



Faith vs. Faith In...

Ephesians 1:15-16 NIV

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

How Would You Assess Your Faith?

One of my favorite sports teams of all time were the 2006/2007 "We Believe" Warriors. A below average team, as the season began to draw to a close, they suddenly started winning. Their home fans became legendary for how loud they cheered for the Warriors. Sure losses turned into wins as the team pushed to break the curse of continual losing and missing the playoffs year after year. Finally, at the end of the season, with only two more wins than losses, the Warriors made it into the playoffs, only to go against the best team in the NBA. "We Believe" became the team slogan and it was picked up by hundreds of thousands of Warriors fans. What though did that mean, "We Believe"? Believe what? Believe the Warriors would win games? Believe they would become world champions? Believe the Warriors would make the playoffs? Believe the coaches had the best strategy for winning? Or did everyone just believe in believing? Disney movies are famous for the theme "Believe". Believe in what though? Believe in who? Believe in yourself? Believe in your hard work or good ideas? Believe everything will work out in the end?

Faith and believe in the Greek language have the same root and are identical in meaning. Faith is what you call the act of believing. To believe means to have faith. The Bible doesn't promote faith in faith. It never suggests that we should have faith without an object to that faith. It is always faith in God, faith in Jesus Christ. Often Jesus criticized or commended different ones about faith, but it was never intended to just be general faith that things will go well, a sort of religious positive thinking, it always had to do with having the right object of faith, faith in Him, faith in God. A classic example of this was when two blind men approached Jesus, begging Him to heal them. **When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?"** (Matthew 9:28 NIV) Their quick response was "Yes, Lord". Immediately Jesus touched their eyes and they could see. Jesus made it clear why He gave them their sight. It was according to their faith. Not faith in themselves, not faith in good things happening, not even faith in life. It was faith in Christ to heal them. They had it and that was why He gave them their sight.

Our verse for today celebrates the faith of the Ephesians. It was though not faith in faith or faith in life or faith in themselves but rather faith in the Lord Jesus. **For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.** (Ephesians 1: 15-16 NIV) What connects faith and the Lord Jesus is the little Greek word "en" translated in. En has to do with a movement toward, going in a certain direction. Faith for the Ephesians was straight to Lord Jesus, it was pointed to Him. Jesus as a man has much to commend Himself. His teachings were powerful and extraordinary. The miracles were wonderful and brought great joy. His love of people and kindness to the neglected and despised of society was inspiring. The faith of the Ephesians was not in Jesus, just another man among many, but rather in Lord Jesus, the ruler of all and King of kings. We mustn't forget that this faith was in someone specific, in Lord Jesus.

Do you have faith in Jesus Lord? Are you all in on Him as King over all things, over you? There is a fascinating account in the Gospel of John that illustrates the point of the question. In John 4 is the narrative of Jesus coming into a tiny Samaritan village after an exhausting journey. His disciples went into town to see if they could find some food while Jesus rested outside the village, sitting on the stone covering the community well. All of a sudden a social outcast arrived, hoping to fill her water pot but she was stopped dead in her tracks because a stranger was sitting on the well. It was a most awkward moment. Jesus broke the strained silence by immediately asking the woman if she would get Him a drink from the well. This was an odd request in the woman's eyes. Jews hated Samaritans and Jewish men did not have public conversations with women at that time. Jesus pushed harder though, offering the woman living water. This seemed a bizarre offer of Jesus. The Samaritan had no idea who He was but here He was promising her something that could only come from some mountain stream. She asked Him if He was greater than the ancient patriarch Jacob who dug the well originally almost 2,000 years earlier. She certainly saw Jesus as an odd duck!

Jesus' reply brought the conversation to an entirely new level of perplexity. **Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."** (John 4:13-14 NIV) That seemed preposterous to the woman! Her response was laced with sarcasm. **"Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."** (John 4: 15 NIV) Then though, Jesus upped the ante and grabbed her attention. He asked her to go get her husband and then return. The woman answered that she didn't have a husband. Jesus, the complete stranger quickly made it clear that He knew more about her than seemingly could be possible. **"You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband."** (John 4:17-18 NIV) Immediately, the woman realized Jesus was at least a prophet, maybe more. Jesus then reminded the woman that God is spirit and those who worship Him must do so in spirit and in truth. Suddenly, the switch flipped on in the woman's head and she thought of the long promised Messiah. Jesus said that was who He was, and she took off in a flash to the village to invite all the townsfolk to come meet the Messiah.

This monumental change of direction in the Samaritan woman cannot be overstated. She went to the well at the time she did because she wanted to avoid all the women of the village. A woman with five previous husbands living with someone not her husband, she would have been and clearly was a social pariah., Yet she still went out to the very people who despised her, opening herself up to even greater herself ridicule by telling everyone that the stranger she had just met was maybe the Messiah. The way she announced it to everyone, the grammar indicates that she clearly had her doubts. But as the day moves to night and Jesus remained in the tiny village another couple days, the identity of the woman changed. At the beginning of the chapter, she was known as a Samaritan woman. By the time the account is finished, the Bible calls her "the witness woman". Who she was, how she was known was transformed by her faith. Faith became faith in Jesus Lord, and she was witness woman, the one who pointed people to Him. Having faith in Jesus makes you different, rewrites your story.

Later in the same chapter, a royal official came to Jesus, begging him to go to his house and heal his dying son. Jesus told him to go home, that his son would live. Rather than arguing with Jesus and continuing to plead for him to go back to his house, the man had faith in Jesus Lord and trusted Him. On his way home, the man received word that his son had recovered at the exact same time Jesus told him to go back. This poor dad was in desperate straits. He could not just give up on his son. He went to Jesus because he had faith. When he went home, having been told by Jesus his son would be fine, he left because he had faith in Jesus. The difference between faith and faith in Jesus Lord is subtle but vast. When you have faith in Jesus Lord, you put your life in His hands. You do what He tells you to do. You trust Him to handle your issues. You don't worry because you know Jesus Lord loves you and will take care of things.

You have probably never heard of Graham Staines. From Australia, he went as a medical missionary to work in a leprosy hospital in eastern India. Graham was leading a five-day open air evangelistic outreach and his two young sons were with him. Graham's wife and daughter had stayed home. That night, as he and his boys settled in their station wagon to sleep that night, a group of militant Hindus attacked them, trapping Graham and his boys in the car, and setting it on fire. Holding his sons to himself, they died in the flames. Potential rescuers were threatened with death if they intervened. The president of India called it barbaric and eventually the leaders of the mob were arrested. It is the response of Graham's wife Gladys and her daughter that makes this account so very inspiring. They stayed in India and worked at the leper's hospital five more years. Gladys told reporters and friends that ten days before the murders, she felt, as she was praying, urged to give all she had to Jesus. Weeping, she finally agreed to do so. "Lord Jesus, yes, I am willing.. Take all that I have. I surrender them all to You." What about you? Is He Lord Jesus to you? Do you have faith in Jesus to do all things right? Will you trust Him that He is good and worthy to be in charge of your life? Is your hope in Jesus?