

“All in favor say ‘aye’...all opposed say ‘no.’” Hey, how many times have you heard these words at one time or another? Well, many of us have heard that quite a bit from venues where there’s voting going on, you know, in those places or organizations where there’s a representative voice in governance or process. Examples of voting “aye”—of course, that means “yes”—can be in the U.S. Congress...or a local school board meeting...or maybe just a quick count of your office mates about choosing a place to eat lunch. And when the ultimate answer is “the ayes have it,” well, then, you are a winner when you said “aye.”

When I come across rather odd words like this one—“aye,” that’s spelled a-y-e—it’s then that I get curious about word origins. You may recall that the studying of word origins is called etymology. Well, the use of the word “aye” apparently just kind of appeared in Britain about the year 1575 and was being widely used by 1600. And, yeah, it essentially means “yes” or “agree.” So, all of you in favor of reducing government spending, say “aye.” Unless, of course, it’s money you’re personally receiving from the government, then say “no.” So, right there, you can see why the “ayes” don’t always have it!

So—in the context of today’s episode—what’s all that about? Well, we’re continuing a series about the amazing life of Abraham, a man whose lifelong narrative is a top candidate as the pinnacle reference in the Old Testament for a full life in God. Abraham is clearly among the very most famous folks in history, and one of the reasons for that is that at least three very influential groups over the centuries claim Abraham as an ancestor-founder-father figure—and those three specific groups are often called out as the three monotheistic religions—the word *monotheistic* embracing of the idea there’s only one God.

Now those three religions are Judaism, Islam, and Christianity....and all three groups claim a special relationship with Abraham. So, let take a look at that. As you recall, in the Genesis account, Abraham was blessed by God and promised a son. Abraham’s wife, Sarah, became frustrated with the very long wait for a son and arranged for Abraham to conceive a son with her servant Hagar. The result was Abraham’s son Ishmael...and Islam traces its roots back to Abraham through Ishmael. (We’re leaving aside the issue as to whether the god of Islam, Allah, is the same as the God of Christians—another topic for another time!)

Then, about thirteen years after Ishmael was born, Abraham and Sarah did indeed bear a son as God promised. He was named Isaac...and Judaism traces its roots back to Isaac and his son Jacob, who became known as Israel. And of course, Judaism is very focused on the God of the Old Testament as their God.

Then—in the fullness of time, according to the prophets of old and the full counsel of the Word of God—Jesus the Christ was born, lived a sinless life, died on the Cross as a ransom for all humanity, was resurrected, and ascended to the right hand of the Father. ‘Course, that’s a brief rendering of the Christian faith that is very much anchored in the God of the Old Testament...and the New Testament as well!

So, all three groups claim Abraham as clearly *theirs*, pretty much each doing so in a quite exclusive manner—again, Islam through Ishmael...Judaism through Isaac...Christianity through “Jesus the Messiah... the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). The trouble is, each group believes their claim is clearly preferential to the others! And that was manifested in this clash between Jesus and several Jews. (John 8:31-44 ESV)

“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’”

“Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.’”

“They answered him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did.’ They said to him, ‘We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.’” Again, that’s John 8:31-44.

This confrontation of Jesus and His response is a watershed, definitional moment *for all people...for all time!* Here, Jesus is declaring the status of each person is “out” of their bloodlines and “in” through their spiritual decisions! The bloodline of the Jew in Abraham as their father held no spiritual value to Jesus...it was *only* their spiritual condition that mattered. And, yes, Jesus took it all the way to the Jews being of “their father, the devil.” Later, the issue of being a descendant of Israel was further explained by Paul by the power of the Holy Spirit in Romans 9:6b-7a: “For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children.” Then Paul wrote to the Galatians...

“Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’...Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” (Galatians 3:6-9)

So, it’s *not* about bloodlines, *it’s all about faith in God!* Yes, Abraham did beget two sons, the two “I’s”... that’s a capital “I” for Ishmael and a capital “I” for Isaac. But there is no salvation in either of these two “I’s.” Instead, God only pays attention to the “aye”...the a-y-e that is the “yes” of registering belief in Christ and Him crucified! That’s the spiritual “yes,” the “aye” that reconciles each believer to God! (Acts 4:12)

So, it doesn’t matter if Isaac is in your bloodline...or not! And it doesn’t matter whether Ishmael is in your bloodline...or not! It doesn’t matter who your earthly family is...or not! And frankly, it doesn’t matter what your church or religious heritage is...or not! All that matters is your “aye”...your “yes”...of a heartfelt faith in Christ! As the saying goes: “God has no grandchildren”...indeed, each person must say “aye” to Christ.

As Paul said, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring.” (Gal 3:28-29)

So that’s the great “yes” vote for victory. You might say that, for every person who has voted “aye” for Christ, that “the ayes have it”—yeah, the “ayes” have the whole shebang: eternal life and fellowship with God...grace abounding beyond our imagination! For sure, as to the “yes” to Christ...the ayes have it *all!*

But sadly, sooner or later, the relentless, unfolding history of many churches and denominations and sometimes even God-grounded families is that faith in Christ falls by the wayside for a changed focus—the things of this world, the distractions, other priorities. So, it falls to every generation that each person must respond with their own personal faith in Christ...and God will show Himself faithful to those who do! And, hey, have you ever wondered why so many businesses and nonprofits only last a relatively few years or perhaps just a generation or two...or if they do last for generations, the zeal and faith of the founders morph into something quite different, a mutation into a much different intent than that of the founders?

So, we must be sure our “aye” is genuinely ours, not merely inherited. But, still, do you personally operate in faith at the *depth* of the Apostles—is your “yes” to Christ abiding at the heights reflected in the book of Acts? So, take stock: how about your personal aye to faith in “Jesus the Christ...the son of Abraham” ...?

A&A: Application & Action

1. So, do you find yourself feeding off an inherently depleting inheritance—perhaps from your family or a denomination—rather than having a fresh, personal, replenishing faith in Christ in the here and now? Similarly, how about your church harboring a depleting inheritance? Similarly, how about your workplace having a depleting inheritance? Discuss.
2. From this episode: “So, do you personally operate in faith at the depth of the Apostles—is your ‘yes’ to Christ abiding at the heights reflected in the book of Acts? So, take stock: how about your personal eye to faith in Jesus the Christ, the son of Abraham...?” Discuss.
3. So, is your church operating in faith at the *depth* of the Apostles—is your church’s “yes” to Christ abiding at the heights reflected in the book of Acts? Discuss.