

Should a Christian Be Cremated?

By Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Have you ever had gunpowder on your eggs for breakfast? A man once counseled his son that if he wanted to live a long life, the secret was to sprinkle a little gunpowder on his eggs every morning. The son did this religiously, and he lived to the age of ninety-three. When he died, he left fourteen children, twenty-eight grandchildren, thirty-five great grandchildren, and a fifteen-foot hole in the crematorium!

There is a lot of information on the Internet these days about a "Green Funeral" where you can save money and be friendlier to the environment by cremating the human body. Cremation is the disposal of the dead by reducing the body to ashes through a burning process. During the process of cremation human remains are placed in a box and then into a crematorium or furnace. They are heated to temperatures between 870-980 °C or 1600-2000 °F until the remains are reduced to bone fragments and ashes. The bone fragments are then processed in a machine until they resemble coarse sand, light gray in color.

In my years serving as a pastor, I have had many Christians ask me about cremation. Is it proper for a Christian to be cremated after he or she dies? Should we purposely burn the dead? Are there any Biblical reasons why we should not be cremated after we die? In this study, I would like to address the question regarding cremation and seek to arrive at a Biblical conclusion concerning the burning of the human body. We can do this by observing the practice of God's saints throughout the ages and by applying basic Bible principles to this burning process of the human body. Of course, the Bible does not say, "Thou shalt not cremate your body" but the practices and principles found in God's Word, which relate to the human body, provide us with a united witness against the practice of cremation.

Someone said:

"It is madness to live in a fool's paradise when plain, stark facts stare us in the face."

Today many people are practicing the burning of human bodies after death for emotional reasons (shorten grieving process), economical reasons (much lesser cost) and ecological reasons (save valuable land). Trends and statistics reveal that more Americans are now being cremated. The percentage varies from state to state but this is an alarming new trend in our society. Funeral homes are now offering a cremation option for the body instead of traditional burial. However, we must remember that economical reasons do not override the timeless and ethical principles found in the Bible concerning the subject of cremation.

I do believe the subject of cremation is important to address and I am convinced that as Bible believing Christians, we should take a stand against the practice of cremation. Scriptural teaching argues for burial and not cremation. The arguments for burial are incredibly persuasive as we study the Bible.

God does not look favorably upon the cremation of the human body.

This truth is revealed in seven conclusions.

1. Cremation is a heathen practice.

Many who advocate cremation are not aware that that is a revival of the practice of the pagan world, which was eventually suppressed by the entrance and spread of Christianity.

The Encyclopedia Britannica states:

“There can be no doubt that the practice of cremation in Europe was as the first stopped, and then prevented, in great measure, by the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body, partly also by the notion that the Christian body was redeemed and purified.”

In fact, it was Christianity and the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead which kept cremation from becoming a major custom in the early foundational days of the Western world. Sadly, we see America promoting this ancient custom and moving toward paganism in many areas of life as Christianity begins to lose its grip on our society and country.

We know that the Viking dead were placed in their boats, which were then set on fire and pushed out to sea. We also know that ancient Nomadic tribes practiced cremation and carried cinerary urns containing the ashes of their loved ones with them in their wanderings.

The historical passages found in Biblical records reveal that reducing human bodies to ashes originated in heathen lands. This practice has ancient origins and was practiced by the Canaanites in the time of the Old Testament. When reviewing the Old Testament Scriptures, we learn that cremation is linked to a heathen custom or practice.

Dr John J. Davis in his book "What About Cremation?" said that cremation "was both early in origin and widespread in geographic scope. For the most part, it was associated with pagan ideas about the essence of life or mythical beliefs regarding the afterlife." The Bible supports this finding.

Cremation is tied to the heathen practice of offering human sacrifices. God commanded the Israelites not to follow this cruel and hateful practice of the heathen in Deuteronomy 12:30-31, "Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters *they have burnt in the fire* to their gods." For the heathens, cremation was the way to send off both the living and the dead to the netherworld. Is it no wonder that non-Judeo-Christian religions like Hinduism and Buddhism also practice cremation? Its roots are clearly pagan.

The Jews actually regarded the act of cremation as a form of pagan idolatry. Israel in keeping herself distinct from the heathen nations, and in obedience to the command of separation, practiced burial instead of cremation. To prove that the divinely sanctioned method is burial and not cremation, the Jews cited Deuteronomy 21:23, "His body shall not remain all night upon a tree, but thou shalt in any wise *bury* him that day" (Gen. 23:19, 35:8; Deut. 34:6; 1 Kings 11:15, 22:37, Ezek. 39:15).

