

BURIAL OR CREMATION

A BIBLICAL CASE FOR BURIAL AND AGAINST CREMATION

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INTRODUCTION

In Genesis 3:19 God declared to Adam, "*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou [art], and unto dust shalt thou return.*" Exactly what did God mean by the statement: "*For dust thou art, and unto dust shall thou return*"? It means man's body which is of the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7) is to return to the earth when he dies. These words have been historically taken by Jewish believers of the Old Testament and both Jewish and Gentile believers of the New Testament to mean the body is to be buried.

But someone will surely say, "Doesn't the Bible say, 'dust to dust and ashes to ashes'?" No, it does not. This phrase is not found anywhere in Scripture. It is found in certain Pastors' Manuals often used by ministers as they officiate at burials, but it can be found nowhere in the inspired Word of God.

The phrase ashes to ashes is often appealed to as a justification for cremation. Cremation, which was hardly heard of in Middle America forty years ago, is increasingly being used for the final disposition of the body. This writer knew very little about such a practice until he moved to California in 1966. Shortly after moving to San Jose in 1968, he was asked on one occasion whether or not it was Biblical for Christians to cremate their bodies after death. Because he could not answer the question satisfactorily in his own mind, he asked for time to study and research this

issue. After devoting some time to the study of this subject, he has come to the decided conclusion that burial, not cremation, is the only proper and Biblical practice for the final disposition of the body.

When one discovers that the origin of cremation is to be found in unbelief and paganism, he will abandon any notion of its being a viable alternative to burial which is everywhere in Scripture shown to be the proper disposition for the body after death. Cremation is a part of certain pagan and man-made religions. It is the choice of atheists, who do not believe in either God or resurrection, and all who would escape resurrection if they could, even though the cremation of a body will not and cannot prevent it from being resurrected.

CREMATION IS NOT THE PROPER METHOD FOR THE FINAL DISPOSITION OF THE BODY.

IT IS AN ANCIENT PAGAN PRACTICE.

Both the pagan Greeks and Romans practiced cremation, but are Christians to follow the practices of pagans or the teachings of the inspired Scriptures? Following pagan practices instead of the Word of God has always brought dire results upon those who have done so. Remember what occurred when David sought to move the Ark of the Covenant the way the Philistines had moved it instead of the way God prescribed in His Word to move it (2Sa 6:1-11).

IT IS THE PRACTICE OF BOTH HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM.

Neither of these religions believes in resurrection, nor do those who practice these religions desire to be resurrected. Both of these ancient religions believe in achieving Nirvana in which the soul is released from its

many reincarnations and absorbed into nothingness. What a goal? To become nothing! Cremation is therefore compatible with that belief, but it is not consistent with a belief in resurrection. In India, for example, Christians bury their dead to demonstrate the difference the hope of resurrection gives the Christian in contrast with what is taught by Hinduism. Thus, Christians in India consider cremation to be a heathen practice and burial to be a Christian practice.

IT IS THE CHOICE OF SECULAR HUMANISM.

Between 1876 and 1884 there were only 28 recorded cremations in the U.S. During the 1960's and 70's many changes in our culture began to occur in a time of social instability fueled by the doctrines of secular humanism, the basic tenant of which is man is not accountable to any higher power or God. From this doctrine of human autonomy have come both the acceptance of abortion and the practice of cremation. The right to do both of these barbaric rituals is claimed on the basis of the false concept that one's body belongs to himself and he can do with it whatsoever he pleases. Consequently, by 1977, 7% of all human corpses were reduced to bone fragments and ashes by cremation in this country.

By 1993 that percentage had increased to nearly 20 %. That percentage will continue to increase as Americans reject Biblical Christianity and adopt the so- called New Age thinking which is nothing more than ancient and pagan Hinduism and Buddhism in new garb.

BURIAL IS THE METHOD OF DISPOSITION PRACTICED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

GOD COMMANDED ISRAEL TO BURY THEIR DEAD.

"His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged [is] accursed of God;) that

thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee [for] an inheritance. " (Deu 21:23) The final disposition of the body is not a matter of indifference, notwithstanding the claims of even some ministers who say it really doesn't make any difference what is done to the body after it is dead. It mattered to God. He commanded the body to be buried, and the command to bury renders cremation totally unacceptable in His sight.

ABRAHAM BURIED SARAH AND HE HIMSELF WAS BURIED BY HER SIDE.

"And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same [is] Hebron in the land of Canaan. " (Gen 23:19) *"And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which [is] before Mamre."* (Gen 25:9) It is most significant that an entire chapter of the first book of the Bible is devoted to making burial arrangements. If God devoted this much of His Word to this subject, how can any Bible-believer treat the final disposition of 'the body with indifference? As one reads further in Genesis, he notes that Jacob buried Deborah, Rebekah's nurse who was but a slave (Genesis 35:8) and his beloved wife Rachael (Gen 35:19). Both Esau and Jacob lovingly buried Isaac (Gen 35:29). Before he died Jacob gave explicit instructions to his twelve sons to bury him (Gen 49:29-31). Likewise, Joseph gave a similar command to the Children of Israel before he died (Gen 50:24-26) which command was duly obeyed when Israel had conquered the land of Canaan (Jos 24:32).

