

The “Amen” of Prayer

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What does a believer mean when he says “amen” at the end of a prayer (perhaps especially when the prayer has been spoken by someone else)? The answer generally given to this question is, “so be it”, that is to say, “I agree with the prayer and *also* desire the performance of the things asked”. But should the response, “amen”, convey only this?

The word “amen” derives from the Hebrew *aman*, as does the general word used for faith (or faithfulness) in the O.T. (*emunah*). Underlying these words are at least three basic, inter-connected ideas, which ought to be taken into consideration in the usage of the response “amen”:

(1) Stability. In Exod. xvii. 2 Moses’ hands “were *steady* (*emunah*) until the going down of the sun”. As Joshua fought with Amalek, so Moses (with Aaron and Hur staying up his hands) sat on the top of the hill with the rod of God. This is surely a picture of *unwavering* prayer before God—the “steady” hands of Moses.

(2) Truth. Deut. xxxii. 4 refers to God as “The Rock”, emphasizing the *reliance* Israel may place upon Him because of His *stability*. He is also called “A God of *truth* (*emunah*)” in the same verse.

(3) Faith or Faithfulness. In the same chapter the Lord’s complaint against Israel is concerned with their forsaking of “The Rock” that bare them, and He calls them a perverse generation, “children in whom is no *faith* (*emun*)” (verses 18, 20).

In the N.T. *amen* is mostly translated “verily” (an emphatic assertion of *truth*) as in the Lord’s “Verily, verily, I say unto you” (John i. 51, etc.). Paul emphasized the truth of his words by the negative “I lie not”, and perhaps also, “This is a *faithful* (*true*) saying” (Rom. ix. 1; I Tim. i. 15; iii. 1).

Applying these thoughts to the “amen” of prayer it may be said that in responding so, the believer ought to be assured: (a) That the prayer expresses *truth* (otherwise no ‘amen’ should be said) for it is possible to ‘ask amiss’ (James iv. 3). In fact, the response “amen” at the end of a prayer is an assertion that the believer *agrees that the prayer is truth*. (b) That the prayer, since it is truth, will be heard by the God on Whom one can *rely*, in Whom one can *trust* (*faith*).

Hence prayer is seen as an aspect of *resting* in the Lord, and “amen” the expression of that *trust* which submits all its desires to the furtherance of the *truth* (Thy will be done). All prayer should be asked in Christ’s name, and it is not without point that He is called, “The *Amen*, the *faithful* and *true* witness” (Rev. iii. 14).

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