It's clear that cremation has a heathen origin and purpose. Why do the Hindus in India and those of other heathen religions cremate? They do it believing that the dead are not raised again. Many heathen practice cremation believing that the dead will only be reincarnated. In fact, to destroy the body is sometimes considered a way of releasing the spirit of the deceased. Also, some practice cremation with the heathen idea that by destroying the body of the deceased it will keep the person from haunting their loved ones in their next life. In the final analysis, the practice of cremation allows people to escape the Biblical teaching of future judgment and accountability before God.

The Bible does not teach the heathenistic belief of reincarnation or the transmigration of the soul which is linked with the heathen practice of cremation. It does not teach that we will resurface as a different person or in another life form after death. Instead, the Bible teaches there is a resurrection of the human body and this occurs at one point after the body dies (Acts 24:15; John 5:29; 1 Corinthians 15). The Bible repeatedly talks about resurrection – not reincarnation. Resurrection is what follows death and not reincarnation. Those who die will experience a bodily resurrection at their appropriate times in accordance with God's resurrection program.

How does all of this information apply to us today? Although some would argue differently, it seems that the practice of cremation, which has been historically linked to the heathen belief system of reincarnation, would be a violation of God's command that forbids copying pagan ways or customs of heathen people.

Jeremiah 10:2 says:
"Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them."

In other words, we should not copy a heathen custom that has no resemblance of Biblical Christianity and its practices. In fact, when copying the heathen customs that go against God's clear revelation of truth we are placing our stamp of approval upon them. The Bible commands us to "Abstain from all appearance (every form) of evil" (1

Thess. 5:22). The timeless principle that we must follow is this; we should not copy heathen customs that mock truth and Christianity.

2 Corinthians 6:17

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.”

One pastor on a missionary trip said this:

“Recently I stood three or so feet from a burning corpse with a missionary pastor from Singapore and his wife who were visiting us. The head was already burnt beyond recognition and the skull split open due to internal expansion from the heat of the fire. The lower legs and feet were unscorched, as they were protruding from the pile of burning wood and stubble upon which the man's body lay. The professional Hindu burners were poking the body from time to time to keep the members in the fire and adding stubble and wood as needed. The bones were contracting and popping; the bodily organs were frying and the juices sizzling in the intense heat.

“My wife, a nurse with experience in a hospital in a very remote part of Asia and in an intensive care ward in the States, stood with another friend observing the ghastly sight from a distance, unwilling to come closer. The air for a hundred yards or more was filled with the unmistakable, stomach- turning stench of burning human flesh. When the fire had burnt most of the body, the ashes and remaining members were shoved into the river.”

This is the kind of cremation which has been practiced by heathen religions for centuries but without the sanitized methods adopted in more technically advanced places such as the United States. Cremation is a heathen practice. It is of heathen origin and has served heathen purposes of propagating the reincarnation theories and the disbelief in the resurrection program of God.

King Ahaz was looked down upon because he learned heathen ways and practiced them. One of these practices was to burn children and sacrifice them. The burning of bodies was considered to be an evil atrocity in the sight of God.

2 Kings 16:3 records:

“But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel.”

Ahaz followed the examples of the wicked kings of the Northern Kingdom. He went so far as to sacrifice his one son as a burnt offering to an idol. This heinous sin was a common practice of the Ammonites and the other native pagan Canaanite nations that Israel had partially driven out of the land under Joshua.

2 Kings 17:17 gives this sad commentary:

“And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.”

The people degenerated into this heathen custom of burning the bodies and bones of their children as a sacrifice to their heathen gods. Some might argue that this practice was not the burning of bodies after the people were dead. This is a true observation; however, the procedure of burning bodies was completely heathen in its origin and practice. Whether a person is burned alive or burned after death it all boils down to one thing – heathenism!

God clearly says that He despises the burning of bodies. God has always looked upon cremation or the burning of bodies (dead or alive) as something that was evil and considered it to be a transgression.

Amos 2:1 says:

“Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime”

It is interesting to note that burning human bones on an altar desecrated the altar.

2 Kings 23:16-20

“And as Josiah turned himself, he spied the sepulchres that were there in the mount, and sent, and took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon the altar, and polluted it,

according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words. Then he said, What title is that that I see? And the men of the city told him, It is the sepulchre of the man of God, which came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that thou hast done against the altar of Bethel. And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria. And all the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Bethel. And he slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem.”

The burning of bodies and bones was definitely a heathen custom and was never to be practiced by God’s people. God considered it a mockery to His divine plan for burial of the human body and the dignity that he has placed upon the human body.

