

The Temple Without Obedience Is Empty

~ Olaf Standley

We often say we believe—but how does that belief actually show up in our lives? This is the question James presses us to consider (James 2:14). Is our faith something we only confess, or something we truly live? James speaks plainly: “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17). That can sound strong, but his point is simple—real faith doesn’t stay hidden. It shows up. It moves. It acts.

Faith is more than words. It’s easy to say we trust God, but genuine faith begins to shape how we live. It affects how we treat people, how we respond to need, and how we carry ourselves in everyday moments. As James writes, “Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:18). James even gives us examples. Abraham trusted God, and that trust led him to act in obedience (James 2:21–23; Genesis 15:6). Rahab believed, and her faith moved her to take a risk (James 2:25; Joshua 2:9–11). Different lives, same truth: living faith produces action.

But Scripture also reminds us of something deeper—we are not just people who believe; we are now the dwelling place of God. “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). Our lives are meant to be living temples, reflecting His presence to the world around us.

And this is where James’ words take on even greater weight. A temple without the presence and movement of God is empty. In the same way, a life that claims faith but lacks obedience reflects something hollow. As Jesus said, “**If you love me, you will keep my commandments**” (John 14:15). Obedience is not about earning God’s love—it is the evidence that His Spirit truly lives within us. A servant of Christ obeys.

This doesn’t mean we earn God’s favor through what we do. The gospel reminds us that we are saved by grace, not by works (Ephesians 2:8–9). But that same grace doesn’t leave us unchanged. It awakens something in us. As Paul continues, we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Ephesians 2:10). Our actions don’t create our faith—they reveal it.

So the question for us is simple: where is our faith visible? If we are His temple, where is His presence being seen through us?

Maybe it looks like reaching out to someone in need (1 John 3:17–18). Maybe it’s offering encouragement, showing patience, or choosing generosity when it would be easier not to. These small, everyday acts become powerful evidence that our faith is alive. James isn’t trying to weigh us down—he’s inviting us into something real. A faith that isn’t just spoken, but seen. “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:26).

If we are His temple, then our lives should not be empty of His movement. A servant of Christ obeys. And as we walk with Christ, we can trust Him to shape both our hearts and our actions into a living testimony of His grace.