

TEACHING SERIES // November 28—December 12, 2021

Say Amen

In crossword puzzles, the clue is “prayer-ender” and the four-letter answer is “amen.” But is this word really just a prayer-ender? Is it simply a religious roger-and-out, a sign-off marking the divide between religious and secular discourse? Amen is absolutely, unequivocally much, much more! Amen is a powerful, divine affirmative. It’s God’s way of saying, “Yes! This is the way it is!” or “Indeed, this is true!” It’s the reverent way of saying, “You can take this to the bank, bet the farm on it, stake your life on it!” or even “Listen up! This is worthy of your full attention.”

So why wouldn’t we just operate under the assumption that all of God’s Word is true, trustworthy, and deserving of our full acceptance? Why do we need such phrases as “truly, truly,” “indeed,” or “amen” interspersed throughout the Scripture? Why would God inspire the writers to put in a plug for the veracity of His Word here and there? At first blush, it might seem this does more to undermine rather than underscore the truthfulness and reliability of God’s Word. After all, if we were in a conversation with someone who repeatedly reminded us, “Honestly, I’m telling you the truth” or “Really, you need to believe what I’m telling you,” we might wonder if this person had a serious credibility problem!

When we dig a little deeper, however, we discover God’s Word is not like anything else we read because it is self-authenticating. It does not need to appeal to anyone or any source outside itself to confirm it is the truth. The Bible is truth, and we know this because the Bible itself claims to be truth from God, period. Amen! We could say the truth of the Bible is internally and eternally settled or fixed. It does not need truth outside itself to make it more efficacious. If this sounds somewhat strange or fishy, it’s only because we’ve been conditioned by thinking patterns and presuppositions of the Enlightenment.

For years, we’ve been operating under the false assumption that man is the measure of all things. It is *my* reason and rationality, along with the evidence *I* select by which truth is determined. God’s Word is subject to *my* judgments, not the other way around. And given our therapeutic culture, it gets even worse! It’s not just *my judgments* which are supreme, it’s *my feelings*. What I personally *feel* about God’s Word is what really matters. This is the water in which we swim, all of us, believers and unbelievers alike. This is our natural habitat. God’s Word stands trial at the bar of our judgment and feelings.

Let me illustrate why this thinking must change regarding God’s Word. Whatever I consider to be my ultimate source of truth is, without question, my final authority. Absolute truth and authority are inseparable. If I tell you we know the Bible is true and reliable because a recent archeological dig confirms the existence of something mentioned in the Bible, I am appealing to something outside of the Bible to prove it is true. This evidence outside of the Bible can then (if I am not careful in the way I think about it) subtly start functioning as my final authority. If I tell you the Bible is true because it makes sense to me, then I myself and my reason become the final authority. As Dr. Wayne Grudem points out in his systematic theology, there is no way out of this conundrum of circular reasoning with regard to the Bible. This is the way it has to be. You see, if there were another way, the Word of God itself would not be our final authority. Instead, the final authority would be that “other thing” (my reason, scientific evidence, historical artifacts, etc.) that “confirms” God’s Word.

I’m not saying, of course, that extra-biblical evidence is of no use. History, archeology, philosophy, apologetics, etc. can all be or contain God’s truth, and this gives us confidence as well as arguments for the

reliability of God's Word. What I am saying is this: One of the biggest blind spots or biases we bring to our study of the Bible is the idea we ourselves are the final authority and court of appeal as it pertains to God's Word. We give it our amen only because we might concur with what it says based on what we feel, believe, or have been taught. Whether we are aware of it or not, when our thinking functions in this way, it hinders our ability to simply trust His Word above all else. It puts us in control and keeps us from saying amen in our hearts to all God is revealing to us—especially those things that challenge our misguided and cherished assumptions. Instead of approaching God's Word like a little child with our imagination wide open, humble, and ready to receive, we often come with hidden agendas.

Jesus once told the Pharisees, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life" (John 5:39-40). If you've studied the Bible much, you know many of the Pharisees would not believe the testimony of God's incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. Why not? Because Jesus did not meet their expectations or assumptions. In some ways, when we withhold our hearty amen, we betray a pattern of thinking not unlike those Pharisees! We want God on our terms, not His.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus repeatedly uses the phrase, "You have heard that it was said...but I say to you..." (Matthew 5:21-44). It's clear from this expressive idiom He is not just putting another opinion on the table for consideration. No, without citing any authority other than His own words, He effectively tells His listeners, "Whatever you've heard from all your esteemed rabbis, My Word is the final Word!" That the people understood this is what Jesus meant can be seen by the editorial comment Matthew makes at the end of Jesus' sermon: "When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:28-29). You see, when the scribes taught, they always cited some respected rabbinical authority to add weight to their teaching. Jesus did no such thing. He didn't need to. His Word is, was, and always will be the final Word.