Here is an important question to consider. Why would Christians want to engage in a pagan belief system and practice that was historically used to disintegrate children, worship false gods, and one that rejected the resurrection of the human body? It seems very unchristian to practice a heathen custom that is associated with these wicked atrocities. It seems very clear that we do not want to send the message that we approve of such things as reincarnation by practicing the heathen custom of cremation.

In a book published on the subject of Christian funerals, a writer gives the following advice regarding cremation: "Personally, the minister may or may not approve of such proceedings. Privately, he is free to hold any opinion that he will. But officially he should keep an open mind. In the Christian religion there is nothing that frowns upon cremation or requires burial." This conclusion ignores many facts stated in the Bible. We need to view cremation as a heathen practice that is not acceptable to God because of the origin of its pagan practices and the message it conveys regarding the afterlife and resurrection.

Until recently burial prevailed quite universally as the common method for disposal of the dead in Western nations and cremation was looked upon as something practiced only by atheists or followers of heathen religions. The recent return to cremation practices can only be the result of the rapidly increasing apostasy from the Word of God in the Western nations where Christianity was once the dominant faith.

Once again, cremation symbolizes the pagan worldview of reincarnation. The reincarnationist believes that they will come back in some other kind of body which will be different than the previously body they possessed. Therefore, Eastern religions teach reincarnation instead of resurrection. A person who believes in the resurrection looks forward to a resurrected body whereas a person who believes in reincarnation looks forward to a recycled body. The two concepts are opposed to each other.

There are several Bible passages used to teach cremation.

a. King Saul and his sons

Some make the argument that King Saul and his sons were cremated after their deaths and conclude that this practice gives God's approval of cremation among God's people (1 Samuel 31:6-13). In other words, they use this passage to support their idea that cremation is a noble way to dispose of the human body. But this is a false premise. Many fail to read that only the flesh of King Saul and his sons was burned by the brave soldiers who came to take away their bodies. The Bible clearly states that their bones were buried under a tree. Why do so many people miss this point? This was NOT a true cremation.

1 Samuel 31:12-13 records:

“All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried *them* under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.”

Why did these people want to burn the flesh of King Saul and his Sons? The answer lies in the fact that Saul had been decapitated (vs.

9) and the bodies of Saul and his sons were being disgracefully used by the heathen Philistine people. The people of Jabesh Gilead were absolutely horrified when they became aware of the horrible way the Philistines had treated the bodies of Saul and his sons. Saul's headless body had been paraded around the land of the Philistines in a disgraceful manner (vs. 9-10).

This was a disgrace to their bodies. Therefore, the brave soldiers in the army removed the bodies of Saul and his sons under the cover of night and brought them to their own city, just 10 miles across the Jordan. It was here that they burned the corpses probably to hide their mutilation and ghastly appearance or simply because they wanted the wicked Philistines to leave their bodies alone and stop humiliating them before this wicked race of people. We must understand that these bodies were burned because of this unique and particular circumstance.

The people graciously chose to burn the bodies of Saul and his sons out of respect for their bodies in view of the humiliation and disgraceful acts that the Philistines had performed upon these bodies. However, we see the people did still honor the practice of burial since they buried their bones under the tree ("And they took their bones, and buried *them* under a tree at Jabesh" – 1 Sam. 31:13).

We can conclude that the practice of even burning the flesh of God's people was not a normal practice. In this case, the flesh of their bodies were burned because the heathen people were desecrating these human bodies by terrible acts of dishonor. This text in no way supports the practice of cremation. It was merely a respectful way to honor the dead bodies that had been mutilated beyond recognition and disgraced among a wicked heathen society. Again, none of this was a common practice; it was simply a necessary practice that revolved around a unique circumstance.

David Cloud has remarked:

"If the bodies were actually burnt, it is plain that it was a unique situation brought about by the difficulties of the hour. The Philistines had desecrated the bodies, and the men of Jabesh-gilead possibly desired to render the bodies in such a way that the Philistines would leave them alone. It was certainly not the normal method whereby the

Israelites disposed of the bodies of the deceased. Exceptions do not overthrow the rule. In war times men are forced to do many things that they do not do under ordinary conditions. Years later King David had the bones of Saul and Jonathan dug up and given a proper burial (2 Samuel 21:12-14).”

F.C. Cook, in the Barnes Commentary, notes:

“Burning was not the usual mode of sepulture (burial) among the Hebrews. But in this case from a pious desire to disguise the mutilation of the headless corpses, and exempt them from any possible future insult, the men of Jabesh burnt the bodies, yet so as to preserve the bones.”

