

Chapter 16: Amen: It Is True and Certain

The end of the doxology

Whenever a doxology occurs in the New Testament, it usually ends with the word "Amen". That is not only the case when a book or a letter ends with the praise of God, but also when such a doxology occurs in the middle of a letter. Here are a few examples. In the first chapter of the letter to the Romans, Paul sings the praises of the Creator, "Who is blessed forever!" (Romans 1:25) Then, before the apostle speaks about the guilt and punishment of the ungodly, the word "Amen" is inserted. When the apostle later in the same letter writes about the election of Israel, he sings the praise of Christ, "who is God over all, blessed forever." (Romans 9:5)

And then again that little word "Amen" follows. Also in the song of praise sung by the apostle further on in Romans, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33-36), the word "Amen" forms the conclusion of that song.

We also find it at the end of the first letter of Peter, which is quoted at the end of the form for profession of faith. Peter has not yet said all he wanted to say there. After his doxology there are three more verses in that chapter. But first he closes his doxology with the word "Amen".

Response to the doxology

The word "Amen" is really the response to the doxology. One has sung the praise of God and another agrees with "Amen". When the ark was brought to Jerusalem, David first appointed that praise be sung to the Lord by Asaph and his brethren. After that, according to the first book of Chronicles, follows the exuberant praise of God in David's song. And at the end of it we can read: "Then all the people said 'Amen!' and praised the LORD." (1 Chronicles 16:36)

It says something similar in Nehemiah. "Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen'". (Nehemiah 8:6)

Also in the book of Psalms we come across the "Amen" more than once, for example at the end of Psalms 41, 72, 89 and 106. The Book of Psalms actually consisted of a number of smaller Psalm books. These various collections of Psalms were made into one larger whole. Each of those Psalm books concluded with the word "Amen", while Psalm 150 should really be seen as the one great "Amen" to the entire collection of Psalms.

In the service of the synagogue the word "Amen" was also used as a response to the words of praise spoken by the leader.

Expression of faith

So "Amen" is the agreement with, the response to, the praise of God. At the same time it is also the expression of faith. The Hebrew word for faith is closely associated with the word "Amen".

When on a certain evening all those thousands of stars were twinkling above the tent of Abram, he suddenly heard a voice saying: can you count them, Abram, all those stars? Of course, Abram could not. Then comes the promise, "So shall your offspring be". Then Scripture says, "Abram believed the LORD". (Genesis 15:6) Abram said "Amen".

Later the LORD tested Abram's faith. The LORD wanted to know if Abram would stick to his "Amen", even if the LORD asked him to offer his only son Isaac. Abram continues to say "Amen" to the LORD. Then follows the promise that God will multiply his descendants "as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore." (Genesis 22:17)

Abram did not deny the LORD his son; he obeyed the voice of the Lord. He said "yes and amen" to God! Likewise our "Amen" is the response of faith with which we praise the LORD.

Seal of prayer

One of the church fathers at some point called the word "Amen" the seal to the prayer. For "Amen" means: "It is certain!" Abram affirmed the promise of God. He said: "It is certain!" even if he could not really tell if the promise would be fulfilled. Amen is: it is true and certain. You may be sure that it will come true. You can also be sure that the prayers are heard. A seal of prayer! Seal – doesn't that imply certainty?

Therefore "Amen" is the word of victory. You stand in the absolute certainty that the Lord God has the last word, and that his Word is reliable.

Handclasp of the covenant

"Amen" has also been called the handclasp of the covenant. When a minister says "Amen" after praise, after prayer, after the preaching, he is not just telling people that now it's over and that he has nothing more to say. No, that closing word is directed to the Lord, and with it he says: "Yours be the glory. What you have promised will be, it is all quite true and certain!"

Therefore "Amen" is the final chord in the song of salvation. In that word, thankfulness rises to God because it has laid hands on the covenant. God's Word and his promises are certain, much more certain than we could even feel the desire for that certainty. For however many promises of God there may be, they find their "Yes" in him; therefore, we also utter the "Amen" through him, to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 1:20)

The "Amen" is a matter of believers. They say, they sing their "Amen" to the preaching of the Word of God for their lives. "If you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?" (1 Corinthians 14:16)

With this "Amen" you enter life as a confessor. You will now fulfil, through God's grace and power, all that you have committed to the Lord.

You may be a choir member, singing the praise of the Lord. And when, after a little while of suffering, the Lord calls you to his eternal glory, you may join in the chorus of the great multitude which no man can number: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:10)

You join the seven-fold, full praise of all creation, singing: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." (Revelation 7:12)

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