If "Amen" is God's own seal of approval that His Word is truth and can be trusted, then our amen is far more than an ending of a prayer. Our amen is an echo and a fitting response to God's Amen; it is our way of saying, "Yes God, we have heard what You've said and we agree wholeheartedly! We agree that You alone are the only Savior; we agree that Your Word is trustworthy and true; we agree that You are able to keep us from falling; we agree that You love us and have released us from our sins by Your blood, and that You are coming again. We agree with all of this, not because we have reasoned all these things out, but because You have revealed them to us in Your great love by Your Holy Spirit." Amen!

As we conclude our study in the one-year chronological Bible, think of these last few weeks as a chance to say amen to all God has taught us this past year. The passages we will be absorbing in Galatians, Corinthians, Jude, and Revelation (with a break for our Christmas sermon) all end with an emphatic amen. God has spoken; let's respond with AMEN!

November 28 // Say Amen // Galatians 1:1-15 // John

It is one of the earliest letters of the New Testament and it couldn't have come at a more crucial time. The unity of the church was at stake: Is a person's relationship with God in any way determined by race, gender, or social class? Must Gentiles adopt certain Jewish practices before they can be Christians in good standing? Is salvation in *our* hands? Is it something God starts and we finish with our good works? These

were some of the questions Paul dealt with when writing to the first-century churches of Galatia. And these are questions we still wrestle with today. If you doubt this, just think about how rigid and divided people have become on questions of alleged racial superiority and inferiority. Or browse through the latest offerings of the unending list of self-help books on the market.

The truth is human beings have always had a tendency to believe they have something redemptive to contribute as far as salvation is concerned. Whether people believe they are too bad to be saved or too good not to be saved, the problem is and always has been the same: the idea that salvation is about our goodness, not God's. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul the Apostle deconstructs this deceit in the very first verses. In describing Jesus as having given Himself for our sins so He might rescue us (Galatians 1:4), in one fell swoop Paul effectively takes salvation out of our hands and puts it in the hand of God. In using the word "rescue," he makes it clear God has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. Simply put, we who need to be rescued cannot save ourselves. We bring nothing but our sins. He gives us the righteousness of His Son. To this we can all say amen!

December 5 // Say Amen // 2 Corinthians 1:15-22 // Scott

Have you ever had to make a last-minute change of plans? Of course you have! Though God doesn't change, our circumstances do, and we have to make adjustments. In the first century, Paul the Apostle had to change his travel plans and sadly, when he was unable to visit his friends in the Greek city of Corinth, some held it against him. Critical Christians in the church at Corinth accused Paul of not being a man of his word. They were saying, "Paul cannot be trusted. He says one thing and then he does another!"

Remarkably, Paul's greatest concern was not the slanderous accusations directed against him. Paul's greatest fear was that the Corinthians might conclude that if he could not be trusted, then the message of the gospel he proclaimed could not be trusted either. This was Paul's worst nightmare! So what does he do? He pivots from what the Corinthians were saying about him to what they needed to know about God and His Word. God's Word can be trusted, and all the proof you need can be found in Jesus Christ. All the promises of God find their fulfillment in Jesus. To this we can say a hearty amen!

December 12 // Say Amen // Jude 1:24-25 // Scott

The tiny little book of Jude is a great big smackdown on posers who had crept into the church. They were trying to advance a weird teaching that apparently denied sensual sins were a serious problem for those who indulged in them. To this destructive heresy Jude took exception, warning the true believers to reject this alien faith and instead contend for the faith that was once and for all delivered to God's holy people.

With so many bizarre and unbiblical teachings floating around us today, Jude is a wonderful reminder of two very important truths. What you believe really matters because those beliefs will shape your life, whether for good or evil. And even though counterfeit faiths may abound, our God is able to keep us from falling and to present us before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy. This is comforting reassurance to which we can say amen!

December 19 // Christmas Sermon

December 26 // Say Amen // Revelation 1:1-7

There is an ending to the story of which we are all a part. History as we know it is coming to an end. What will happen when a world outside our own makes its presence completely known? Are you ready for this coming kingdom? Are you unsettled or afraid? You needn't be. The One who entered our world over 2,000 years ago and changed it forever is coming again. The first time He came, it was a local, humble, unassuming affair. Shepherd and angels were His audience. He came to die. When He returns, it's going to be a worldwide, spectacular appearance. Every eye will see Him. He's coming to reign. To this we say amen, amen, and amen!