

THE MOURNER'S BENCH CAUSES GOD TO MOURN

David Halbrook

The mourner's bench is cherished by many people as the place where they believe they found Jesus and His salvation by mourning for sin and praying for salvation. Is this how God promised to save man from sin?

If your first desire is to come to (belong to, be in) Christ, then God has clearly spoken. *Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?* (Romans 6:3) ... *buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God,* (Colossians 2:12). No one today belongs to Christ before being baptized into Christ. That is the great deception of "the mourner's bench"—it is represented as the place to get into Jesus and His salvation while God says that by faith we are baptized into Jesus—that is when God puts us into Jesus, His salvation, and His death.

When men are at the mourner's bench being assured that they are being saved, **God is mourning**, for men leave there feeling and believing that they are in Christ while in the Bible, often laying nearby, God has said something different.

-- *Editor's Note:* This week, our article in *Arkansas Weekly* is a condensed version of an article that I've posted at our website and included in this bulletin. If you hear others talking about events they witnessed or experienced at the "mourner's bench" or "the altar call" during a "revival," then use the sword of the Spirit to lead them to God. If you don't speak and patiently teach them, who will? (Thank you brethren, for giving me time each week, for over two years, to study, think, write, and speak, David)

We assemble each Sunday at 10AM, 10:45AM, 5PM & Wednesday at 7PM

Church of Christ—Quail Valley
4104 E. Harrison St.
Batesville, AR 72501
Office- (870) 793-6700

Evangelists:
David Halbrook 569-4491
Lenoard Westbrook 612-8409

The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*

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The mourner's bench is cherished by many people as the place where they believe they found Jesus and His salvation by mourning for sin and praying for salvation. Because of the seriousness and importance of the salvation of our soul, this is an emotional subject. While no one says that salvation should be a non-emotional occasion, sometimes we make the mistake of letting our emotions guide our thoughts instead of letting our thoughts guide our emotions. The Ephesians in Acts 19 are a good example of people who were willing to think carefully about their past commitment to God, even when their past deeds were questioned. The noble-minded Bereans are likewise a worthy example of careful self-reflection (Acts 17:11). For a few lines, consider whether the Bible teaches that the mourner's bench is God's way to save man from sin.

The role of mourning in salvation is certainly appointed by God. Jesus said, *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.* (Matt. 5:4), but He appointed no place for that mourning to occur. Wherever a man's heart is pricked as he recognizes his sin and guilt is the place he ought to mourn. While mourning is essential to receiving salvation from God, mourning alone is not enough. Remember the parable of the two sons (Matt. 21:28-31). The son who first said he would not go, later regretted it, but did his regret alone please his father? No, "he regretted it **and went**" (emphasis mine, DH) and did the will of his father. Likewise, Jesus said "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." (Matt. 7:21) Those who only mourn for their sins, have not done the will of the Father and remain lost. So, what else must they do?

A common answer today is "They need to go to the mourner's bench to ask God to forgive their sins." What were sinners, who were taught the gospel of Christ in the Bible, told to do when being taught to seek God's forgiveness? In Acts 2, sinners

whose hearts were pricked, were told, *Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* (Acts 2:38). Peter does not tell them to come to a “repenter’s bench” because they could repent right where they stood. Peter does not tell them to pray at all, though after they were baptized they continued steadfastly in prayer (Acts 2:41-42). When the lost jailer asked “What must I do to be saved?,” he was told to believe on Jesus, along with other words from the Lord. What were those other words? We do not all of them, but some of them were about baptism because “immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:31-33).

The lost world must learn of their need to come to Jesus. Jesus offered this invitation, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28-30) “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.” (Rev. 22:17) Yes, we must come to Jesus, but not even one time does the Bible say “Come to Jesus at the mourner’s bench and altar.”

Coming to Jesus means we submit to Jesus. If your strongest desire is to come to (belong to, be in) Christ, then God has clearly spoken. We need to accept what God has spoken—this is faith (Rom. 10:17). There we learn to mourn for our sins and confess Jesus as the Son of God and Christ (Lk. 24:47; Acts 8:37). But if you stop there, you fail to come to Jesus and are lost. *Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?* (Rom. 6:3), *... buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God,* (Col. 2:12). *There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism* (1 Pet. 3:21). No one today comes and belongs to Christ before being baptized into Christ. That is the great deception of “the mourner’s bench”—it is represented as the place to get into Jesus and His salvation while God says that by faith we are baptized into Jesus—that is when God puts us into Jesus, His salvation, and His death. The “altar call” is supposed to be calling people to think about the offering of Jesus on the cross. But when the Bible speaks of Jesus’ death, it says we are “baptized into His death,” not that we pray at an altar.

When men who are at a man-made mourner’s bench or altar are being assured that they are being saved, **God is mourning**, for men leave that bench or altar feeling and believing that they are in Christ while in the Bible, which is often laying a few inches away from the bench and altar, God has said something different. These people are

not being told what the will of the Father in heaven is. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. (Matt. 7:21). If you believe that Jesus is the world’s Savior and are ready to leave sin and to confess your faith, then leave the bench and altar, arise and be baptized and wash away your sins calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). Only then can you rejoice with God and the angels, knowing that God has added you to the church of Jesus and written your name in heaven (Acts 2:47; Lk. 10:20).

GIVE ATTENTION TO READING

Jesse Flowers

Paul instructed the younger evangelist Timothy, “*Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine*” (I Timothy 4:13).

How often do we give attention to the reading of God’s Word in our day to day lives? No doubt we give attention to many other things that interest us. Some give attention to football, while others give attention to NASCAR. Some give attention to fishing and hunting, while others give attention to shopping and watching their favorite TV programs. Some give attention to talking on the phone or surfing the Internet, while others give attention to gardening and sewing. Many give attention to reading, but it is given to such things as Sports Illustrated, Readers Digest, the TV Guide, or some riveting fictional book. All of the above things and more may have their proper place in our lives (if their not all consuming), but what place (if any) does just reading the Bible possess?

God emphasized to Israel through Moses that constant attention was to be given to the words of the Law. “*And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates*” (Deut. 6:6-9).

Christian parents and grandparents need to do likewise today, and diligently teach the inspired stories of God’s Word to their children and grandchildren. Families need to turn off the TV, get off the Internet, hang up the phone, and sit down together to give attention to reading. Why? Because this “reading” tells the life of Christ. This “reading” shares the redemption story. This “reading” tells how one can be saved. This “reading” gives hope, comfort, and joy. This is the only “reading” of its kind that will lead to the salvation of your soul and the souls of those you love!