

Amen

Psalm 106:48

Worship is dialogical: a conversation between God and His people. He speaks and we respond, and one of the most weighted and wonderful words we use is *amen*. It's not a space-filler or simply an emotional expression, but a word taken in covenant oath to agree, believe, uphold, and abide by thing spoken. The Lord's people have *amened* for millennia, looking to Jesus who is our *amen*.

The Corporate Amen

Like so many aspects of worship in Scripture, *amen* is something we typically say together. We say it as individuals and there's nothing wrong with saying it alone, but "all the people" told to say *amen* in Psalm 106 say it together: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, 'Amen!' Praise the Lord!" (Ps. 106:48). Jews worshiping in synagogues in the old covenant would say *amen* to each of the three sections of the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:24-26. Christians unfamiliar to this congregational response may be unsettled by it because they've been taught that corporate religious activity is suspect and cultish. You can say the Pledge of Allegiance in unison, no problem, but what about the Apostles' Creed and the corporate *amen*? We have been well-schooled in secularism. Paul rejoiced when he beheld the "good order" of the Colossians, a phrase that translates a word meaning "good discipline" and can be used to describe military order (Col. 2:5). While worship is not a military drill, it is an orderly service where we join hearts, minds, and voices. The effect a booming *amen* in unison is very different than a random guy shouting it on his own.

The Oath of Amen

When God covenants with Israel as they enter the Promise Land, He gathers half of the tribes on Mount Gerizim and the other half on Mount Ebal to *amen* the terms the covenant: "'Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor's landmark.' 'And all the people shall say, 'Amen!' 'Cursed is the one who makes the blind to wander off the road.' 'And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'" (Deut. 27:17-18). Similarly Nehemiah puts the Israelites to stop exacting usury and enslaving one another, "And all the assembly said, "Amen!" and praised the Lord. Then the people did according to this promise" (Neh. 5:13). Some oaths taken by individuals would include "Amen, so be it" (cf. Num. 5:22). *Amen* is far stronger than *yes* or *let it be true*. *Amen* makes the words your own and holds you to it. Jesus said not to take oaths lightly, but let your yes be yes and your no, no (Matt. 5:37). But He also said "Amen, Amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (Jn. 6:53; cf. John 5:24). In fact, *amen* is used 123 times in the New Testament and 30 in the Old. We don't recognize it because it's often translated truly, verily, etc. We use this binding word when we pledge to be the church to the baptized or to new members, when we confess our sins and our faith, when we pray and sing (cf. 1 Cor. 14:16). We are pledging ourselves to the Lord and one another and taking His words into our hearts and lives.

The Blessing of Amen

In His kindness, the Lord doesn't just speak His benediction over us but seals it with *amen*: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen" (2 Cor. 13:14); "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen" (Phil. 4:23; cf. Gal. 6:18); "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (Rev. 22:21). We are tempted to doubt our blessedness from God which comes from being in Jesus, and so He follows His benedictions with this

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wonderful word. Not every blessing concludes with *amen*, so we can be wise instead of superstitious. Nevertheless, the Lord assures our hearts. He blesses us, and then blesses us to know we are blessed.

The Doxology of Amen

When we sing the Doxology, we give glory to God. Glory means radiance, value, honor, praise, renown, distinction, admiration, and gratitude. It means weightiness. God doesn't need our glory since He is sufficient in Himself; we don't fill up a lack of His by glorifying Him. But we need to give it to Him because He deserves it, and it brings us great joy to do so. Think of a four-year-old who really wants to bless his mom, and draws her a picture and gives to her, which she therefore loves. There's a kind of pride that resists this, actually wanting to be wiser than God while telling yourself you are humble. The Lord is enthroned in the praises of Israel (Ps. 22:3). In the vision of heavenly worship that John sees, a myriad of angels proclaim the worthiness of the Lamb who was slain, and then he "heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!' The four living creatures said, 'Amen,' and the elders fell down and worshiped" (Rev. 5:13-14). We give God glory, bless Him, and say amen: "the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen" (Rom. 1:25). "To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet. 5:11). "To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen" (2 Tim. 4:18; cf. Rev. 1:6; Heb. 13:21). "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! And all the people said, 'Amen!' and praised the Lord" (1 Chron. 16:36). Do you see how much is going on in the reading, teaching, preaching, believing, and amening of the Scriptures?

The Christ of Amen

God has always identified Himself with *amen*. Isaiah prophesies of the new heavens and the new earth, the time of the new covenant when "he who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of amen" (Is. 65:16). John tells the church in Laodicea, "These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 3:14). And Paul defends his travel plans to the Corinthians: "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (2 Cor. 1:20). Because Jesus lived and died in our place, and rose from the dead with eternal victory, every promise is given to us in Him—Yes, and Amen. When you ask Him to fulfill His promises and bless you, you don't need to wonder what the answer is. If Jesus is your savior, the answer is Amen.