

To Bury or To Burn?

“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.” (Gen. 3:19; cf. 3: 19)

SUBJECT: The Interment of our Dead

Introduction: Burial is the RETURNING UNTO THE GROUND the body of our dead as the result of the Edenic curse upon fallen man as prescribed by God as His mandated method to dispose the dead. Death has always been accepted as a negative event in our lives. It was imposed upon the race of mankind as a result of sin. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, they immediately received the ultimate consequence: separation from God. **Romans 5: 12** says, *“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men.”*

This separation, while initially a spiritual one, affected the body, soul, and spirit. Sinful man lost the privilege to have fellowship and communion with God; for he was spiritually dead. But the body also suffered in that it took on the properties of corruption, began to decay, culminating in death after a period of existence. This was the origin of an issue as to the disposal of the dead: *“What is to be done with the dead body?”* God Himself has prescribed a method that is based on the way He created man. That is, man should return back to the earth from whence he came. **(Gen 2: 7 cf. 3: 19) Therefore, cremation is not a matter of Christian liberty but they are based on Scripture and sound Doctrine.** One’s beliefs will determine such choices.

We then need to answer questions like:

- a. Is cremation scriptural?
- b. Is cremation sinful?
- c. What about loved ones who have been cremated?
- d. What about those martyred by being burned at the stake?
- e. What about those who were incinerated in a house fire or eaten by an animal?

Some of the reasons given for cremation are:

1. It is economical.
2. There are no associated costs with the purchase and perpetual care of the grave site.
3. Those who favour cremation claim it is more hygienic, cleaner and cheaper.
4. They see cremation as a convenient way of disposing the dead.
5. It allows scattering of the remains in a place of significance to the deceased.
6. Some prefer a quick disposal of their body by burning rather than allow it to decompose in a grave.
7. In certain countries land space being scarce burial plots become expensive and in some cases there are efforts by the governments to discourage burial in preference to cremation. Singapore is a prime example of this. It is quite evident that the Singapore Government favours cremation; crematoriums and columbarium are made attractive and cheap, and at the same time increasing the cost of burial.
8. There are an increasing number of cremations amongst Christians, so why shouldn’t I?
9. Some pastors support cremation and have officiated at cremations?

Historically, cremation has been practiced by those, such as Hindus, who deny the bodily resurrection and who believe in reincarnation. Cremation was also the normal practice of ancient Greeks and Romans. Many of them believed in the immortality of the soul and saw no reason to give special attention to the body. Hindus, still practice cremation with their doctrine of reincarnation. They have no such knowledge or hope of bodily resurrection. The Hindus and Buddhists believe in a human soul which is distinct from the body. But they do not believe that the soul, once departed from the body at death, will be resurrected in any relation whatsoever to the first body. Rather they believe the soul will be reincarnated in another entirely unrelated body human or animal or released into non-existence from *karma* if they are lucky. For them life as we know it is an illusion (*Maya*) and we are somehow trapped in this body. So the whole goal of life is to reduce *karma* by keeping to the caste duties of life (doing good works in ones station of life born in) and strive to be released into nothingness eventually by way of an 'endless' reincarnations, and that too if that is possible. Therefore, the body is a prison and is of no value or significance.

For many years, mostly liberals and freethinkers chose cremation. Interestingly, the first cremation in America took place in 1876, accompanied by readings from Charles Darwin and the Hindu scriptures. But that has changed dramatically in recent years as the world moves further away from Biblical moorings.

Among the early Jews cremation was the exception. Some considered the burning of the corpse in relation to idolatry.

Many who advocate or prefer cremation are not aware that it is the revival of the practice of the pagan world, which was suppressed by the entrance of Christianity. At cremations clergymen generally conduct the service like the ones made during burial. Prayer is made, Scriptures, often referring to the resurrection of the body, are read and hymns are sung. It is at best a pagan rite behind the facade of Christian acknowledgment.