GOD BURIED MOSES.

"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 Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his

sepulchre unto this day." (Deu 34:5-6) God could have burned his body as easily as He buried it (2Ki 1:10), but He did not; He buried it in keeping with His own commands and the principle of resurrection which coincides with burial. If the method of the final disposition of the body is a matter of indifference, why did God Himself bury Moses' body?

ELISHA THE PROPHET WAS BURIED.

"And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year." (2Ki 13:20) Even in a time of spiritual decline in Israel, burial was still practiced (2Ki 13:21). For one not to have a burial was considered a sign of extreme disgrace— something reserved only for the most worthless of men. *"They shall die of grievous deaths; they shall not be lamented; neither shall they be buried; [but] they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth: and they shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine; and their carcasses shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth."* (Jer 16:4) *"He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem."* (Jer 22:19)

JOB EXPECTED TO BE BURIED.

"And [though] after my skin [worms] destroy this [body], yet in my flesh shall I see God." (Job 19:26) The patriarch obviously has his burial in view because there are no skin worms where cremation has occurred.

CREMATION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED BY OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING.

GOD FORBADE THE BURNING OF CHILDREN AS A SACRIFICE TO MOLECH.

"And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through [the fire] to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I [am] the LORD." (Lev 18:21) While human sacrifice is primarily in view in this prohibition, cremation is indirectly forbidden in this command. *"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."* (Deu 12:31) The Law of God provided for the stoning to death of rebellious children, but never did it permit their bodies to be burned (Deu 21:18-21).

GOD PUNISHED THE KING OF MOAB FOR BURNING THE BONES OF THE KING OF EDOM.

"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." (Amo 2:1) If cremation is a matter of indifference, then why did God pronounce this punishment upon the king of Moab? It was because the burning of his bones erroneously declared the King of Edom was accursed. The symbolism for a curse was the cremation of the body. *"And it shall be, [that] he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel."* (Jos 7:15) Does this fact not explain why the Church of Rome burnt heretics at the stake? Believing they were accursed from God, this harlot of Rome reduced the saints whom they hated to ashes to show their abhorrence for their doctrines, for the burning of something to destroy it remains a sign of the greatest abhorrence. *"The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou shalt not desire the silver or gold [that is] on them, nor take [it] unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it [is] an abomination to the LORD thy God."* (Deu 7:25)

Because of burning being a sign of the greatest abomination, certain offenses were punishable by burning instead of stoning. Such was the offense of whoredom on the part of a priest's daughter. "*And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire.*" (Lev 21:9) The same kind of abhorrence was to be shown toward any man who married a woman and her mother. "*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.*" (Lev 20:14) Sins which were extremely flagrant and repugnant were to be punished by burning, not stoning. It is this truth which makes the burning of all things abominable more significant. "*The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou shalt not desire the silver or gold [that is] on them, nor take [it] unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it [is] an abomination to the LORD thy God.*" (Deu 7:25)

Achan and his family were burned with fire. That was because they were accursed, and that curse was upon them because Achan took that which was accompanied with a curse, thus placing himself under the pronounced curse. "*And the city shall be accursed, [even] it, and all that [are] therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that [are] with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.*" (Jos 6:17) Thus, the punishment for him and his family was not mere stoning but burning of their bodies in accord with God's command, as a sign of their being cursed. "*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.*" (Jos 7:25) The association with a curse accounts for the burning of the bodies of Saul and his sons. "*And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan.*" (1Sa 31:10) Since Saul's body remained fastened to a wall after dark, he was considered to be accursed. "*His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged [is] accursed of God;) that*

thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee [for] an inheritance." (Deu 21:23) Thus, the men of Jabesh burned the bodies as a further sign of this curse (1Sa 31:12), but buried their bones as a sign of their faith (1Sa 31:13).

The burning of the bones of the priests of Bethel on the altar of their idolatry signified the curse which God had pronounced on the altar and the priests who served there. *"And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee."* (1Ki 13:1-2) Godly King Josiah fulfilled this prophecy exactly. *"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."* (2Ki 23:16)

Thus, cremation is not an acceptable means of final disposition for Christians. It is a barbaric practice and totally unsuited for the disposing of the physical remains of a loved one. If people were to take the time to learn about the hideous process of cremation, they would abandon any idea of ever having their own bodies cremated or cremating the bodies of a deceased loved one. The entire process is grotesque. As the fires engulf the body, it begins to jerk and twitch as if alive. Even though the crematory is heated to between 1500 and 2000 degrees Fahrenheit, some three to four hours are required to burn the body to a crisp. Even then the skeletal remains must be broken with a sledge hammer and then pulverized into bones chips before they and what ashes can be removed from the crematory are placed in a small box or urn. Because ashes from different bodies

become commingled in cremation, funeral homes publish a disclaimer in reference to this fact. In addition, this writer has seen the boxes of unclaimed ashes which are left at funeral homes by those too callous even to pick up what little remains of a loved one.

