn’t saying “No judging” whatsoever. He’s saying, “No judging according to your own autonomous standards!” So, “Yes” we judge. We judge according to the word of God. But

we don't judge according to our own standards. As 1 Cor 5 says, we judge those within the church and according to the standard of the word of God. We don't judge outside the church and according to our own autonomous standards. That's very serious. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. How are you going to do that if you don't A) have the right standard, God's word telling you what's wicked and B) have the authority to execute it, remove them?

So, this is the situation over in James. Turn over to James 4:11. These guys have erected their own autonomous standard and they are just pumping out judgment after judgment against their fellow brothers and it's all according to the sin nature. We saw that in verses 1-5, all the fighting and bickering. And he begins with a command, **Do not speak against one another, brethren.** The words **speak against** are a single word in the Greek NT, *katalaleo*. It's an imperative meaning "speak degradingly of, speak evil of" Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with speaking against some things. We can speak against sin and evil. But when God has set His valuation of someone or something and then we speak against it then we have a problem because it implies that we've set up a standard independent of the word of God. And contextually we have the teacher of this assembly and everyone thinking they're so great and they should be the teacher so we get bitter toward this guy and we erect our own standards and judge him by it, speak against him, run him down, before you know it we're running everyone down. So, turn over to Num 12:1-8. Here is a little incident with three siblings, and they were having this little rivalry and it got God really angry because He'd already set His evaluation. Numb 12:1, "Then Miriam and Aaron *spoke against* Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); ²and they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?" Hear the arrogance? "Oh, look at us, we're so great." "And the LORD heard it." Of course He did. "³(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.)" That's a little side-note to tip us off as to God's valuation of Moses. And what did we just get through talking about in the previous verses in James? The arrogant vs the humble and how to become humble. And here's the humblest guy on the planet and older brother and sister are into the "Aren't we so great program" and to show how great we are we're going to run Moses into the ground "⁴Suddenly the LORD said to Moses and Aaron and to Miriam, "You three come out to the tent of meeting."

We're going to have a little pow-wow. "You guys want to play the judging game, fine, I'm the Judge, I'll do the judging." "So the three of them came out. ⁵Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam. When they had both come forward, ⁶He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. ⁷"Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household;" There's another value judgment by God. "With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the LORD." Incidentally, Allen Ross said Moses beheld the pre-incarnate Christ. "Why then were you not afraid To speak against" and there's our word *katalaleo*, they spoke against who? God's "servant, against Moses?" The point is that when you start stepping on God's evaluation you are in big trouble. So, that's what's going on and James says, "Don't do that." **Do not speak against who? one another.** That's a reciprocal pronoun, it's like A says something illegitimate about B and B has just got to say something degrading about A and on and on. And they're **brethren**. They're all believers here acting just like the world, acting carnally. In fact the same word is used of carnal activity in 1 Pet 2:12 and 3:16. This is all just fleshly operation. So be careful you're not erecting some standard independent of the word of God and then running believers down with it. You're not the standard, I'm not the standard, the word of God is the standard, in particular the Law of Christ.

Continuing verse 11, **He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law.** Now, he's not saying the **brother** is the **law**. What he's saying is "You've erected a standard independent of God's word and then turned around and used it to judge him. And by doing so you have also set up your standard over **the law** of Christ. In other words, "You're out here and you're so brilliant, you've got such a high IQ that you can come up with a better standard than God's word." Every time we erect a standard, an autonomous standard, we're saying we know better than God, we're the authorities, we decide what's right and wrong, we decide what truth is. Let's go on, see how far James pushes this, **but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.** If you come in with your standard, erect it, build your case on it, apply it, whatever, then **you are not a doer of the law**, that is, you're not a doer of the law of Christ. You're not being like Paul who was under the law of

Christ. You're setting yourself up outside of the law of Christ as over it and now you're sitting in judgment on it. You're saying, "Hmm, I got Christ's law here and this doesn't quite measure up and this over here, this doesn't meet my standards" and all you're doing is sitting up in the judges bench, like you're God or something and you've got Christ over there on the witness stand being interrogated. He's not interrogated by you, you're interrogated by Him. But we are so quick to do this because A) we've got a conscience, we're made in the image of God and we've got to judge, and B) we're sinful and our flesh wants to be autonomous, our flesh doesn't want to submit to God's standard, it wants to erect it's own standards, just like the Pharisees did, and every time we do that we end up with another system, a system, "Oh, yea, I can live up to this but so and so isn't and we use it as a platform for running them down". But we're the guilty ones. We're not called to erect standards of truth and morals, we're called to obey God's standard and in the present dispensation that's the law of Christ, that's what we're going to be judged by. We can judge other believers by God's standard, Paul tells us to but never by our own standards. Why?

