



**WHEN INFLUENCE
SUCCEEDS BUT
SELF IS CREDITED**

The 'Evil Boasting' of James 4:16

James 4:16 — The Evil of Self-Credit

Introduction: What Do You Think of When You Hear the Word “Evil”?

When most people hear the word “evil,” their minds rush toward images of violence, exploitation, murder, abuse, theft, deception, or cruelty. And they would be right—these actions truly are evil. Scripture condemns them plainly.

Yet the New Testament describes another form of evil - one so subtle, so socially acceptable, and so normalized that most professing Christians not only practice it continually, but even affirm it *as good*, healthy, and virtuous. It is an evil committed not against neighbor, but *against God* Himself. You think this is impossible? Read on.

James 4:13–16

James addresses those who speak of tomorrow as if God were irrelevant to it. They say: “We will go... we will spend... we will do... we will profit.” Their words betray a hidden assumption: Independent autonomy. Ownership. Control.

James answers with shocking force: “*All such boasting is evil*” (v. 16).

Not careless. Not unwise. Not unfortunate, but...*Evil*.

I. The Rescuer Analogy

Imagine a man spiraling downward, ready to make a catastrophic decision. A friend intervenes - pleads, reasons, persuades. The man turns back from destruction. Later he tells the story - but never once mentions the rescuer. He repeatedly references *his choice* to change, and his testimony is “*I chose ...*”, not “*Because of the intervention of a close friend whose persuasive plea succeeded, I*

chose.” The silence of person A who is giving the testimony is deafening. Silence in such a context *distorts* the truth. Such an omission *misrepresents* reality. He boasts in a change he did *not* originate – he is not the cause of. Now imagine that person A repeats this same ‘version’ of the change of direction in his life and persistently omits the influence of person B? If you were person B and you heard that same testimony along with its now intentional omission of what you did, how would you feel? Now imagine that person B is not a finite, flawed sinner but the eternal, majestic God Himself.

James calls this kind of boasting by omission “*evil*.” And he is right. Biblically, “sin” consists of a few elements: sins of commission – the active crossing of a prescribed command or boundary line; sins of omission – the passive failure to do what one ought to have done. Both constitute “sin” in God’s sight.

II. The Evil of Silence

If failing to acknowledge human help is arrogant, what is failing to acknowledge God’s decisive intervention? Not merely acknowledging that He had to “take the first step” by sending His Son and dying on the cross, rising again etc. Nor even that His grace – however loosely defined that may be, was in *some* way “necessary” for the change in direction to occur. These types of anemic attempts to acknowledge God had *something* to do with the change in us, are far from the reality – and the principle of James 4:13-16 demonstrates this beyond doubt. In the analogy above – the action and effect of person B is tangible, measurable – *decisive*.

James is not merely addressing travel schedules and business plans. He is revealing a universal principle:

Any claim of independence from God—natural or spiritual—is *arrogant*. To speak as though we control tomorrow is *evil*. To speak as though we caused our own spiritual life is therefore infinitely worse.

✚ If we cannot speak of tomorrow without God, how can we speak of regeneration without Him?

III. The Example of the Sinless Savior (John 14:10; 5:19–20)

If anyone ever had the right to self-credit, it was Jesus Christ.

Sinless. Sovereign. Perfect. Divine.

And yet what do we consistently see from Him?

“The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but *the Father* abiding in Me *does His works*” (John 14:10).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son *can do nothing of Himself*, unless it is something He sees the Father doing.” (John 5:19)

“My teaching is *not Mine*, but His who sent Me” (John 7:16)

“For I did not speak on My own, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment—*what to say and what to speak*.” (John 12:49)

✚ Jesus persistently deflected credit and honour from Himself to the Father...yet He was inherently sinless and fully divine.

Humility is essential to His incarnate mission. Not theoretical, but functional. Not symbolic but *lived*. The Son delights to deflect *all* credit – for everything on the Father.

If the Sinless One deflects credit to the Father, what right have sinners to claim anything good in matters spiritual as self-originated or caused?

If Jesus Christ Himself refused to speak independently, how unthinkable is it for us to attribute faith, repentance, regeneration, or perseverance to the autonomous power of our *own* will?

✚ **Saying “grace assisted” is not enough. Far from it. Assisted *how*?
In what measurable, practical, demonstrable way did grace assist?**

Oxford Definitions

Influence (n.)

“The capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behavior of someone or something, or on the outcome of something.”

Persuade (v.)

“To cause (someone) to do something through reasoning or argument; to induce belief by appealing to the mind or emotions.”

If *influence* means the capacity to **effect** a change, and *persuasion* means to **cause** someone to act or believe, then any change produced through influence or persuasion of another is, by definition, **not** self-originated. **The effect belongs to the influencer; the outcome belongs to the persuader.**

Thus, in the analogy, to omit the *decisive* role of Person B is not humility but distortion — and when the influencer is **God**, the omission becomes the very “*arrogant, evil boasting*” James condemns.

✚ **The humility of the sinless Son of God exposes our pride...in the most glaring way possible!**

IV. The Example of Paul — 1 Corinthians 15:10

If any Christian, “saved by grace” might have claimed personal credit for hard work, endurance, sacrifice, or spiritual accomplishment, it was Paul.

1 Cor 15:10 - “By the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not without effect. For I work harder than the others - *yet not I*, but the grace of God with me.”

This contains a three-part structure:

1. “I am what I am by the grace of God”
2. “I worked harder than all of them...”
3. “Yet not I...but the grace of God that was with me.”

If the 3rd phrase were missing, Paul’s words would be arrogant. Instead, he masterfully attributes *every* spiritual effect—his labor, his endurance neither of which are possible without the choice to do so - his total transformation to the *operative grace of God*.

 **Paul refuses rob credit from God who *produced* all this change.**

Conclusion — Is It Really That Serious?

Yes. According to James, it is deadly serious.

A “control freak,” in common speech, refers to someone who insists on having things their way. At the risk of sounding irreverent, that is God—except He is no “freak.” He is Lord. Creator. King. Judge. Father. Savior.

He alone has the right to determine outcomes. He alone has the right to define truth. He alone has the right to be acknowledged in “*all* your ways” (Prov 3:6).

Your words speak James said. So does your silence. What you omit is as devastating an indictment on you as what you say – at least in God’s opinion.

And both your words – what you do say and emphasize and your silence – what you fail to say and emphasize, can “bear false witness” about the God who saved you.

To say, “I chose myself into salvation,” is not merely incomplete. It is the proverbial “mist” (as James says we are all like the morning mist – James 4:14), *boasting of raising itself from the grave.*

If Scripture teaches anything with unmistakable force, it is this: we do *not* turn ourselves to God - God *turns us to Himself*. James calls self-credit “arrogant evil,” and Psalm 80 teaches the *true* prayer of the redeemed: **“Turn us again, O God, and we shall be saved.”** (Psalm 80:3,7, 19). And if this is the true prayer – then the true testimony is not “I turned to God” but “*God turned me to Himself.*”

 **Every saving step we take is grace preceding, grace empowering, and grace completing.**

Anything less or else is arrogant, evil boasting!

Psalm 80, James 4, 1 Corinthians 15:10 etc., were not written by “A Calvinist” – but by the Spirit of God moving on the men who wrote them.

May God give light

Sola Gratia. Soli Deo Gloria.