

The Baptist Examiner

A nation-wide, independent paper, standing foursquare for the distinguishing doctrines of Baptists, and shunning not to declare all the counsel of God.

"To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

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A Defense of the Mourners' Bench and Our Reply

In our last issue we announced that Elder E. G. Sisk of Hopkinsville, Ky., had informed us that he would accept our challenge to defend the mourners' bench. Below we give his defense and our reply. For the convenience of our readers in holding the connection between his defense and our reply we give his defense part by part and insert our reply to each part.

"In your paper of July 15 you offer one page to any one who will tell why they use the mourners' bench. You sent me a sample copy which I considered a personal invitation to write."

You misread our offer. Our offer was not to any one who would tell why he uses the mourners' bench; it was to any one who would give his authority for its use. There is a vast difference in telling why we do things and in giving our authority for them. A criminal may tell why he commits a crime, but he can plead no authority for it. A Methodist can tell why he sprinkles babies, but he has no authority for it. But you have expressed the matter rightly, for you have no authority for your use of the mourners' bench. The best you can do is to give your reasons for its use.

"1. What is a mourner? One who mourns over his sins.
2. What is a mourners' bench? A place for prayers and instructions."

Since we issued the challenge, it is our prerogative to define terms. And we do not accept the above definition of a mourners' bench. It is too broad. By a mourners' bench we mean a bench or place in the house or at the place of public service where sinners are invited to come for prayer. This definition was clearly implied in our challenge. We made it clear that our challenge was for some one to give his authority for inviting sinners forward for prayer.

"3. Were you ever at a mourners' bench?"

NO.

"If not, where were you saved?"

At the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16).

"4. When did mourning begin? When sin began. 5. When will it cease? When sin ceases. As long as we have sinners we will have mourners, and as long as we have mourners we will have mourners' benches somewhere. It may be at the front seat, in the woods, in the field, in the mines, or in the home, but it is there just the same."

This has nothing to do with the question at issue because it wholly ignores the plain meaning of our challenge. We are not opposing sinners mourning where and when they please.

"So let us take care of all true mourners."

We are ready and glad to take care of them just like they were taken care of in New Testament times, but that was not by inviting them to a mourners' bench.

"The real dispute is not over the bench but the mourning."

This is not true, unless you make a certain amount of mourning and outward demonstration essential to salvation.

"6. Can a man be saved and leave off any of these seven steps? If so, please mention them, viz., conviction, godly sorrow, prayer, seeking, yielding, repenting, and believing."

Yes. A man can be saved without seeking. The Apostle Paul was. He was not seeking Christ, but was rather seeking to destroy the followers of Christ. While doing this he was suddenly stopped on the Damascus road and there saved and called to preach (Acts 26:13-19). As Saul went on the road his heart was being pricked, but he was kicking against the pricks (Acts 9:5).

"Who told you that Baptists borrowed the mourners' bench from the Methodists?"

The historian told us that. Here is one explicit testimony to that effect: "The Methodists were the first to make use of the 'anxious seat,' as a means of bringing out our enquirers." (History of American Revivals by Frank G. Beardsley, page 97).

"Brother, that fellow was wrong."

Prove it.

"Baptists used the mourners' bench 1600 years before Methodists got here. The truth is that Methodists borrowed it from Baptists and most of them are honest enough to say so.

We challenge you to submit proof of either of these statements.

"They did not get it from the Catholics, for you know they did not have it. It is such a pity they did not have it and use it wisely, for it would have kept millions out of hell."

We did not say that Methodists got the mourners' bench from the Catholics. We said that the mourners' bench is the offspring of the Roman Catholic idea of salvation through human effort.

"Our own history says that revivals were unknown among Baptists during the last half of the 18th century."

If you refer to the statement of Jarrel, you misrepresent him. On page 406 of his Baptist history he says: "In the latter half of the last century PROTRACTED MEETINGS were unknown among Baptists." There can be a revival without a protracted meeting. In fact, it is true, doubtless, that the majority of protracted meetings are not revivals at all. They frequently leave the church in worse condition than it was before. That Baptists were not having protracted meetings does not mean that they were dead during the latter half of the 18th century, as the following quotation from Vedder abundantly shows: "If these figures (the figures he gives just above this quotation) are substantially accurate, and for good reasons they are believed to be, THE PERIOD OF GREATEST ACTUAL AND RELATIVE ADVANCE AMONG AMERICAN BAPTISTS WAS THE LAST QUARTER OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY" (A Short History of Baptists, page 211).

"This condition continued into the nineteenth century until Baptists and Calvinists split, which was from 1827-1836."

Spencer records revivals among Kentucky Baptists in 1795,