We must simply understand that this unique account of burning in no way provides support for cremation practices. Only a person wanting to reject God’s clear revelation on this matter could miss what God’s Word teaches on this subject.

We must also remember that there are sometimes exceptions to the normal way that God wants something done because of certain unique circumstances and situations.

b. Israel under God’s judgment

We also read of how the people practiced burning the bodies of their own when they were under the divine judgment of Jehovah. This was seen in connection with what Amos recorded concerning the Assyrian invasion upon Samaria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Amos 6:9-10 says:

“And it shall come to pass, if there remain ten men in one house, that they shall die. And a man's uncle shall take him up, and he that burneth him, to bring out the bones out of the house, and shall say unto him that is by the sides of the house, Is there yet any with thee? and he shall say, No. Then shall he say, Hold thy tongue: for we may not make mention of the name of the Lord.”

What about this reference to burning human bodies? Perhaps the bodies of the deceased would be burned to typify God’s divine disfavor and judgment upon them. Others suggest that they would be

burned simply because of the large number of deaths and the need to dispose of bodies quickly due to the spreading of infectious disease among the remaining people. This is a real possibility and plausible explanation for this burning of these human bodies.

Page H. Kelly writes:

“In the pestilence that will sweep across the land there will be so many victims that normal burial practices will have to be set aside and the survivors will resort to the unusual procedure of burning the corpses. When the relative of a deceased man enters his house to take out his body to be burned, he discovers that there is a lone survivor, hidden in some far corner of the house. When the relative calls out to him, he responds with a Hebrew interjection translated ‘Hush!’ and then adds, ‘We must not mention the name of the Lord.’ These men have profaned the name of God in the past but now they dare not pronounce it, lest it loosen some fresh avalanche of His wrath. It is significant that even to this day an orthodox Jew will not pronounce the covenant name of Israel’s God.”

Because of the greatness of the judgment of God the practice of burning these bodies was necessary to quickly counteract the spread of infectious diseases among the remaining survivors of Israel. There was a need to dispose of the bodies quickly. Thus, burning became an exception to the rule to burial in times of war and the incapability of the surviving people to bury the dead.

We can conclude that the matter of burning bodies was done only on rare occasions for the purpose of indicating God’s judgment upon the people or more likely for sanitary reasons among the people. Once again, we must note that the relative did not burn the bones in this Biblical account. Amos 6:10 reads: “And a man's uncle shall take him up, and he that burneth him, to bring out the bones out of the house ...” This would indicate that this was not the practice of a pagan cremation. The bones were obviously brought outside the house to be properly disposed of by burial. Therefore, to speak positively regarding cremation from this particular recorded act in history is erroneous and is like trying to find a needle in a haystack.

Questions:

- As a Christian, why would you want to copy a heathen custom (cremation) that was used to burn the bodies of children and present people as a sacrifice to their gods?
- Why would you want to be cremated and portray the pagan belief in reincarnation instead of resurrection?
- Do you want a pagan funeral or a Christians funeral?

2. Cremation was a sign of God's judgment and wrath.

God's judgment under the law was also meted out upon various sex offenders by the process of burning. There were those who were burned under the Levitical law for sexual misconduct.

Leviticus 20:14

"And if a man take a wife and her mother, it *is* wickedness: they shall be burnt with fire, both he and they; that there be no wickedness among you."

Leviticus 21:9

"And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire."

In the case of a man having unlawful sexual intercourse with a mother and her daughter, all three offenders were to be burned. Also, if a priest had a daughter who played the harlot she was to be burned to indicate God's disapproval and divine judgment upon this grievous sin. These verses are sometimes used to justify the practice of cremation among God's people today. But we must understand that this was NOT the normal practice of disposing of the body, which God instituted. It was actually a sign of God's judgment. Burning the body was a demonstration of God's judgment being meted out upon a person for his grievous sins.

Dr. Paul Van Gorder has said:

"But an examination of these passages indicates that both of these were God-ordained judgments for those who had willfully disobeyed God's laws under the levitical system."

In other words, this practice was not the normal way to dispose of the dead even under the Mosaic Law, but it became a way to demonstrate God's divine disfavor and judgment upon those who disobeyed Him in such a grievous way. This was unique instruction, which God gave to His people Israel, who were living under the Mosaic Law. However, even under the law, people were not cremated unless they offended God's law in some specific and grievous way.

We must remember that both Old and New Testament teaching always portrays burial as the normal and accepted way to dispose of the dead. The dispensational principle of interpretation is that when the New Testament teaching or practice overrides some Old Testament teaching or practice, then the new teaching that God has given to the church must be accepted as a replacement for the old.

