

Christian Burial Versus Cremation

By Darrell Farkas

It's becoming increasingly popular for Christians to be cremated rather than buried. This wasn't the popular choice until recently.

This isn't a pleasant topic, but it's important. This method of dealing with the dead is not Christian in practice. I hope to make that clear.

I. WORLD VIEWS

Cremation a pagan practice

Cremation makes a statement about one's belief system. Note the following quote on Hindus:

"... beliefs about the soul and the body form the basis for why Hindu funeral rites generally include cremation."

from neptunesociety.com

Orthodox Jews still don't cremate

Orthodox Jews have this to say:

"Cremation was historically associated with pagan practices that Jews are repeatedly enjoined in the Torah to reject. And because the body is traditionally considered the property of God, it is forbidden to defile it, which some regard the willful burning of human remains to be."

from myjewishlearning.com

Burned their children

The rebellious Israelites burned their children in offering to Molech. Note how the idolatrous worship focused on not only the murder of their children, but in their being cremated:

17 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.

2 Kings 17:17

10 And he (King Josiah) defiled

Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech.

2 Kings 23:10

Causing their children to "pass through the fire" was a practice where they literally burned their children to death in an offering to an idol. This was tortuous murder, but paralleling this behavior with our bodies, when we die, should be seen as appalling to God who hates the customs and practices of idolatrous nations.

II. MESSAGE FROM GOD

Sodom and Gomorrha torched as a warning

God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrha was given as a sign to the rest of the world of God's wrath on the wicked. The inhabitants

were incinerated!

7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Jude 7

More judgment of God manifest via burning

Priests who offered illegitimate incense offering were incinerated. Annihilation by fire was a message of God's wrath upon the objects of the fire:

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

Numbers 16:35

Josiah burned bones of priests for the purpose of

desecration and scorn

Josiah burned the bones on the altar, but not bones of the good prophet. That burning was a desecration:

*15 Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he brake down, and burned the high place, and stamped it small to powder, and burned the grove. 16 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.
2 Kings 23:15-16*

John Wycliffe burned to add scorn

The Pope of Rome, in 1428, had John Wycliffe exhumed and burned to ashes 44 years after

his death to add more scorn to this great man of God.

Wycliffe translated the Scripture into English, much to the rage of the Roman Catholics.

Wrath of God on those who cremated King of Edom

The following passage about Moab and the King of Edom should cause anyone considering cremation to think twice. To burn his remains into lime meant to thoroughly destroy the body, as in modern cremation. Just look at the wrath of God for this CRIME!

1 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:

Amos 2:1

III. MESSAGE WE DECLARE

What we see in the New Testament

Jesus was buried in a man-made cave. This was the ultimate

desire for a Jew after he passed away. It didn't have to be man-made, but natural caves are rather rare.

We know how Jesus Himself was given a rich Jew's burial cave for use.

Lazarus (John 11:38-44), was buried. All New Testament Christians, whose burials are mentioned, were buried. Even Ananias and Sapphira, the two who lied to God when they testified of selling their property for a false value, were buried (Acts 5:1-10).

Temples of the Holy Spirit

The bodies of Christians have been the habitation of the Holy Spirit.

*19 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?
1 Corinthians 6:19*

We need to treat those past temples with respect. Remember:

11 And Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for

her: for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the LORD hath come.

2 Chronicles 8:11

Where God's tabernacle had been, was still considered as a special place to be treated with due reverence.

Desecration of the dead

In cremation, the perpetrators actually desecrate the bodies of the deceased. If you saw an Indian attack, such as the Battle of Little Big Horn, you would know how they mutilated the bodies of their enemies. If you saw them crushing skulls, you instinctively know THAT IS A DESECRATION! Now we pay morticians to incinerate our loved ones. There are on-line videos showing the cremation process from funeral homes. They pound and smash up the bones and skulls of these beloved ones. This is desecration.

From Dust to Ashes?

When God said to Adam and Eve, from dust they came and

to dust they would return, that was a clear statement of how God decreed man should return to the earth:

*19 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.
Genesis 3:19*

To “return to dust” and to “be made ash” are different things.

The Hebrew for dust is “aphar” - אפר, Strong's 6083. It is usually in reference to larger pieces of earth such as lumps, clods and clay, it rarely refers to fine dust. Its color seems to be a variation of white to reddish. Adam came from the dust, which is a red clay and accounts for the very name of Adam. “Aphar” is organic, it is based in life.