Historically, wherever Christianity has found acceptance, pagan practices such as cremation have been rejected. The increase in cremation in society has paralleled the wholesale rejection of the Bible. As paganism/humanism/relativism increases, cremation becomes increasingly popular even among Christians, in their ignorance of Scripture. **Historically, burial has been a testimony of faith in the bodily resurrection.**

Let us first examine the practice of cremation from Scripture, and then note the doctrinal reasons why we ought to bury and not burn/cremate our dead.

What is Cremation?

The word *cremation* comes from the Latin word *cremo* which means "to burn". 'Cremation' is a sanitized word to burn the dead. Cremation is a method for the disposal of the dead by burning. The cremation of a dead body in a casket involves temperatures, typically between 760 to 1150 degrees Celsius. The entire process may take about 3 to 5 hours. The body usually dressed is stripped of all jewelry. Pacemakers are removed because their batteries can explode at high temperatures. After this process the body slides into a brick-lined oven that looks like a big bread oven. This process of burning a body and grinding it to granules is out of sight from the view of loved ones.

Noted from Wikipedia is the following information. “In medicine, *body water* is all of the water content of the human body... The largest component of the body is water... In individuals of normal weight, water is abundant in most parts of the body, except in *adipose tissue* (fat). Water makes up between 45 and 75% of body weight, with the variability due primarily to differences in body fat. While most tissues including muscle, skin, and visceral organs are over 70% water, adipose tissue contains less than 10% water. The percentage of body weight that is water therefore varies inversely with body fat.

In the average lean adult male around 60% of the body weight is water. The remaining body weight consists of 16-18% fat with 22-24% protein, carbohydrate and other solids. In the female the percentage of body weight that is water is lower due to a relatively greater amount of subcutaneous fat.”

Therefore, in the intense heat of the incinerator body-water evaporates; all other solids are burnt away. The body and coffin are almost completely consumed; and although often called ashes, the remains are actually bone fragments and particles. The *cremated remains* usually weigh from 1.8 to 3.6 kg. These are gathered with a hoe-like scraper from the bottom of the incinerator and put in a container to cool down. Any large debris, such as dental crowns or hip prostheses, is removed. Everything is then ground to granules. The remains are then compact enough to fit in a small pot or vase (urn).

Although the attempt is made to remove all of the remains, a small portion of it will be inevitably left inside the cremation chamber, and subsequently mingled with some of the remains of the previously cremated body and the next body to be cremated. (*Most bodies that are not cremated are buried in a casket where they gradually decompose over time.*)

CREMATION HAS A PAGAN ORIGIN, PURPOSE AND PRACTICE

Cremation is not new. It has ancient origins, and was practised by the Canaanites in the time of the Old Testament. From the Old Testament, we learn that cremation is not only a pagan practice but also a sign of divine judgement. For the most part, it was associated with heathen concepts about life or mythical/mystical beliefs regarding the afterlife. Cremation is also associated with the heathen practice of offering human sacrifices. God commanded the Israelites not to follow this cruel and hateful practice in **Deut 12:31**, "*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 non Jews, cremation was the way to send off both the living and the dead to the netherworld as is seen in the non-Judeo-Christian religions like Hinduism and Buddhism.

Cremation, as described above and as practiced today in the more technically advanced societies, no longer has the sensory ghastliness associated with cremations performed in the third world. Modern technology use hot incinerators which rapidly reduces the body to ashes, and the entire process is done out of sight of the loved ones and the public.

Not so in the Indian continent and the bordering Hindu countries around it. In my teens, I too have witnessed Hindu cremation out in the open on a pile of wood, in Malaysia in the early 1960s. I have been told by my mother and others of the eerie sight of the burning body sitting up as the ligaments contract under the intense heat. To observe the burning of the human body out in the open would cure any Christian with repulsion every thought of cremation being an acceptable Christian practice.

