

**James 2:12** So speak and so act as those  
who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

1. This verse begins with the adverb **οὕτως** (*hoútōs*): “so.” This word introduces application. It is a demonstrative adverb that refers to what precedes. What precedes is all that has been discussed before, meaning James 2:1–11, but also principles studied in chapter one as well. Therefore, *hoútōs* refers to what has been just discussed. The best translation to capture this concept is, “In light of these things.”
2. This application refers to communicating what you know, the present active imperative of the verb **λαλέω** (*laleō*), and is the sixteenth imperative mood of the epistle. The present tense has linear action so you are to “keep on speaking or communicating.”
3. The active voice places the responsibility of communicating on the subject which is you. The imperative mood is a command to keep on doing so.
4. This “speaking” referenced here is the prohibition against sins of the tongue: gossip, slander, maligning, judging, denouncing, condemning, criticizing, and carping.
5. A believer really has made very little progress in the plan of God if he cannot avoid sins of the tongue. We just studied illustrations of the mental attitudes that start and ultimately conclude with adultery and murder.
6. A person’s reputation can be destroyed, murdered if you will, by the tongues of those who through self-aggrandizement criticize, castigate, and belittle others.
7. With these previous verses in view, the speech of the believer is not to include the mental attitudes and verbal schemes used as illustrations and others of their low character.
8. So the first application is speech. What follows is action, the present active imperative of the verb **ποιέω** (*poiēō*): “so act,” is the seventeenth imperative mood of the Book of James and is best translated, “keep on doing.”
9. So, retrospectively, “keep on speaking and keep on doing.” These are behavior patterns that believers are to acquire and apply if they are to please God and their Savior, Jesus Christ.
10. What James is leading the reader to do is to prepare his soul with doctrine so that he will not remain static or retreat spiritually into the mental attitudes and behavior patterns just described in verses 8–11.

11. The paragraph started with the Royal Law which is James's title for the second most important commandment in Scripture according to Jesus Christ and which is cited twenty-two times in the New Testament. Here are reminders:

**Matthew 19:19** "Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

**Matthew 22:39** "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

**Mark 12:31** "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

**Romans 13:8** Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.

**v. 9** For this, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor, as yourself."

**v. 10** Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

**James 2:8** If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.

**Galatians 5:14** For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

12. These passages above quote the full text of Leviticus 19:18. The others on our list do not do this but rather shorten the statement to read, "love one another," in John 3:34; 15:12; 17; Romans 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; and 1 John 3:11.
13. John 13:35 and 1 Thessalonians 3:12 read, "love for one another." First Peter 2:17 uses "love the brotherhood." First John 3:14, 23; 4:7, 11; and 2 John 5 have the clause, "love the brethren."
14. Paul uses the longest clause, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" in Romans 12:10.



**Principle:** Unconditional love recognizes the Righteousness of God in other believers and gives respect to that person for that righteousness no matter how good or bad he is. It is the state of being free of all mental attitude sins.

15. Following verse 8, James gives illustrations of how the Royal Law was broken by members of the Jerusalem church. In doing so, the apostle demonstrates that the whole law is broken when a believer simply thinks about committing an overt sin.
16. The two examples given are adultery and murder. Although one may not commit adultery but does commit murder then he is guilty of all the mandates and vice versa. We noted our Lord clarifying this situation by saying to even think about committing murder and adultery means such a person is guilty of both. See Matthew 5:21–22, 27.
17. Believers must make adjustments to their thought processes in order to maintain spirituality under the ministries of the Holy Spirit. True, a person may never commit certain overt sins, but it is dead certain that he does think them.
18. For example, revenge motivation is a mental attitude of retribution held by a person who assumes he has been wronged, insulted, abused, or mistreated. All sorts of revenge motivations may be conjured in his soul, but he is restrained from committing an overt act.
19. What James offers as an alternative has to do with speech and behavior, “keep on speaking and keep on doing.” Those who do so are identified as “those who are.” What we have here, first of all, is the present active participle of μέλλω (*méllō*): “To be about to do something; to be impending,” followed by the present passive infinitive, in this case, of κρίνω (*krínō*): “to judge after considering the particulars of a case.”<sup>1</sup>
20. This judgment refers to a definite time when believers will be evaluated and is followed by the present infinitive of *krínō* which indicates it is God’s intent to evaluate every believer.
21. This evaluation follows immediately after the Rapture of the church. The verb *méllō*—about to do something—indicates the imminency of the exit resurrection of Church Age believers.
22. The sin nature is left behind since the resurrection body is free of its corrupting influence. What is left to be examined are human good and evil. These works must be judged while divine good must be rewarded.

