

Amen!

Whatever happened to the "Amen Corner?" I can remember when the worship assembly of Christians never failed to ring with a hearty chorus of "amens" at the conclusion of a prayer; and the preaching, too, was often punctuated with the same bass-voiced confirmation. The brethren seemed in this way to join closely together in the prayers and the preaching. Was this just a passing fad better left behind in a more sophisticated age? Or does it have some foundation in biblical examples?

Perhaps brethren in years gone by did not always use the word accurately, yet I am confident that they had a far greater understanding of the word than we do. To many Christians today it has become merely a sort of verbal buzzer to signal the end of a public prayer. How unfortunate!

The word Amen does not come to us from our own language. It was carried as a Hebrew word into the Greek New Testament and from thence into our English versions. It comes from a Hebrew word which means "to prop" or "to be firm." From this root idea it came to be used in the sense of "true, faithful, or certain." Isaiah speaks of the "God of truth" or literally "the God of the Amen" (Isaiah 65:16). Jesus, in Revelation, speaks of Himself as "the Amen, the faithful and true witness" (Revelation 3:14).

At the beginning of an affirmation, "Amen" gives force to the truth of the statement, as when Jesus says, "Verily, verily" or "Amen, amen, I say unto you. . ." (John 3:3). At the end of a statement it gives confirmation, meaning, "It shall be so" or "let it be so" as in the writing of Paul when he says, "Now unto our God and Father be the glory for ever and ever, Amen."

The children of Israel were commanded by Moses to say "Amen" when the curses of God upon the disobedient were repeated by the Levites in the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 27:15ff). They all said "Amen" and "praised the Lord" when David charged them in a psalm to give thanks to the Lord (I Chronicles 16:36). They all said "Amen" when Nehemiah charged them to put a stop to usury and called on them to promise accordingly (Nehemiah 5: 13). They all said "Amen, amen" when Ezra, upon opening the book of the law of God to read to them, blessed the Lord, the great God (Nehemiah 8:16). In so doing, the people of God joined themselves to His oaths and covenants though they were actually only spoken by one or a few. And one man's thanksgiving and praise to God became that of the whole people. They committed themselves to what was spoken in their presence.

The New Testament reflects the same practice by Christians. Speaking of one praying in a strange tongue, the apostle Paul asks, "How shall he that filleth the place of the unlearned say the Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he knoweth not what thou sayest?" (1 Corinthians 14:16). From Paul's statement it is evident that in this way the early Christians actively participated in the public prayers. Having paid careful attention to the words of the brother praying, they made his prayer their own by saying "Amen — let it be so." They were not casual onlookers at a public performance. They were actively involved and committed. They had to understand the prayer so they could with confidence honestly say "Amen."

What a contrast is the response given to a public prayer among many Christians today. The brother leading the prayer is left to see to his own affairs. If he doesn't "Amen" his own petitions, his supplication to the Lord will be greeted by stony silence or at best a few feeble "Amens" whispered apologetically. Does this reflect the New Testament pattern? I know that just mouthing the word, "Amen," will not summarily make us the kind of worshipper we ought to be, but the thoughtful consideration of this practice of the early Christians might just help to change our spectator spirit.

Are the prayers that are voiced by selected brethren in our assemblies our prayers, too? Do we join in them? Are we involved? Then "let the redeemed of the Lord say so" (Psalm 107:2).

- by Paul Earnhart

"I'm At Peace with My God"

It is not uncommon -- while trying to rebuke or admonish someone concerning their spiritual condition -- to have them reply with this statement: "I'm at peace with my God." Just recently we got this reply from a fella who left the Lord's church and joined a denomination. Not long ago a Christian, after admitting his homosexual lifestyle, used the same defense. Apparently these

folks think that this feeling of "peace" is the absolute standard by which their conduct should be judged. They could not be more wrong!

In ancient Judah, the prophet Jeremiah bemoaned the unfaithfulness of God's people. One of the great problems was that they were oblivious to their lost condition. This was largely due to the fact that "from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace." (Jer. 6:13,14) Do you see it? They believed they were at peace with God. Their religious leaders even told them that there was peace with God. But in reality, there was no peace.

People today, like those in Jeremiah's day, are deceived into thinking that they are at peace with God even as they continue in their rebellion against Him. False teachers contribute to the problem with "good words and fair speeches that deceive the hearts of the simple." (Rom. 16:18)

The only true basis for peace with God is in humble obedience to His will. The apostle Paul urged: "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." (Philippians 4:9) Faith and obedience produce true peace. Anything other than that is simply the deception of subjective feelings. Think!

- by Greg Gwin