

Dear Family of God,

Here we are at the end of our study of the catechism. Over the past few months we've studied prayer. And we finish it up tonight by examining the last two Q&As of the HC which reflect on the doxology and the amen of the Lord's Prayer. What do we mean when we pray, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and glory forever. Amen."? We too often race through the prayer or pray the closing words with little thought. And that's probably truest when it comes to the doxology and the amen! So let's take some time tonight to think about those closing words of the Lord's Prayer and what they mean for us.

## **The Doxology**

First of all, the Doxology. We pray "For thine (or yours) is the kingdom, and the power, and glory, forever." A doxology is any form of praise to God, but it is most often used at the end of prayers.

When we read the Lord's Prayer in the books of Matthew and Luke, it doesn't include the doxology. And there's really no evidence that Jesus included it when he taught the Lord's Prayer. Yet the church throughout history—particularly Protestants—has added it, as early as the second century already. They added it to their use of the Lord's Prayer with good intention and good historical precedent.

You see, Jewish worship services before the time of Christ included prayers ending with a doxology. Think of David's well-known prayer in 1 Chronicles 29 which includes a longer version of the doxology than the Lord's Prayer.

*1 Chr 29:11 Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power  
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,  
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.  
Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom;  
you are exalted as head over all.*

That's an OT example.

When we get to the book of Revelation, we get a picture of those in our eternal home offering this kind of praise to the Lord as well. From the Island of Patmos, John writes,

*Rev 5:11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering  
thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They  
encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.*

*12 In a loud voice they sang:  
"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,*

*to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength  
and honor and glory and praise!"*

*Rev 5:13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under  
the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing (this doxology):  
"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"*

At that time and place pictured in Revelation 5, there are no more petitions for daily bread, or no more prayers for forgiveness of sins or deliverance from temptation. We have no more needs like this. God is our all in all. Yet we still praise him! In the new world we will still sing the doxology!

Perhaps it takes recreated eyes to see this perfectly. But let's stop and think about it from our place now. You see, God is God! All by himself he is the source of all goodness, life, holiness and blessedness. He does not need any other creatures and is not somehow made greater by us. The Westminster Confession of Faith says, "He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things and (he) hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever Himself pleaseth." In short, we confess that God is almighty, all-knowing, and all-glorious. He is praiseworthy in and of himself, even before he does anything for us. That's why when we get to heaven and live in a place of perfection, we will have no need to pray for our daily bread and forgiveness. But we will still praise the Lord.

Why not start now!? To help us digest this more, let's consider the little word *for* that begins the doxology. "*For thine is the kingdom...*" That little *for* reminds us that all the preceding parts of the prayer depend on the power and kingship and glory of God! (NOYO, 191). The old orange Never On Your Own book was a standard for catechism classes many years ago. In it, the late Dr. Gordon Spykman says,

In every Christian's life there comes a time to stop asking and start singing, to stop praying and start praising. That's what happens in the Lord's Prayer.

Spykman continues,

The message of the doxology is this: God is the Ruler! He has conquered the devil. Satan is mighty, but God is all-mighty. And God's victory is ours. He will make all things turn out for our good. All God's ways lead to glory.

The story is told of a man who, during World War II, sat trembling in his bomb shelter during an air raid. He prayed desperately, feverishly. But suddenly he stopped begging that his life be spared and he started praising God instead. He was singing doxologies! He was like Paul and Silas singing songs at midnight while locked in the inner dungeon of the Philippian jail.

Then according to his own testimony, this frightened man found in his praises a wonderful peace. God answered his prayers (for safety)—through praise (which resulted in overwhelming peace).

That, my friends, is the power of the doxology.

And that's why God's people need to be praisers. Sometimes we speak our praise; most often we sing it. You see, congregation, telling God how awesome and glorious and mighty he is strengthens our soul. Making music and singing to the Lord is good for us individually. We sing like that soldier in the foxhole. We sing in our car. We sing in the shower. We sing when we're doing housework or mowing the lawn or shovelling the snow. Singing can strengthen our soul even when we are alone!

We also sing together as the church and lift our praise to God. Sometimes an individual in the church will sing and the music of the one expresses the praise of all—and lifts the heart of all. Other times a small group singing or playing musical instruments lifts our praise to God and our hearts are tuned to the Lord. Either way—alone or together—God delights in the praise of his people and our praise lifts up God's name as well as lifting our own hearts.

