

Cremation

1. "Is there anything wrong with cremation?"
2. Cremation comes from the Latin word "**cremo**" which means "**to burn.**"
 - a. It refers particularly to burning the corpses of the dead.
 - b. Approximately 27% of all bodies of dead persons in the United States are cremated.
 - 1) This figure is much higher in other parts of the world.
 - 2) A majority of corpses are cremated in England and about 97% of bodies are cremated in Japan.
3. The modern practice of cremation involves incineration of the body and its container in an oven heated to an extremely hot temperature . . . generally between 1400 and 2100 degrees.
 - a. Almost all the body and container are consumed in the fire.
 - b. The cremated remains are ground into fine particles and preserved for the family of the deceased.
4. Our concern is whether or not there is anything wrong with this practice.
 - a. We understand that many people are highly uncomfortable with the idea of their corpse, or the corpse of a loved one, being incinerated.
 - b. We often hear remarks like, "**There is absolutely no way I would ever want to be cremated.**"
 - 1) I do not know anyone who would ever say that you should be cremated.

- 2) Again, the question we're dealing with is whether there is anything **wrong** with cremation for those who make that choice.
- 3) People do face questions about cremation regularly.

5. Why do people choose cremation over burial?

- a. Cremation is considerably less expensive than burial.
 - b. Some choose cremation because they think it is better for the environment than burying human remains to decay in the ground.
 - c. It is increasing in popularity.
 - 1) The number of cremations in the U. S. has more than tripled in the last 30 years.
 - 2) The cremation rate in Florida is much higher than the national average . . . almost half (47.5%) of Florida corpses are cremated. [www.creationassociation.org]
 - 3) The social stigma associated with cremation will decrease as it is more commonly used as a means of dealing with bodies of the dead.
 - 4) It is likely that someone in your extended family will choose cremation in the future.
6. If it is determined that cremation is wrong (i.e., sinful), then it should be opposed everywhere.
- a. One could not say that cremation is sinful in America but acceptable in Japan, India, or other places where it is almost universally practiced.
 - b. If it is against Bible teaching in one place, it is against Bible teaching everywhere else.

- c. It is critical that we find a Bible answer to the question of cremation.

I. THE NORMAL BIBLE CUSTOM WAS BURYING THE DEAD.

A. David Cloud (a Fundamentalist Baptist who argues against cremation) provides a list of Bible men and women who were buried.

1. Abraham [Genesis 25:8-10]
2. Sarah [Genesis 23:1-4]
3. Rachel [Genesis 35:19-20]
4. Isaac [Genesis 35:29]
5. Jacob [Genesis 49:33; 50:4-13]
6. Joseph [Genesis 50:26; exodus 13:19; Joshua 24:32]
7. Joshua [Joshua 24:29-30]
8. Eleazar, the son of Aaron [Joshua 24:33]
9. Samuel [1 Samuel 25:1]
10. David [1 Kings 2:10]
11. John the Baptist [Matthew 14:10-12]
12. Ananias and Sapphira [Acts 5:5-10]
13. Stephen [Acts 8:2]

B. However, we need to be careful that we do not read too much into these examples.

1. The existence of a custom does not make it a binding custom which would be sinful for us to break.

- a. A long list could be provided from the Bible of people getting from place to place by riding horses.
 - b. Obviously this does not mean it's wrong for us to ride in a car instead of on a horse.
2. We're bound with the task of determining if the Bible examples noted above are binding.

II. THE BODIES OF SOME IN THE BIBLE WERE BURNED.

A. Some sins were punished by being burned with fire under the Law of Moses.

1. **Leviticus 20:14** (NKJV) 'If a man marries a woman and her mother, it is wickedness. They shall be burned with fire, both he and they, that there may be no wickedness among you.'
2. **Leviticus 21:9** (NKJV) 'The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire.'
3. **Joshua 7:25** -- The body of Achan was burned with fire after he was stoned to death for his sin.
4. **2 Kings 23:20** -- King Josiah slaughtered the idolatrous priests and burned human bones on the high place altars where they had sacrificed to idols.

B. However, the Bible also offers examples of cremation with honor. Consider what was done with the bodies of Saul and his sons:

[**1 Samuel 31:11-13** (NKJV) Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul,

12 all the valiant men arose and traveled all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth Shan; and they came to Jabesh and burned them there. 13 Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.]

1. The Philistines had taken the bodies of Saul and his sons and displayed them on the wall of Beth Shan.
2. The inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead recovered the bodies and burned them at Jabesh.
 - a. Then they took their bones and buried them.
 - b. This was followed by a week of fasting.