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<sup>1</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, rev. ed. (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), s.vv. : “μέλλω, κρίνω.”

23. This process is conducted in the third heaven before the Evaluation Tribunal where Jesus Christ will sit as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Heaven.
24. The present tense of *krínō* (“to judge”) is historical which vividly portrays an event as though the reader were in the midst of the scene as it unfolds. Here it transposes us into the future to describe an event as if it were presently occurring:

The reason for the use of the historical present is normally to portray an event *vividly*, as though the reader were in the midst of the scene as it unfolds.<sup>2</sup>

The *aspectual*<sup>3</sup> value of the historical present is normally, if not always, reduced to zero. The historical present has suppressed its aspect, but not its time. But the time element is rhetorical rather than real.

The writer uses the present tense in a highly vivid manner, as though the event occurred simultaneously with the time of writing.<sup>4</sup>

25. The historical present of *krínō* refers to the time when all believers appear before the Lord’s *bēma* at the tribunal, post Rapture. The passive voice refers to each believer’s works being judged while the infinitive refers to the evaluation itself.
26. The Evaluation Tribunal will occur in heaven between the Rapture of the Church and the Second Advent of Jesus Christ.
27. The manner by which we will be evaluated is mentioned next by the phrase the “law of liberty.” The word “law” is the familiar noun **νόμος (*nómos*)**: “by means of the law,” followed by the noun **ἐλευθερία (*eleuthería*)**: “freedom.”

**James 2:12** In light of these things, keep on speaking or communicating and keep on applying just as those who are about to receive judgment by the law of freedom. (EXT)

28. The English Bibles that use the word *liberty* to translate *eleuthería* are the KJV and NASB. The NIV and NET Bibles correctly translate it, *freedom*, which is best. Here’s why:

<sup>2</sup> “The most recent works on verbal aspect in the New Testament are in agreement that *vividness* or *dramatic narration* is the *raison d’être* [justification for existence] of this usage” (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 526).

<sup>3</sup> “The nature of the action of a verb as to its beginning, duration, completion, or repetition and without reference to its position in time” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (2003), s.v. “aspect”).

<sup>4</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 527, 527n38.



## The Differences between Liberty and Freedom

1. When searching for the English word that contains the full essence of the Hebrew or Greek word under consideration, synonyms must be evaluated to discover which has the most precise definition.
2. Although liberty and freedom seem to be synonymous, they are not exactly. The Greek word under scrutiny is the noun, *eleuthería*. To understand why the better translation of this word is “freedom” rather than “liberty,” we must define each.
3. We will begin with the word “liberty” from whose definitions will emerge the reason it is not the best translation. In our research we will consult *The Oxford English Dictionary*:

**Liberty.** Permission. Exemption or release from captivity, bondage, or slavery. **Natural liberty:** the state in which everyone is free to act as he thinks fit, subject only to the laws of nature. The condition of being able to act in any desired way without hindrance or restraint; faculty or power to do as one likes. Unrestrained action, conduct, or expression; freedom of behavior or speech, beyond what is granted or recognized as proper.