This is what David W Cloud, a missionary in South Asia for 10 years relates of the Hindu cremation/burning of the dead in Kathmandu, Nepal:

“A few years ago I stood three or so feet from a burning corpse.... The head was already burnt beyond recognition and the skull was 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 working with lepers in a hospital in a very remote part of Asia and in an intensive care ward in the United 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 cremation as has been practiced by heathen religions for centuries, but without the sanitization adopted in more technically advanced areas.

Would you treat your loved ones so? Is this an acceptable Christian practice? No sir, cremation is a heathen practice. It is of heathen origin and serves heathen purposes. Why do the Hindus and those of other heathen religions cremate? It has a connection with their belief in reincarnation. There is nothing Christian about cremation. We were standing that day, as I have many other times, observing cremation in the surroundings from which the practice arose--idolatrous, Christless heathenism”

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Non Burial and Fire is a sign of God’s Judgment, Curse and Disgrace Of People and Objects

The Old Testament has a few references to the disposal of the dead by burning in fire.

The burning of bodies and objects in ancient Israel were mostly reserved for idols, criminals or enemies:

1. **Genesis 38:24-30:** Tamar, the pregnant daughter-in-law of Judah was initially ordered to be burned to death because she was thought to be guilty of prostitution. This action would have caused the death of the woman and her twin foetuses.
2. **Exodus 32:20:** Moses destroyed the golden calf by burning it.
3. **Numbers 16:35:** God sent fire to consume Korah and 250 Israelite men because they opposed Moses.
4. **Joshua 7:15-25:** After Joshua and his army had utterly destroyed the entire population and livestock of Jericho, a few soldiers disobeyed God's command and looted the city. To pay for Israel's disgrace, God ordered Achan the leader and the thieving soldiers to be burned. They were stoned to death; their bodies were burned and buried in what was called the *Valley of Achor*.
5. **Lev 10:1-2:** The wicked priests, Nadab and Abihu offered *profane fire* before God which He forbade, and "*there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD*".
6. **Leviticus 20:14:** If a man marries both the daughter and her mother, then all three "*shall be burnt with fire*".
7. **Leviticus 21:9:** If the daughter of a priest becomes a prostitute, then she "*shall be burnt with fire.*"

8. **Deuteronomy 7:25:** God commanded the idols of pagan gods to be destroyed with fire.
9. **1 Samuel 31: 3, 4:** Earlier in the chapter, wounded Saul asked his armor-bearer to kill him. The latter refused, so Saul suicided. The Philistines impaled Saul's body and those of his sons and left them on public display. But the people of Jabesh Gilead retrieved the bodies, burned them and later buried the remaining bones in Gilead. Burning might have been necessary because their bodies may have partly decomposed.
10. **1 Kings 21:23-24:** Jezebel, the wicked queen, was eaten by dogs.
11. **1 Kings 13:22:** A prophet disobeyed God by eating a meal in a forbidden location. God laid a curse on him: *"...your corpse shall not come to the tomb of your fathers."* Shortly after, a lion killed the prophet.
12. **2 Kings 10:26:** Jehu demolished a temple consecrated to the God Baal and burned its sacred stone.
13. **Psalm 83:9-10:** The Midianites *"who perished at En Dor... became as refuse on the earth"* To remain unburied was considered the greatest indignity which could befall the dead'
14. **Jeremiah 16:6:** God laid a curse on the Israelites: that many would die gruesome deaths of diseases that will not be lamented neither "buried."
15. **Jeremiah 29:22:** This verse contains a curse which refers to the time that the Babylonian king burned "roasted" Zedekiah and Ahab by fire.
16. **Jeremiah 22:19:** God laid a similar curse on Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, the king of Judah. Because of his pride and disobedience, he would be given the burial of a donkey, that is, to be dragged away and thrown outside the city gates.
17. **Amos 2:1-2:** The entire nation of Moab faced God's fiery judgment, because Moab "Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime."