Throughout the Bible the destruction of a human body or object by fire is used as a sign of God's divine wrath or judgment. It was NEVER a sign of God's blessing and approval. This can be easily traced throughout the Bible.

Joshua 7:25

"And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones."

Leviticus 10:1-2

"And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord."

Numbers 16:35

"And there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense."

There are times when God's judgment is meted out upon evildoers and He decides to consume their bodies with fire. This act of

consuming bodies by fire is always a sign of God's judgment and wrath.

We might recall the account of Elijah calling fire down from heaven to consume the soldiers sent by Ahaziah (2 Kings 2:10-12). Ahaziah wanted Elijah to submit to him but the man of God could not forsake the Lord. Therefore, God judged the soldiers which were sent by this wicked king by a consuming fire. Their bodies were consumed by the fire of God's judgment. Only God has the right to burn bodies in connection with this proper and righteous judgment.

Revelation 20:15 records this solemn scene:
"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

God's final judgment upon the bodies of wicked and unregenerate people will be a constant fire. It will be a fire that will burn the flesh of people in their resurrected bodies. The eternal fire will not consume these specially designed bodies, which are capable of experiencing pain, but torture the people forever and cause them great pain and agony. This constant fiery torture will be a sign of God's unending judgment upon them.

The practice of cremation seems to portray a wrong message. It conveys the message of God's judgment and disfavor upon the lives of people. Since this is true, it sends the wrong message at the time of a believer's death. The Christian's death is to be a sign of God's promise of eternal life (John 3:16; 6:47; 11:26). As far as believers are concerned, we will not suffer any judgment by the hand of God (Rom. 8:1). Christians should refuse to be cremated and portray the message of eternal life to others. We should not present a message that portrays God's disfavor and judgment upon lost people. Cremation portrays the wrong testimony for the Christian who believes in God's gift of eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:23).

Questions:

- Why would Christians want to engage in a practice that has historically been a sign of God's judgment and curse?

- Why would Christians want their bodies to be burned and resemble the future judgment that God is going to inflict upon the lost and wicked of this world?
- What message do you want to portray at your funeral – eternal life or eternal judgment?

3. Cremation opposes God’s practice of burial.

Deuteronomy 34:5-6

“So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.”

God Himself was the undertaker in the funeral of Moses and there was no cremation service taking place for the body of Moses.

“By Nebo’s lonely mountain,
On this side of Jordan’s wave
There lies a lonely grave;
But no man dug that sepulcher,
And no man saw it e’er,
For the angels of God upturned the sod,
And laid the dead man there.”

It is clear that God practices burial. This is seen in His burial of the body of Moses. God as the divine undertaker does not burn the bodies of His people. Instead, we discover from this incident that God’s desire and ordained blueprint and practice is to bury His people. God established this method in order to express dignity for the human body and present a clear picture of His future plan for resurrection.

We should learn to follow God’s pattern for burial and not the practice of pagans. Burial is the only God-ordained method and Christian way to dispose of the human body.

Questions:

- If God practices burial, shouldn't we?
- Are we smarter than God?
- Is our plan better than God's original design?

4. Cremation does not promote belief in the resurrection.

The overwhelming consensus of early church writers and leaders was that cremation was associated with rites that were incompatible with many basic tenets of their faith such as the resurrection. Burial looks forward to resurrection. It symbolizes the promise of resurrection. Cremation testifies against the resurrection and is rooted in paganism which rejects resurrection by replacing it with reincarnation.

Biblical Christianity embraces the resurrection of Christ and believers. Paul even likened spirit baptism with the burial and resurrection of Christ and our subsequent participation in this event (Romans 6:1-4). All of this portrays the orthodox belief of Christianity in the resurrection program. The reason God's people have always practiced burial is not difficult to understand. The Bible teaches a bodily resurrection (Romans 8:22-23; 1 Cor. 15:20-23; 2 Cor. 5:1; 1 Cor. 15:51-57). Jesus taught the doctrine of the resurrection when He was here on earth (John 5:28-29; 11:25). Therefore, the Christian practice of burial is a testimony to their belief in the future resurrection of the body.

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the body and argued with Christ over the matter. They brought before Him an argument of a woman having seven husbands and then dying. In trying to trap Jesus they asked the question: "Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be? for they all had her." Our Lord replied, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matt. 22:29-30). Yes, we should express our belief in the resurrection and the way we do this is by practicing burial.