**Freedom.** Exemption or release from slavery or imprisonment. Liberation from the bondage of sin. Exemption from arbitrary, despotic, or autocratic control. The state of being able to act without hindrance or restraint, liberty of action. The quality of being free from the control of fate or necessity. The power of self-determination of the will. Exemption from a specific burden, charge, or service; an immunity, privilege. The right of participating in the privileges attached to: a. membership of [the royal family of God]; b. citizenship of a town or city [the heavenly πολιτεύμα (*políteuma*)]; often conferred upon eminent persons [always conferred by faith alone in Christ alone].<sup>5,6</sup>

4. The latter definition of freedom speaks of all believers’ citizenship, or πολιτεύμα, being in heaven. Paul’s point is that believers live in the hostile environment of the devil’s world although their real citizenship is in heaven. They must orient and adjust during their human lives but, at physical death, they are immediately rescued from it.

<sup>5</sup> “For our citizenship [πολίτευμα (*políteuma*)] is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20).

<sup>6</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), s.vv. “liberty, freedom.”



5. The following excerpt expounds upon this idea regarding the noun πολίτευμα:

The commonwealth to which Christians belong, their “homeland,” is in heaven. They are not citizens rooted here in nature, thought and interests. What we have here is a figurative use of the term in the sense of state or commonwealth and with a view to describing the fact that Christians are inwardly foreigners, not specifically in relation to the earthly state, which is not mentioned at all in the context, but very generally in relation to the earthly sphere. More positively, the word is used to describe their membership of the heavenly kingdom of Christ, to which they belong as it were by constitutional right.<sup>7</sup>
6. Definitions of the word *liberty* indicate an environment in which a citizen may live and act as he thinks fit, subject only to the laws of nature. This is a right conferred by a society with attendant laws restricting some behaviors.
7. The word *liberty* is best understood as the general public environment in a nation of laws that allow its citizens freedom of thought, movement, and choice as long as laws are obeyed.
8. The word *freedom* may be used theologically to define the circumstances that occur when a person places his personal faith in Jesus Christ for salvation and eternal life.
9. Freedom of choice results in a person being removed from the slave market of sin and invested into the divine policy of grace.
10. Where he was once in bondage to sin he is now emancipated by being made free from the Law. The Law only illustrated an Israelite’s release from bondage by the performance of rituals.
11. The rituals portrayed the means by which the Law would be replaced by divine grace in the form of a human, substitutionary sacrifice.
12. The Law was to be kept, not as a means of salvation, but as a means of learning about the freedom which would be provided by a coming Messiah.
13. It is by the power of self-determination and free will that one may extract himself from the works of the Law and be set free to follow the Savior.

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<sup>7</sup> Hermann Strathmann, “πολίτευμα,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 6:535.





14. The concept of freedom is the right of self-determination to make the choice to either stay under the yoke of the Law or to choose the freedom of grace.
15. Liberty nicely defines the system of imposed restraints necessary in an open society. Citizens of the United States still enjoy independence of thought, movement, and choice, but for the good of the society certain restraints must be imposed.
16. Freedom nicely defines the release from bondage to a dead system of commandments associated with obsolete rituals that cannot be consistently obeyed.
17. Faith in Christ produces freedom from the slave market of sin while anointing us into the freedom of His grace. Free of both ritual and unforgiven sin, the believer is free to grow in grace and acquire the guidance that leads to potential escrow blessings at the Evaluation Tribunal of Christ.
18. From Oxford's definition of *freedom*, we may now develop some application from the phrase "law of freedom":
  1. Those who place their personal faith in Jesus Christ move out of a life of works into a life of freedom in which they may serve God.
  2. This freedom makes you free to make good decisions based on principles found in the Word of God.
  3. Except for the worldly laws that define criminality, you are not accountable to other people on how you live your life as unto the Lord.
  4. While continuing to function under the authorities of this world, you personally orient to a set of rules that are exercised under the divine policy of grace.
  5. The object of grace is faith toward the divine guarantee of God's logistical grace support.
  6. The Law of Freedom rejects all human ability, talent, or good works. Man's work has no place in a system of grace.
  7. The cosmic system functions on human good and evil. However, the law of freedom places the obligation on the believer to use that freedom to apply the Word of God and its power, under the enabling ministry of the Holy Spirit, to produce divine good.