Verse 12, **There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?** I love this verse, I love the end of this verse, "Who are you? Just who do you think you are?" Stop getting on your high horse. You are a silly little creature, you are limited, you're limited physically, you have to have food to live, you get sick, you die; you're limited mentally, your human reason can't figure it out because your peanut brain is damaged by sin; you're limited experientially, you can't be everywhere simultaneously, you can't go in the future, you can't go in the past, you're always stuck in the present. So just who do you think you are? **There is only one Lawgiver and Judge.** Now, here's another hint that the law of Christ is what James means by "law". Who has the Father given all judgment too? The Son (John 5:22). Jesus Christ. So, Jesus Christ gave the law of Christ through the Holy Spirit and it was recorded by the apostles and prophets in the NT epistles and given to the Church and He's the **Judge**. We could go down to James 5:8-9 and see clearly that Jesus Christ is the Judge, His coming is near and He's standing at the door. So, Jesus Christ is the **Lawgiver and Judge** here. In the terminology of our government, we have three divisions of power in our government, we call it the balance of powers; Legislative, Judicial and Executive branches. Well, Jesus Christ is the Legislative and Judicial branch. The Father is the

Executive branch. So, if Jesus Christ is the Legislative branch then what does that mean? He legislates the law. That's why Paul called it "the law of Christ". He's also the Judicial branch which means what? That He judges us according to His law. And the Father, He's the Executive branch so that means He does what? He executes the sentence. And then we have a relative clause that further describes Jesus Christ, **the One who is able to save and to destroy**. There's an attribute of Christ here, very clearly. Anyone see it? He's **able**. He's omnipotent. He can do anything compatible with His character because it's His character which sets the law and He always judges according to His character. He has all power within Himself. He needs no external sustenance, He's self-sustaining, He's not dependent on anyone or anything, He doesn't get tired, He's always brimful of energy His nature is energetic, potential and kinetic. And what is Jesus' Christ's omnipotence **able to do? to save and to destroy**. Now, these are believers he's talking to, they are speaking against one another, their brethren, it's an intra-body of Christ issue. This has nothing to do with eternal salvation or damnation. Of course, Jesus Christ is able to save and destroy with respect to eternal salvation but this context is within the body of Christ. **to save** (*sozo*) means "to rescue, to deliver" from something, it could be physical or spiritual. He can save believers from physical sickness, death. He can save believers from spiritual sickness, the grave consequences of sin. He can also **destroy** (*apollumi*) believers in a physical or spiritual way by divine discipline or turning us over to the lusts of our flesh to reap the consequences of our sin.ⁱⁱ He has the power **to save and to destroy** believers (also see Matt 10:28 in a discipleship context). But who are you James asks? Can you do that? No. You you're not omnipotent, you can't save and destroy. So who do you think you are to come along in history as Mr Know-It-All and Mr I'm-So-Great and erect a universal standard within yourself and then use that to judge everybody else with, including God.

So, this is a powerful passage that I think stands in perfect harmony with other passages about judging. Some passages command us to judge and some passages command us not to judge. But the key is the standard involved. Every time we judge, every time we use the word "ought", right, "wrong" "true" "false" we're making a judgment and we want to make sure we're making that judgment according to the standard of God's word and not some autonomous standard that we've erected. The Bible commends our judging within the Church as long as we're judging by the standard of Scripture.ⁱⁱⁱ

But the Bible condemns our judging those outside the Church; that belongs to God. And the Bible condemns our judging anyone period according to an autonomous standard that we've erected. So, the issue is this, that the standard is transcendent. It's not "inside us" it's "outside us". What modern man wants to do (ancient man too for that matter) is locate the standard inside us because we're fleshly and we want to do away with God, we don't want Him in the picture because that means ultimate responsibility, accountability and it implies a judgment. So, since I've got short accounts I just relocate the standard. I become the standard. I think I've evaded the problem.

ⁱ Paul Schmidtbleicher prefers this to be James' meaning "In summary, the *law of liberty* is the very mind of the Lord from the whole of the Bible internalized in the believer. It persuades and moves the will of the believer to be the same as God's will under the filling of the Spirit. Because the will of God and the will of the believer are the same, the believer serves and obeys the will of God in perfect liberty." This seems to fail because of James 2:12 which says the believer will be judged according to the law of liberty and the believer is not judged by the whole word of God but only by the Law of Christ which is binding on NT believers.

ⁱⁱ Fruchtenbaum takes this as purely physical salvation and physical destruction.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tom Constable says, "James was speaking of judging other people without divine authorization to do so. Obviously God has delegated the responsibility of judging some civil acts to human governments, some church conduct to elders, and the behavior of children to their parents."

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