We all know that the body which is buried will decompose in time (Ecc. 12:7). We also recognize that there are uncontrollable circumstances which take place where Christians end up dying and

render their burial impossible. Some examples would be sinking ships, burning buildings, and such like. We also recognize that during times of plague and war this practice is sometimes necessary. However, in normal times a Christian should always choose burial because it sends a message of their faith in the resurrection. This is why Christians have always practiced burial and not cremation. It's because the message of Christianity teaches a future resurrection that will provide Christians with an eternal body that will never die.

The practice of cremation speaks against a person's faith in the resurrection program of God. It sends the message that they will do away with their body and have no part in the resurrection.

Plummer states:

"In the early centuries of the Christian era it (cremation) was to outrage this well-known Christian sentiment (the resurrection) that persecutors sometimes burned the bodies of the martyrs and scattered their ashes in mockery of the resurrection."

One lady shared with me that she attended a funeral where children were in butterfly costumes commemorating the freedom that comes after death. Of course, there is no freedom if we are not saved (Heb. 9:27). Anyway, the children were dancing around in these butterfly suits in memory of someone who was recently cremated. At the funeral they played a song that honored this person's belief system which was in defiance against burial. The song was called: "I Did It My Way." Yes, we can dispose of our body in our own way and a heathen way, but as a Christian, we should want to die in God's way and demonstrate that we are Christians and believers in His resurrection program.

The Bible gives two metaphors that demonstrate burial.

a. Burial is compared to a planted seed.

1 Corinthians 15:35-38

"But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of

some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.”

It is the Christian hope that the same individual will be raised in a similar body but one that is totally changed! The physical body is called the seed for the resurrection body. When planted, a seed decomposes, and the new plant comes forth. The Bible uses this to illustrate the burial of the body and the resurrection. As a seed is planted underground, so the human body is buried in the ground to await a future resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15:35-44 the apostle answers those who would ask how it is possible for God to raise again a decomposed body. The terminology used by the Holy Spirit in this passage is that of planting a seed. The human body is likened to the planting of a seed in the ground. You do not throw the seed on top of the ground. You must plant the seed under the ground. This speaks of burial.

The farmer does not destroy his seed like cremation does in destroying the body. The farmer plants the seed in the ground and eventually from the decaying seed comes forth the new life. Such is the picture of burial and the resurrection. When we bury the body of a Christian loved one, in one sense, we are planting the seed for the resurrection body! Burial is a powerful testimony of our unwavering faith in God's Word regarding the promise of bodily resurrection. The practices of heathen religions have no such knowledge or hope.

As we have already observed, the Hindus and Buddhists practice cremation and believe in reincarnation. Although they believe in a human soul which is distinct from the body, they do not believe that the soul, once departed from the original body at death, will be joined in any relation whatsoever to the first body. Rather they believe the soul will be reincarnated in another body entirely unrelated to the first body (transmigration of the soul). Therefore, Eastern religions reject the idea of resurrection as God reveals in His eternal Word.

God's Word teaches that the original body, which was buried in the ground, will be resurrected to experience an eternal and glorified body (1 Cor. 15:51-55). The resurrected body that goes into the ground will be *related* to the body that comes out of the ground even as a seed is related to that which springs forth from its own shell.

However the resurrection body, though related to the old body, will be a new body of glory and magnificence in that it will never die, be incapable of sinning, and never again experience pain.

b. Burial is compared to a sleeping body.

1 Corinthians 15:52 declares the speed of the Rapture and resurrection program of New Testament saints when saying: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." To burn or cremate a body demonstrates disbelief in the future redemption of the human body (Rom. 8:23). It's interesting that the most prevalent word used in the New Testament to describe the death of a believer is "sleep" (not cremation). This is a term used by both Jesus (Matt. 9:24; Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52; John 11:11) and Paul (1 Cor. 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 2 Cor. 5:6-8; 1 Thess. 4:13-16). The word "sleep" was a term given to the body of a Christian which was awaiting resurrection. Cremation does not fit this picture of the body sleeping and again mocks the resurrection.

God's people have always buried their dead with the magnificent hope of the resurrection in their hearts. We will see our brothers or sisters again in the same body, only changed and glorified! This is why we can shout, "Hallelujah!" But cremation does not portray a proper faith in the resurrection. It speaks volumes against the hope of the resurrection. It takes the hallelujah out of the resurrection program! Cremation tells the story that there will be no seed germinating in order to bring forth a new body. In other words, it sends the heathenistic message that there cannot be a resurrection of the body that goes into the ground.