C. Two verses in Amos are sometimes used as evidence that God views cremation as sin.

1. **Amos 2:1** (NKJV) Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime.
2. **Amos 6:10** (NKJV) And when a relative of the dead, with one who will burn the bodies, picks up the bodies to take them out of the house, he will say to one inside the house, "Are there any more with you?" Then someone will say, "None." And he will say, "Hold your tongue! For we dare not mention the name of the LORD."
 - a. Both these verses need to be studied in their contexts—It does not appear that the sin condemned is cremating bodies per se.
 - b. In **chapter 2**, the prophet Amos spoke against the wickedness of the nations around about Israel.

- 1) Moab was to be punished because the **Moabites** "**burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime.**"
- 2) This act was hated by Moab against Edom done as punishment and desecration of the dead. It would always be wrong to desecrate the dead.
- 3) In **chapter 6**, the emphasis is not on the burning of the dead, but on the situation which had come upon those who were "**at ease in Zion.**"
 - 1) Amos says a time would come when great destruction would come.
 - 2) The Lord God of Hosts had sworn by Himself that He would deliver up the city because He abhorred the pride of Jacob (Israel) and hated his palaces (citadels, NASB).
 - 3) The situation would be so bad that if ten men huddled together for safety in one house, they would die. In such a situation, burial would be impossible.
 - 4) If a relative came to get the bodies for burning, and happened to find another survivor hiding in the house, then the survivor would beg him not to mention the name of the Lord, lest the Lord's attention be called to the fact that some still were alive.
 - 5) Don't miss the point: the Lord would break the great house into bits and the small house into pieces [v. 11].
 - 6) The burning of bodies is only incidental to Amos' depiction of the calamity that would come upon this unholy nation.

III. TEACHING ABOUT THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF BODY AND SOUL.

A. The spirit (or soul) of man is what is eternally important.

1. Man's punishment for sin included physical death.
[**Genesis 3:19** (NKJV) *In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.*"]
2. **Ecclesiastes 12:7** (NKJV) *Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it.*
3. The physical body will return to dust.
 - a. The only question is how quickly that will occur.
 - b. Cremation only hastens the natural process of decay.
 - 1) Someone observed that the difference between cremation and burial is 300 years and \$3,000.
 - 2) In either case, the body becomes again the dust of the earth.

B. Jesus taught that we should fear the one who could harm the soul, not the body [Luke 12:4-5 (NKJV)

*"And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. 5
"But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"]*

1. We do not need to be concerned about what happens to our bodies.
 - a. Whether one dies in a flaming plane crash or peacefully at home in his own bed has no effect whatsoever on the eternal destiny of his soul.
 - b. Likewise what happens to our bodies after death is irrelevant to where we will be for eternity.
2. Consider the implications if this is **not** true.
 - a. If burning the body causes one to lose his hope of the resurrection, then:
 - 1) Our enemies could keep us out of heaven AFTER our death by simply burning our corpses, and we would need to fear those who kill the body because they would have the ability to cause faithful Christians to be lost.
 - 2) What about faithful martyrs who died for their faith by being burned at the stake.
 - i. The famous Foxe's Book of Martyrs tells of faithful Christians who had their bodies used to light the grounds around Caesar's palace by being covered with hot tar and burned alive.
 - 3) Could it be that such terrible treatment would result in the souls of the faithful being lost? Of course not!

C. God is able to resurrect a glorious body no matter what the condition of the old mortal body might be.

1. **1 Corinthians 15:42** (NKJV) So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.
2. **1 Corinthians 15:53-54** (NKJV) For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."
3. At the resurrection, ALL that are in the graves will come forth [John 5:28-29 (NKJV) "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 "and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.]
 - a. This will include those who did not have a "proper burial" [**Revelation 20:13** (NKJV) The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.]
 - b. Everyone will be judged.
 - 1) No matter how one dies, he will be judged.
 - 2) No matter what happens to the body after death, he will be judged.
 - 3) Eternity depends of how we live BEFORE death, not on what happens to our bodies AFTER death.

CONCLUSION

1. Cremation has long been opposed by some religions and is still grounds for excommunication in some.

- a. However, we have seen that the Bible does not either require or prohibit cremation.
 - b. The dead should be treated with honor and respect.
 - c. Details about how that honor and respect is shown are not specified.
2. If you do not wish to be cremated, make your feelings known to your loved ones.
- a. If you do want to be cremated, likewise let your family members know your thinking.
 - b. Each one should have his wishes respected, however, none of us should condemn another who reaches a different conclusion from us.
3. Sometimes a family will crowd themselves into a small mobile home on the property where their fine, large new house is being built.
- a. When the right time comes, they will move out of the old and dwell in the beautiful new house.
 - b. When that happens, they won't be much concerned about what happens to the old trailer.
 - 1) In a similar way, whatever happens to the old human shell of a body left behind will be the least of concerns to a soul after death.
 - 2) What matters is having a soul ready for the Lord on Judgment Day.

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