



## Burial and Cremation which is biblical??

**Discuss** – Do you think that the traditions and practices of the church over 2000 years are important to us today?  
(Give reason for your answers)  
What do you think happens to us when we die?  
Would you have a preference to what happens to your body when you die? (Give reason for your answer)

For many people today the issue of how their bodies are disposed of, is something that most people do not give a lot of thought to. However as Christians we have clear advice given to us from the word of God of how to respectfully and in a Christian way put our bodies to rest. Over the last 50 years the practice of the church has dramatically changed around with no real thought to what that declares about the reality of death and the hope that we have in Jesus.

**There are 3 main view points when we come to this discussion!!** ( Discuss each main point)

### **View 1 – Cremation is pagan and Burial is what the Bible teaches!!**

A) People who argue this view, point to the fact that both in the Old Testament and the New, Both in the early church and for the majority of church history, burial has been the way of God's people!! God Himself chose that Moses would be buried and it is clear that all the major people of God in the bible that were faithful to Him were buried also. The same is true for John the Baptist, Jesus (although he rose again), and for Stephen the first Christian martyr. One of the key reasons why Christians buried their dead was because Jesus was buried.

**Look Up** – Deuteronomy 34 v 4 – 6, Matthew 14 v 1 – 12, Matthew 27 v 57 – 60, Acts 8 v 2

B) It was only the pagan societies that burned their dead. Cremation appears to have been invented as a means of disposing of bodies in the stone age around 3000BC. This became the most common method of disposing of bodies by 800BC in Greece and by 600BC throughout the Roman World. In fact when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire burial became the only method of disposing of bodies throughout Europe. Hindus with their doctrine of reincarnation practice cremation and still do today. Buddhist priests and Tibetan High Lamas are cremated as a sign of great honor. Many of these pagan societies believed in the immortal soul, that at death, departs the body and therefore they give no special attention to the body.

Traditionally for the church burial reinforced the Christian doctrine of the resurrection body, that waits for the day of resurrection. In every sense that which is perishable – putting on that which is imperishable. The church has believed that every human being is created in the image of God and therefore the body should be treated with respect. With the truth that the WORD became flesh in the incarnate God. This reinforced the hallowing of human life and the bodily existence forever. Alongside of this the belief in the body being the temple of the Holy Spirit all lead the early church to bury their dead rather than burn them. **Read** 1 Corinthians 15 v 35 – 58, 1 Thessalonians 4 v 13 – 17.

C) Those who believe this view would point to the fact that the burning of bodies and objects was mostly reserved for pagan's, destruction of idols, punishment of criminals and enemies of God. Alongside of this that for those who's name are NOT written in the Book of Life their place is the burning lake of sulfur which is the second death. In fact throughout history burning has been used by the church as a punishment for witches and heretics.

**Look up a few of these Scriptures** :- Revelation 20 v 12 – 15 (Fire – judgment of the lost) Exodus 32 v 20, Deuteronomy 7 v 25 (Idols destroyed in fire) Leviticus 21 v 9, Number 16 v 35 (burning of the immoral)

**Discuss** – If fire is associated with the pagan death ritual and the judgement of God upon the immoral the sinner and the unclean – how can a Christian who is the temple of the Holy Spirit and awaiting the day of bodily resurrection – give their bodies over to the fire to be burnt??

### **View 2 – The bible does not give any specific teaching forbidding cremation.**

Therefore if someone desires cremation for themselves there is no biblical passage which forbids this. They would argue that just because a body has been cremated it does not make it any more difficult for God to resurrect that body. In fact it is proven evidence that a body that has been in the grave for a thousand years will have completely turned to dust anyway. Nothing of our corrupted flesh is used in the making of the new body so God can and will be able to raise those who are cremated up on the day of resurrection like anyone else. Billy Graham was quoted on this subject as saying “ *Cremation cannot prevent a Sovereign God from calling forth the dead at the end of time!!*” Supporters argue that cremation can be a lot cheaper and cost affective, with no cost of grave site, tombstone or maintenance needed. And ashes can be scattered in a significant place for the person or family.

**Discuss** – do you think it is important whether what happens to our bodies after death ( give reason)

One thing is clear whatever happens to our bodies we have the certainty of bodily resurrection and the reality of heaven to look forward to!! A Christian funeral therefore should be a place of joy, hope and thanksgiving!!