BURIAL IS THE ONLY METHOD OF DISPOSITION ADVOCATED BY THE NEW TESTAMENT.

BURIAL IS TAUGHT BY EXAMPLE.

Biblical example is a strong argument in setting forth the ways of God, and it should never be dismissed as insignificant. Thus, New Testament example records the burial of Lazarus (Joh 11:31,38), the burial of Jesus (Mat 27:57-60), the burial of Stephen (Act 8:2), and the burials of Ananias and Sapphira (Act 5:6,10) among others. In accord with these examples, Christians in every age have buried their dead. The Christians in Rome buried their dead among the Catacombs, and every church cemetery is a testimony to this universal practice among professing believers in Jesus Christ.

BURIAL IS REQUIRED BY TYPOLOGY.

Symbols teach truth which is lost when the symbols are corrupted. As those who profess faith in Christ abandon burial in favor of cremation, one can be sure the truth of the resurrection will soon be lost among them because the most obvious symbol of its certainty will have disappeared as a reminder of it.

Burial is taught in type by the planting of seed. *"[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." (1Co 15:36-38) Why is seed planted? Is it not because it is to come forth from the ground? Who would ever think of burning a seed? Seed is buried for the purpose of coming forth in new form from the ground in which it has been buried or planted.

In exactly the same way, the body is to be buried because it is like a seed. *"So also [is] the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."* (1Co 15:42-44) Why, then, would anyone who believes in the resurrection of the body ever cremate the body of a believing loved one or request that his loved ones cremate his body after he is dead? The very burying of the body is a testimony is one's explicit faith in the resurrection. Conversely, the cremation of the body is the denial of one's belief in resurrection however adamantly he may profess that faith.

Burial is set forth in type by baptism, for baptism is a vivid picture of burial. *"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also [in the likeness] of [his] resurrection."* (Rom 6:3-5) *"Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with [him] through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."* (Col 2:12) Nothing could be a greater contradiction than the cremation of the body of one who had been baptized on the profession of his faith. When this writer pressed this argument against the cremation a professing Christian was considering, he responded that cremation would not contradict his baptism. The problem was he had not been baptized; he had only been sprinkled, and he could see that no burial had been typified. However, one who has been properly

baptized by immersion would contradict that testimony, were he to have his body cremated.

If baptism does, in fact, picture Christ's death, burial, and resurrection together with the believer's death, burial, and resurrection in union with Him and even the impending death of the believer's body, its burial and future resurrection, then every believer ought to be sure that his body is properly buried as an abiding testimony to this truth. This writer wants to bear witness to the fact of resurrection even when he is dead. To that end, his burial is prearranged.

BURIAL IS CONSTRAINED BY PRINCIPLE.

When one is born again and the Holy Spirit indwells his body, his body is at once a member of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. *"Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make [them] the members of an harlot? God forbid."* (1Co 6:15) Realizing our bodies are the members of Christ makes a great difference now in the way we use those bodies. Should it not also make a difference in the way we dispose of those bodies after death? Have we any right to do otherwise with those bodies than what He has clearly prescribed in His Word? Hear the compelling argument of the Apostle Paul: *"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost [which is] in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."* (1Co 6:19-20) Not belonging to us but to God, our bodies are to be used and finally disposed of in strict accordance with His commands. They are His in origin and by design. This fact demands that we treat them with dignity, even to the final disposition of them. *"Ye [are] the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. For thou [art] an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto*

himself, above all the nations that [are] upon the earth." (Deu 14:12) "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." (Rom 12:1) This principle is applicable in both life and death. "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 ." (Rom 14:8) Cremation shows no respect for God's way or the dignity of the body.

THE WORLD PROMOTES CREMATION AND OFFERS SPURIOUS REASONS FAVORING IT OVER BURIAL.

THEY SAY THERE IS NO SPACE FOR CEMETERIES.

This is a false claim. A few years ago it was reported that the entire world's population could stand within the city limits of Jacksonville, Florida. The only places where space is restricted is in large, compacted cities, but there remains plenty of space in the world for burials.

THEY SAY CREMATION IS CLEANER.

This is another false claim. Ask any funeral director who has operated a crematory. The dust from the crematory is pervasive, to say nothing of the smoke which comes from it.

THEY MAINTAIN IT IS LESS EXPENSIVE.

Here is the *real* reason many in America are choosing cremation. They are afraid of spending the necessary money to give their loved ones a decent burial. Does not this objection to burial indicate such love their money more than they loved their departed loved one? Where there is a deep affection for one who has departed this world, the final disposition of

that body will never be made on the basis of the cheapest way to do it. Talk about cheap!

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