The Hebrew for ashes is “epher” - אפר, Strong's 665. Ashes are material that is destroyed. You burn ashes and you simply have ashes. It is the end product of destruction by fire. Its color varies from white to black. There is no red to be found here. “Epher” is dead, it is

only chemical, it is not alive.

Dust is God's way of processing our bodies, through natural means of decay. In most cases, ashes are man's way of processing things.

IV. BUT WHAT ABOUT...?

Saul and company burned

Some will raise the objection, to support cremation, from the account of what happened with Saul and his sons. They will allege this sets a precedent of approval for a new regular practice, but does it?

Let's start by reading the account:

8 And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. 9 And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people. 10 And they put his armour in the

house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan. 11 And when the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; 12 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 Bethshan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. 13 And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

1 Samuel 31:8-13

It is interesting they did not cremate the bones, which is done in crematoriums today. So even if you take this as a defense of cremation, it didn't support further destruction of the bones. Realistically though, a simple reading of the events and conditions shows this was a very rare and exceptional situation. Israel had lost the war and they had no reason for confidence of keeping the bodies safe from their enemies for a long time. Burning them turned the risk of their coming to get

their bodies again for further public mockery. Add to this the fact they still buried the bones, which were obviously still intact from the burnt flesh.

This does not set a precedent for the normal process in dealing with the deceased any more than the account in Judges 20:1-7, where the man cut up his concubine and sent her body parts throughout Israel!

Even diseased weren't burned

Even King Uzziah, who was a leper, was buried though in a separate grave from the other kings of Judah because he was a leper. Someone with a contagious disease was still buried and not cremated:

*23 So Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the field of the burial which belonged to the kings; for they said, He is a leper: and Jotham his son reigned in his stead.
2 Chronicles 26:23*

FINAL THOUGHTS...

Cost is the major lure for cremation, but there are the spiritual costs to count

I believe the issue for most comes down to cost. This is a very legitimate concern.

I watched a Canadian investigative report on funeral home scams. It was disgusting how many funeral homes manipulate people who are grieving, to end up paying a lot more to bury their dead than is necessary. We do need to be informed and watch out for such financial frisking from these kinds of predators.

There are more economical ways to bury our dead. If we have a pretty good idea that we will be in the area we live in we can prepare and pre-purchase our grave

site and talk with the funeral home about financially preparing to cover the costs so our loved ones won't be caught unprepared for sudden emergency costs in taking care of us the way we want to be cared for.

Cremation is obviously the cheapest way to go, so if we are living paycheck to paycheck, it is sure a tempting solution. The question shouldn't be one of cost, but of honor to God. Seeing the disgrace of cremation, we need to realize we need to look to God to help us see a way to afford the more expensive cost of proper burial. It is for the respect of our bodies and His honor that we need to seek His provision to do the right thing. That is

an important enough reason that God will be pleased that we seek His face for necessary provision for this need.

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I was watching a documentary on WW2, and there was a scene of where they had just buried the soldiers who had died in a famous battle. It was a sad sight, all those graves with crosses in a row. Most with names, but not all where known who they were. It didn't matter though. They showed the dignity and respect for that great cost they paid in sacrificing their life for the cost of defeating the enemy. I thought, this scene shows dignity and respect for those soldiers, but what if they simply had a crematory where they

were lining up the corpses to eliminate the troublesome waste after the battle. DISGUSTING! What disrespect that would have been for the price they had paid!

I thought further of the "Final Solution" of Adolf Hitler. He loved those crematoriums. Kill his victims in the gas chambers, then incinerate them to clean up after. When someone like Adolf Hitler loved crematoriums, shouldn't that alone be a red flag that wickedness lies that direction?

I pray you, don't discard this message with an unimportant shrug of "who cares". God cares. Seek His face and seek to honor Him in all you do in life and in death.

NOTE

The burial versus cremation issue isn't about whether God is able to resurrect our body, if it is somehow destroyed. Most assuredly He can. John the Baptist lost his head, but we know God is not handicapped by that in the day of one's resurrection. This challenge in no way asserts the impossibility of a bodily resurrection or salvation for that matter. These kind of points are more of a "red-herring" on the true importance of the issues, as outlined in this article.



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The English version used is from the King James Bible.

To find this article on-line go to www.basedintheword.org entitled "Christan Burial Versus Cremation"