The New Testament contains no references to burning of bodies but objects:

1. **Acts 19:18-19:** In the New Testament, we find the same teaching of fire to symbolize God's judgement and disapproval. The new believers renounced their heathen past by burning all their books on witchcraft and sorcery.
2. **Crucifixion:** Of the numerous tombs in Israel from the time of the Roman occupation which have been excavated, only one skeleton has been found which bears the marks of a crucifixion. That is because after a Roman execution, the body would be typically thrown in an open pit where it would be eaten by wild dogs. To be forbidden a traditional burial added greatly to the horror of this method of execution.
3. **2 Pet 3:7:** The Apostle Peter prophesied that God would destroy the whole universe one day by fire, *"But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word, are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men"*.
4. **Rev 20:14-15:** At the judgement before the Great White Throne, all the fallen angels and all the rejecters of Christ will be cast into the everlasting lake of fire, that being hell.

So What Does the Bible say about Burial?

The People of God Have Always Buried Their Dead

Following are just a few examples in the Bible:

1. The Patriarchs buried their dead.

- a. **Sarah** was buried by Abraham - **Gen 23:3-4, 17-20**
- b. **Abraham** was buried by his sons, Isaac and Ishmael - **Gen 25: 8-9**
- c. **Abraham** bought a piece of land to bury his dead - **Gen 23: 19-20**
- d. **Deborah**, Rebecca's handmaid, was buried near Bethel - **Gen 35:8**
- e. **Rachel** was buried near Bethlehem by Jacob - **Gen 35:19-20**
- f. **Isaac** was buried by his sons, Jacob and Esau - **Gen 35:29**
- g. **Jacob** buried Leah in the family tomb - **Gen 49:31**
- h. **Jacob** made Joseph swear to bury him in the same place - **Gen 47:29-31; 50:2, 13**
- i. **Joseph** was embalmed in Egypt, later buried at Shechem – **Gen 50:26; Josh 24:32**

2. During and after the time of Moses God's people always buried their dead.

- a. **Miriam**, sister of Moses, was buried in Kadesh - **Num 20:1**
- b. **Moses** was buried by God Himself in the land of Moab – **Deut 34:5-6**
- c. **Joshua** was buried in his inheritance at Timnath-Serah – **Josh 24:30**
- d. **Eleazar** was buried (Joshua 24:33)
- e. **Samuel** was honoured with a national burial - **1 Sam 25:1**
- f. **David, Solomon, Hezekiah**, and many other kings were buried in the City of David - **1 Kin 2:10; 11:43; 15:8; 2 Kin 15:38; 2 Chron. 32:33**

3. Jesus and His disciples were buried.

- a. **Jesus** was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea - **Mt 27:**
- b. **Stephen** was buried after his martyrdom - **Ac 8:2**
- c. (Ananias and Sapphira were buried). **Acts 5:5-10**

4. The Bible has an example of burial even in difficult circumstances:

Joseph's body was embalmed for over 400 years in Egypt and then carried by the Hebrews through the 40 years of wanderings in the wilderness before being buried in the Promised Land. (cf. **Gen 50:24-26; Exod 13:19 and Josh 24:32**).

It would have been simpler and convenient for the Hebrews to have cremated Joseph, and then carried his ashes with them in a tiny jar! But they refused this expedience, for Joseph was a believer of the one true God, a man who died in hope of the bodily resurrection. He was given an honourable burial in the land of Promise. From this important example alone, we learn that even if cremation is less expensive or easier than burial, it is still to be rejected, as God's people rejected the economical and simpler way to carry Joseph to the Promised Land.

But Is There A Command To Bury?

First, We Have Overwhelming Scriptural Examples

Sometimes the objection is made that there is not a direct command to bury our dead and should we follow the examples of God's people in the Bible? **But are we bound to follow these examples for they are not direct commands?"**

THE ANSWER is given in **Romans 15:4**. *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime was written for our learning ..."* And again in **1 Corinthians 10:11** we read, *"Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."* **In these passages God is telling us that we are to follow the examples of God's people, as well as the direct commands.**

Are There Scriptural Teachings In Reference To Burial?