Any Christian who practices cremation is sending a wrong message to those left behind. It is a message of unbelief in the resurrection program of God. It is a message that promotes the idea that God will not raise their body in the future. Cremation is a practice that speaks against God's picture of the resurrection as seen in the Bible (burial of a seed and new life) and the Christian belief in the future resurrection.

One particular lady called my home and asked if I could give her some Biblical information on cremation. She had known that cremation was not normally practiced by Christians and wondered if I could help her see more clearly why cremation was wrong. Well, before we finished the conversation, she actually said something that I thought was a very good statement on the subject of endorsing burial and not cremation. She shared with me these words, "Burial is your last statement of faith to the world." This is very true. Burial is your final statement to the world concerning your belief in the resurrection.

Questions:

- As a Christian, do you want to portray the message of reincarnation that is promoted through cremation?
- Do you want to portray the message of resurrection conveyed through burial?
- What will be your last testimony and statement of faith that you leave behind at your funeral?
- Why would you want to miss the great opportunity to display your faith in the resurrection to those left behind?

5. Cremation was not practiced by Christians.

In both Testaments believers have always been buried. This should not go unnoticed. The Old Testament patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—were all buried (Gen 25:8-10, 35:29, 49:33, 50:1-13). The same is true in the New Testament: John the baptizer was buried (Matt 14:10-12), Stephen was buried (Acts 8:2),

We might consider the examples of Abraham (Gen. 25:8-10), Sarah (Gen. 23:1-4), Rachel (Gen. 35:19-20), Isaac (Gen. 35:29), Jacob (Gen. 49:33; 50:1-13), Joseph (Ge. 50:26), Joshua (Jos. 24:29-30), Eleazar (Josh. 24:33), Samuel (1 Sam. 25:1), David (1 Kings 2:10), John the Baptist (Mal. 14:10-12), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5-10), Lazarus (John 11:17), and Stephen (Acts 8:2). The Bible gives all of these examples to us about burial so that we can learn that this is God's plan for the human body. We should learn to follow these examples knowing that this is God's plan and purpose for our bodies after we die.

Even in difficult circumstances God's people in olden days practiced burial. For example, Joseph's body was kept for over 400 years in Egypt and then carried through the 40 years of wilderness wanderings before being buried in the Promised Land. We read of this account in Genesis 50:24-25; Ex. 13:19 and Jos. 24:32. It would have been much simpler for the Israelites to have cremated Joseph and carry his ashes with them in a tiny container! But they refused to do this! Joseph, a follower of the one true God, a man who looked forward to the bodily resurrection, was given an honorable burial.

Some Christians will say, "But cremation is much more economical in our society today than burial." Some Christians seem to think that economical benefits should override God's mind on burial and His disfavor of cremation. But from this important example from Scripture (Joseph's burial), we learn that even if cremation is less expensive or easier than burial, it is still to be rejected. God's people rejected the economical and simpler way to transport Joseph's body.

Florida is a popular retirement area for the elderly due to its tropical climate. There are many ads appearing in local newspapers, which invite people to join "cremation clubs" for inexpensive fees. Membership to these clubs allows one the "benefit" of discounts on cremation expenses. Since burial lots have become very expensive, cremation is often chosen merely from the standpoint of economy. But economical reasons do not always mean that something is honorable to God. Friend, give yourself a decent and respectful burial so you can send to the world a lasting testimony of your faith in God's resurrection program! God will promise to meet your needs as you seek to honor Him (Phil. 4:19).

You might see the need to save on your grocery bill but do not save on your funeral bill by practicing the paganism associated with cremation. Arrange your funeral plans ahead of time and be prepared to honor God's Word, the message of resurrection through burial, and demonstrate dignity for your body. Practice burial, as God's people have historically done, so that you can leave a lasting legacy of your faith in God's resurrection program.

Questions:

- Do you want to follow the Christian testimony of burial?
- Are you really willing to ignore the history of Christians burying their dead?
- Will you trust God to meet your financial needs and prepare for a proper burial?

6. Cremation ignores the dignity of the human body.

The dignity of the human body is supported by various Biblical teachings in the Bible.

a. God's creation

One of these teachings is God's creative statement which is found in Genesis 1:31. Everything that God created was said to be "very good." Therefore, to knowingly and purposely destroy and desecrate the human body which God created ignores its God-given dignity by virtue of creation.

b. God's image

We must also remember that humanity was also made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27) and mankind still reflects this image in a partial way. This adds dignity to his life and body.

James 3:9

"Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God."

Man still retains the image of God in some measure as a higher creation than the animals and he possesses intellect (complex reasoning), inward morals (conscience), and volitional (choice) which is above the animal creation. He was also created to rule over the animal kingdom (Ps. 8:5) which reflects God's image as a ruler.