But now a warning. Because singing is our strength and expresses the joy and health of the church, you can be sure that Satan has tried—and too often succeeded—at separating church members over the way in which we praise the Lord. In the past it was debates over the organ and choirs and more recently it has been musical instruments and praise teams. Just the other day I was listening to a speaker telling his audience that churches shouldn't sing contemporary songs by some specific authors. He had a few good points but it seemed to me that he was bringing division where there doesn't need to be any.

If you stop and think about, that is really sad. The very thing that God delights in—the praises of his people—becomes the point where Satan enters the church to divide God's people. We should think about that each time we feel like complaining about the singing of one person or another or one group or another. It's not that we can't have some difference of opinion but let us not be divided over praising the Lord who is worthy of all the praise and glory and honour we give him.

God has given us voices to praise him. And praise is the most fitting response we can offer to the God who has saved us in Jesus Christ. The church is wise to allow all generations to express their praise to the Lord because the praise must come from the heart of all God's children.

I listen to grandparents talk about how wonderful it is to hear their grandchildren talk so freely and openly about the Lord. And, indeed, we must praise God that our children love him and wish to express that love. To hold them back is to rob God of the praise he is worthy to receive. So rather than trying to silence the praises, we need to encourage it all the more.

Doxology needs to be a part of our life. It's a fitting response to the amazing grace of our God that we receive in so many different ways.

**The Amen**

Now let us turn our attention to the Amen. The amen, like the doxology, is a fitting response to God's greatness. Unfortunately, the amen has been misunderstood and perhaps misused.

I know that as a child, I listened to the sermon trying to figure out when the minister would say that long-awaited word. I'd usually guessed wrong because I was ready for him to finish way before he was. And that happened in the long congregational prayer as well. If I didn't fall asleep on my dad before the end of the prayer, I'd try to guess when the minister would say Amen. The sad part of that memory now as I look back on it is that Amen was just another way of saying "The End." That's all it meant to me.

But it means a lot more than that in the Bible. The word "amen" was transliterated directly from the Hebrew into the Greek of the New Testament, then into Latin and into English and many other languages. That makes it practically a universal word. It has been called the best-known word in human speech.

The word is directly related—in fact, almost identical—to the Hebrew word for "believe" (*aman*), or "faithful." Thus, it came to mean "sure" or "truly," an expression of absolute trust and confidence. Therefore when you believe God, you indicate or express your faith with an "amen." When God makes a promise, our response as believers is "amen," meaning "so be it" or "it is true and certain." In the New Testament, it is often translated "verily" or "truly." So whenever you and I hear the truth about God, it is fitting to respond with an *Amen*.

Recently, someone asked me why I often ask the congregation to respond with an Amen. I said it's biblical. In Bible times the whole congregation responded to God's Word with a united Amen. In 1 Chronicles 16:36 for example we read,

*1 Chr 16:36 Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel,  
from everlasting to everlasting.*

*Then all the people said "Amen" and "Praise the LORD."*

Again in Nehemiah 8:5,

*Neh 8:5 Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. <sup>6</sup> Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.*

And in the NT, in our reading from Revelation we see it as well. After the doxology, we read,

*Rev 5:14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

Remember this, congregation, when we say *amen*, the certainty of all God's blessings and promises that we respond to is based on Jesus Christ. He is the reason we can know without a doubt that God will hear our prayers, that he

will answer them, and that he will bless us according to the truth spoken in his Word. We say this because the Bible also calls Jesus himself *the Amen*.

*Rev 3:14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:*

*These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.*

That refers to Jesus.

This makes responding to all of God's promises with *Amen* a good practice. The catechism considers *amen* an expression of faith in the reliability of God's Word. We don't say "I hope so" or "maybe" but "Amen!" And we need to say that with certainty based on Jesus. We say that we are trusting in God with our requests and that we believe his Word is true. We believe his promises are certain for us because of Jesus.

It's saying yes to the sermon you hear because you believe the Word of God to be true since it's based on Jesus. If you stop and think about it, it doesn't really make sense for the minister to say Amen to his own sermon. And we should perhaps end our communal prayers with a communal Amen as well. Let each person express to God that we take the public prayer as our own, saying, "Yes, Lord, that is my prayer too!"

In the end, congregation, we include praise to the Lord and Amens in order to vocally and communally express our trust in God who spoke his reliable word in Jesus.

And all God's people say, amen.