We Have Two Major Doctrinal Teachings for Burial

We bury because of (1) **The Doctrine of the Body** and (2) **The Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body**.

The Doctrine of the Body

"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" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

The Human Being is Body and Soul

Unlike the Greeks, who regarded the body as a prison of the soul, the Bible teaches the soul and the body as the integral part of the human personality. The human being consists of two parts: (1) **the spirit/soul** and (2) **the body**. While these two parts are distinguishable and separable, they make us whole, a single individual. (**Gen 3:19, Luke 23:43, 46, Eccl 12:7**). As such both the soul and the body are important parts that make us whole as a person. The spirit/soul is that part of man that relates to God (John 4:24, Rom 8:16). The body is that part which facilitates us to subsist on earth. At death, when the soul/spirit departs the body, the body mostly being water, decomposes to the elements from which it was created because of God's curse upon Adam's sin that has befallen us all. (**Gen 3: 19**). Although the soul/spirit is separated from the body at death, both will be rejoined at the time of our resurrection (**1 Cor 15:44**). So the body is not merely a useless shell with no eternity's value but is valuable as Christ's own Body was when He was on earth. He still has this resurrected Body after He ascended to Heaven.

The Body at Death is at Sleep Waiting an Awakening

That is why when a believer dies, he is said to be *sleeping* or *resting* (1 Cor 15:51). Jesus said Lazarus *sleeps* when he was dead for four days. (Jn 11: 11) Paul calls death as 'sleeping' (1 Cor 15: 51) Old Testament believers are said to *sleep* with their fathers when they die. "So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David." (1 Ki 2: 10) When a person sleeps, he expects to wake up. This awakening and resurrection will happen when Christ returns. So the body is an inseparable and integral part of man and must be returned to the ground at death until it is raised up at the resurrection.

The Body of a Believer is the Possession of God

The body of a Christian is God's possession and therefore it is not ours to destroy by fire or by any means. When we don't own it, we certainly have no right to destroy it by fire. The body is not ours to desecrate or destroy as we wish and fancy for whatever reason following the trend of the unbelieving world. In life and in 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" (Romans 14:8) The BODY and soul is for the Lord (1 Co 6:13.) **The BODY is not our own, but bought at a price** – the price of Christ's sacrificial death. (1 Co 6:19.) **He died to save both our BODIES and SOUL.** With the body, dead or alive, we are to glorify God. (1 Cor 6:20)

The Body Is To Be Honoured and Respected In Life and Death

The believer's living BODY is the 'Temple of the Holy Spirit'. Burial reflects respect for the body that once served as the temple of God the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the biblical emphasis upon the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit increases our awareness against cremation. We honour places where important people are laid to rest; why not all the more those bodies where the Holy Spirit once dwelt? Why be miserly on the cost of burial, for to bury a child of God is a privilege as we honour their coming resurrection. Their worth and value is not diminished at death as in life.

The Bible Teaches the Bodily Resurrection of the Believer.

Burial is meaningful to the Christian because it points to the future resurrection from the place of interment. The Apostle Paul intimated this when he wrote, "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 6:4-5).

The Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body

"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom.8:22-23 cf. 1 Cor. 15:20-23; 2 Cor. 5:1; 1 Cor. 15:51-57).

The reason God's people in the Old Testament and in the New Testament and post canonical times have always buried their dead are not difficult to understand. We believe in a bodily resurrection. The physical body is called the seed for the resurrection body. When a seed is buried in the ground, it degenerates and then after a period of time regenerates into a new plant-life. This is the concept Paul uses in 1 Cor. 15:35-44 to illustrate the resurrection of the body together with the soul. (See quote below, emphasis added)

*“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. ... So also is the resurrection of the dead. **It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; 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”*

The Question Anticipated is how it is Possible for God to Raise Again a Decomposed Body?