The fact that man still retains some of God's image and likeness means that we should treat the human body with respect and dignity. Burning a body to ashes and dust is not respectful to demonstrate how man was the crown of God's creation (Psalm 8:4-5).

The Bible actually reveals that a body was disgraced if it was not given a proper burial (1 Sam. 31:9-13; 2 Sam. 2:4-6; Eccl. 6:3). One example is that of Jezebel: "And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat" (I Kings 21:23-24). Another example is of the Midianites: "Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison: Which perished at Endor: they became as dung for the earth" (Ps. 83:9-10).

The Biblical teachings related to God's creation and God's image argues against the practice of cremation. Human dignity is something we should respect and burial is the only practice that demonstrates dignity for the human body and individual who was created to reflect God's image.

Questions:

- Do you understand that you are a special creation of God?
- Do you realize that you are made in God's image and should demonstrate respect for your body?
- Do you want your body disposed in a dignified way?

7. Cremation does not follow the practice of Jesus.

The old question once again resurfaces, "What would Jesus do?" Would Jesus promote the practice of cremation? We know that the Lord Jesus Christ was buried and He is our great example to follow when it comes to death (John 19:38-42). In fact, we are told to follow His example in service (John 13:15) and suffering (1 Peter 2:21). Therefore, it is only fitting and right to follow His example in death and *burial* as we follow the steps of the Master. Just as the Lord Jesus Christ was buried in certainty that He would rise again on the third day, according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:4), even so the Christian body is buried and is awaiting a future resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:22-23

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

We should follow the example of our Lord and allow our bodies to be buried in an honorable and respectable way that honors the resurrection program of God and a person's faith in the future resurrection. Of course, we cannot force people to practice burial, and we do realize that the manner of one's burial does not affect a person's salvation or bodily resurrection. God will have no problem resurrecting the cremated. We understand that all bodies eventually go back to dust and cremation simply speeds up the process of turning a body into dust. We must also remember that cremation does not affect the soul of an individual. Jesus was very clear about this. You cannot cremate an eternal soul!

Jesus taught in Matthew 10:28:

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Man can only destroy the outward body but he cannot destroy the soul. Only God can bring spiritual ruin or loss upon both the soul and body in hell throughout eternity. Therefore, the cremation of the body cannot affect the soul in any way. The soul will live on in spite of what man does to the body (Matt. 8:12; 23:15; 2 Cor. 5:8). Nevertheless, we must understand that what we believe and testify about the resurrection of the human body is important. The way that we dispose of our body leaves behind a legacy of faith in the resurrection program of God. The practice of burial honors the resurrection. Burial symbolizes the promise of resurrection. However, the practice of cremation speaks volumes against the resurrection of the human body. Its roots are paganistic and send the message of disbelief in the resurrection program of God.

Romans 8:11 promises:

“But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

Questions:

- Do you want to follow Jesus' example of burial?
- Do you want to leave behind a legacy of faith in the resurrection?

- If Jesus were here today would He make arrangements for a cremation or burial service?

I am convinced that Christians should take their stand upon the examples of the Word of God and refuse to participate in any practice that mocks bodily resurrection, the sanctity of the human body, and identifies them with the heathen practices of unbelief and paganism. We are to be salt and light in this world and also during our time of death (Matt. 5:13-14). As Christians, we should demonstrate our belief in the glorious prospect of the resurrection and dignity for the human body through the God-ordained practice of burial.

In a culture that diminishes the value of life, it should not surprise us to find that little dignity is demonstrated toward the dead. When Christians practice burial they are rejecting the pagan practice of cremation, honoring the human body, and giving a positive witness of the future resurrection. The Scriptures are clear - bury don't burn!

John 11:25

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”

After Sir Walter Raleigh was beheaded in the tower, they found in his Bible these true and striking lines which gave testimony to his faith in the resurrection. He had written these words the night before his death:

“Even such is time, that takes in trust
Our youth, our joys, our all we have,
And pays us but with age and dust;
Who in the dark and silent grave,
When we have wandered all our ways,
Shuts up the story of our days.
But from this earth, this grave, this dust,
My God shall raise me up, I trust!”

Roy L. Smith said:

“Christianity is a religion of the open tomb.”

Burial is God's intended method to dispose of the human body. What legacy will you leave behind regarding bodily resurrection and the

afterlife? How have you chosen to dispose of your body? The Christian should want to honor the Lord and His God-ordained method of burial in the time of death.

Christians are reminded to glorify the Lord by life or by death!

Romans 14:8

“For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.”