

What ever happened to the Mourners Bench?



The mourners bench--a wooden bench 20-25 inches high, 12-14 inches wide, several feet long, sometimes covered with padding. Known to be the place of outbreaks of tears over sin!

"It's impossible for me to describe my feelings. During that reformation I presented myself at the mourners' bench for prayers. I was soon disburdened of my load of sin, and realized that peace, of which the Apostle Paul speaks, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). (John Hickernell, testimony)

"He would be with them to guide, help and bless their efforts, the next one would shout, rave, and tell them the ungodly wickedness on the frontier would be visited by hell's fire and brimstone, to escape the wrath of God, to kneel at the mourners bench and pray for the Holy Spirit's cleansing power to cleanse and save them from damnation." (Frankie A. Rhodes, Buffalo Bones)

I have given this example of the "mourners bench" where many men and women have confessed their sins. It's not to make you believe that the mourners bench has some power or ability to move men; no, it's a mere symbol of what was in our Churches* and meetings. We have lost the ability to

confess our sins. "I'm sorry" have become dirty words. Remorse and repentance, for many, is not a feeling expressed, nor is it a condition sought. Some would be saying, "But I'm a Christian we don't need to repent." That kind of thinking is what removed the mourners bench from practice.

What I'm saying to you is this, a large part of the Church has "acedia" (no care, spiritual apathy) and is blind to that. Many believers, that are bound in their problems and sins find serving God to boring or unworthy. In the Church today lying, cheating, stealing, hatred, gossip, slander, adultery, fornication, perversion, wickedness, pornography, smoking, drinking, viewing R and X rated movies, TV, dancing, idolatry, heresy, evil speaking, lust, foul language and on and on are a part of the believers life. Beloved, this must not be. We're told in 1 Peter to be holy.

"Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:16)

We find other Scriptures that speak this way.

"[Seeing] then [that] all these things shall be dissolved, what manner [of persons] ought ye to be in [all] holy conversation and godliness." (2 Peter 3:11)

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, [which is] your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what [is] that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Romans 12:1,2)

"Love not the world, neither the things [that are] in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 John 2:15)

We have to be reminded of the fact that we cannot live like the world, and live like a Christian. Jesus said.

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24)

The practice of the Christian must be a reaching for the highest goal in obedience to God, and unmovable faith from which we are called. Again Jesus tells us.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33)

We as Christians have to repent of our sins, and turn to God with all our hearts. What! Christians repent? Yes, Christians repent! Are we sometimes caught up in sin or bad habits? This would require us to repent. At the dedication of the temple Solomon prayed a prayer that was over 1000 words. In it he prayed for the people in a time when they might have fallen into sin.

"[Yet] if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; And [so] return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name: Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause, And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed against thee, and give them compassion before them who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them." (1 Kings 8:47-50)

We notice, in this part of the prayer, he says the people must do several things. (1) **[Yet] if they shall bethink themselves.** Bethink means to reverse, to turn back, or return. If we desire to return to God, and think this within ourselves, we're taking the first step. (2) **Repent, and make supplication.** Repent is to turn from sins and stop sinning. To make supplication is to simply pray! We must desire to turn back to God stop sinning and pray to Him about it. (3) **Saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness** this is confession. Notice, not just Lord I've sinned, but actually saying the deeds we've done in prayer to Him. (4) **And [so] return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul.** This reiterates what was the desire at the beginning--to bethink or to return to God. It has to be with all your heart and soul! The promise is God will hear you and help you.

God not only asks this of individuals but also of whole nations. Sadly, this is something we in America, as well as the rest of the world, are refusing to heed!

"[At what] instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy [it]; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And [at what] instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant [it]; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them." (Jeremiah 18: 7-10)

One thing Christians refuse to do is admit we have set up idols in our heart. Little things we hold on to that makes us uncomfortable and bound in sin. Be it our cars, boats, money, computer, shoes, house, or whatever they are they have to go!

"Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn [yourselves] from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations." (Ezekiel 14:6)

"Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn [yourselves] from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin." (Ezekiel 18:30)

Even the thought of our hearts can cause us to sin. This too needs to be purged.

"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." (Acts 8:22)

The truth is, as Jesus said to those that felt they needed no repentance, that to refuse to turn from sins will perish.

"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke. 13:3)

Praise the Lord! We have been washed in Jesus' blood and made clean and white. Bless God! We have escaped the terrible act of perishing. However, as believers, sadly, there are times we might fall. I make no point in saying this as a light thing, but we should strive to be free of sin and its destructiveness. The simple fact is if we have, are in, or thinking about sin we do need to repent!

Jesus, in His address to the Churches in Asia minor, told them to repent for things they had done we're no different.

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." (Revelation 2:5)

"Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth [it]." (Revelation 2:16,17)

"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." (Revelation 3:3)

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." (Revelation 3:19)

As I said in the beginning, the mourners bench provided a place for people to unload their sins. It was used to bring people down to the alter and confess. It had no special power or draw--it was simply a bench to rest upon while confessing, but its removal marks a departure of the seriousness we once had about sin. Do we need a mourners bench? Yes. Let their be a mourners bench in the heart! We need to be able to feel, to be convicted, and to be chastened. We need broken and contrite hearts as God has said.

"The LORD [is] nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." (Psalm 34:18)

"The sacrifices of God [are] a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psalm 51:17)

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name [is] Holy; I dwell in the high and holy [place], with him also [that is] of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." (Psalm 57:15)

Today, we not only need contrite, repentant, confessing, and turning back to God hearts, but a fear of His Holy Word! The utter lack of disobedience to His Word is very appalling. Hear what He says.

"For all those [things] hath mine hand made, and all those [things] have been, saith the LORD: but to this [man] will I look, [even] to [him that is] poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." (Isaiah 66:2)

Beloved, we need so much today to have this kind of attitude. We need a mourners bench heart. If you find yourself in sin, have committed a sin, or thinking about sinning, stop! Remember we need to bethink ourselves having a desire to turn back to God. We do this by desiring to be obedient to Him and His word. Be mindful of this and determine now to turn to Him with all your heart. Then repent and make supplication, that is, turn from your sins and stop sinning, and pray to Him. Simply don't do the sins you are doing and humble yourself in prayer. Next, confess your sins really confess naming them to the Father asking for forgiveness in Jesus name. Lastly, obey His Word. Don't try to twist the Scripture to fit what you want it to say. Take it as it stands if it speaks to you about certain sins.

Beloved, we need to be ready when Jesus comes; not occupied in sin and worldliness. Make it a must to go before Him daily and allowing Him to correct you in areas He desires to clean (John 15:2,3). Never take grace for granted for it cost Him so much to give it to you. Then we can have a mourners bench of the heart.

Amen.

* - A note to the reader: the word "Church" in our studies always means the body of Christ/called out ones/believers/saints/remnant etc. not the IC DC (Institutional churches or denominational churches).