The New Testament Likens the Body as a Seed

The terminology used by Paul in this passage is that of farming- i.e. **planting seed**. The farmer does not destroy his seed by burning it to ashes but he plants it whole. **Then from the decomposing seed comes forth a new plant.** Such is the picture of burial and the resurrection of the body. The physical body is LIKENED to the seed for the resurrection body. When we bury a believer, we are planting the body-seed for the future resurrection of an incorruptible body. (1 Cor 15: 35, 44) Take note of the “**It**”, referring to the Body, repeated eight times in 1 Cor. 15:42-44, connecting the body **sown** with the body **raised**:

It (the Body) is sown in corruption - **It** is raised in incorruption;

It (the Body) is sown in dishonour -**It** is raised in glory;

It (the Body) is sown in weakness - **It** is raised in power;

It (the Body) is sown a natural body - **It** is raised a spiritual body.

These verses will mean hollow, when read over a coffin, just about to be rolled into a blazing furnace, and reduced to ashes in few hours. Out of sight out of mind? But a grave is an ongoing testimony to the glorious resurrection to every passerby. There can be no resurrection unless what is committed to the Lord in death is literally raised. Every believer relies on the power of God, and the plain teaching of Scripture for its fulfilment.

“Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man (Adam) came death, by man (Jesus) came also the resurrection of the dead.” (1 Cor. 15:20 -21)

Cremation destroys the truth and the close connection between the resurrection of Christ and that of the believer. Burial anticipates a resurrection. It is a powerful testimony of our unwavering faith and hope in God’s Word regarding the promise of bodily resurrection.

Burial of the Believer's Body Therefore Is like Sowing a Seed into the Ground

And at the appointed time, it will sprout out of the ground into a new life to dwell in the New Earth and New Heavens. God will one day raise our body just as He raised Christ bodily on the third day (**1 Cor 15:42-44**). Cremation, on the other hand, with all that crackling, melting, sizzling burning of our dead, would only evoke thoughts of punishment and judgement with no hope of resurrection.

The Old Testament Believers Had Some Knowledge of the Resurrection

God's people even in the Old Testament had some knowledge of a bodily resurrection from the earliest days. The book of Job is considered to be the oldest book in the Bible because there is no mention of Israel, or Jerusalem, or the temple or the Jewish kingdom. It is believed that Job was most likely a God-fearing man who lived in the days prior to Abraham. **Yet we see in Job 19:25-27 that this ancient man of God had thorough knowledge of the bodily resurrection.**

*"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: **And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.**"*

Cremation does not reflect the message on the Christian's blessed hope of a future resurrection but the pagan concept of the body as of no value. Fire is a picture of hell not heaven, illustrating the eternal destiny of unbelievers, and not of believers. If one could witness the beloved body of a believer twist and turn, sizzle and melt as it stokes the fiery crackling flames of the furnace, it will only bring grief and more heart break, not hope and comfort. We believe in the resurrection of the dead (**Jn 5:28-29; Ac 24:15**.) We therefore eagerly await the redemption of our bodies (**Ro 8:23-25**.) We believe that what is sown in corruption will be raised in incorruption (**1 Co 15:42-54**.) The message of the resurrection is lost when we cremate our dead. Which practice better pictures the hope that we have of the resurrection? **Burial reflects our hope in the resurrection.**

The Jews Honoured The Body Of Their Dead.

Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus knew and understood the doctrine of the resurrection and of the body (cf. **John 11:24**). To bury the dead was a special work of affection and an imperative duty primarily of sons towards their parents. **The following Jewish burial procedure is indicative of this hope of bodily resurrection:**

- (1) The eyes of the deceased are closed by a son or a friend followed by a kiss on the face. (**Gen 46:4; 50: 1**).
- (2) The body is washed (**Acts 9:37**).
- (3) The body is not to be disfigured (**Deut 14:1, 2**).
- (4) The body is anointed with aromatic spices (**John 12:7, 19:39, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:1**).
- (5) The body is wrapped in linen (**Matt 27:59, John 11:44, 19:40**).
- (6) The body of the rich and the distinguished are embalmed as in the case of Jacob and Joseph. (**Gen 50: 2, 26**).

- (7) The body is anointed with costly aromatic oil and wrapped with spices, especially myrrh and aloes before the embalming. (**Jn 12: 7; 19: 39, 40**)
- (8) The body is placed in an open coffin. (**Lk 7: 14**)
- (9) The body if not buried immediately is laid out in the upper room. (**2 Ki 4: 21; Ac 9: 37**)
- (10) The body is carried to the grave or a tomb in an open coffin on a wooden bier borne by men. (**2 Sam 3:31**).
- (12) The burial is preceded with a funeral oration at the grave/tomb.
- (11) Finally, the body is interred in a grave, cave, or tomb (**Luke 23:53**).
- (13) After the funeral a meal is given to friends and relatives. (**2 Sam 3: 35; Hos 9: 4; Ezek 24: 17, 24**)

The Root Reason to Bury Our Dead

“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.” (Gen. 3:19)

God Ordained Burial in the Earth as the Way to Dispose the Bodies of the Dead.

God addressed Adam with these words, “...till thou RETURN UNTO THE GROUND” as part of the curse He passed upon him for his sin in eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God plainly warned Adam, “...for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (**Gen 2: 17**) So, bodily death is the penalty of sin.

These were God’s own words plainly stating that just as Adam was created **OUT OF THE GROUND**, so he is to **RETURN UNTO THE GROUND**. God ordained burial in the ground as the way to dispose the bodies of the dead.

“TILL THOU RETURN UNTO THE GROUND” Was And Is And For All Times Till The End Of Time, God's Instruction For Sinful Man To Dispose The Dead. Cremation goes in defiance to this basic rule of God. The burial of the dead was God's clear instruction to our first parents before they were driven out of the Garden of Eden.

Returning our dead to the ground, witnesses to the Genesis account of our roots and our own beginning in Adam and Eve. Burial is a memorial testifying of God’s direct creation of man from the dust of the ground. It also reminds us of God’s sovereign ownership and Lordship of all life and matter, visible and invisible, generation after generation until the culmination of the present world system. Therefore, like the Lord’s Supper and Baptism, burying our dead is a pointer declaring to the world that God is our Creator and is to be acknowledged and obeyed.

God Himself Showed By Example That Burial Is His Ordained Law.

“So Moses, the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he (*God*) buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day” (**Deuteronomy 34:5, 6**).

The will of God for His people is seen in the fact that **GOD HIMSELF BURIED MOSES**. Moses was 120 years old when he died on Mt Nebo, even though he was fit, keen and healthy to lead his people into Canaan. We read “his eyes were not dim, nor his natural force abated.” (**Gen 34: 1-8**). But Moses lost the privilege to enter into the Promised Land because of his sin earlier (**Gen 31: 2**). However, he was permitted to see the Land from the top

of Mt Nebo. When God called Moses 'Home', God buried him in a secret place in the vicinity of Bethpeor, east of Jordan. (**Gen 3: 29; 4: 46**).

God who has used fire in many different ways in the past could have so easily sent one power bolt of fire to burn/cremate the body of His servant to consume every bit to ashes in a second unlike 3-5 hours as the incinerator does for cremation. **BUT GOD CHOSE TO BURY HIS SERVANT MOSES AND HE BURIED HIM IN A SECRET PLACE** for "*no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day*". **To have been reduced to ashes and blown away in the four winds, hence needing no secret place to bury His servant Moses, would have been a convenient thing to do.** Now why didn't God think of that? Will God contradict His own instruction to man? **God Buried Moses Because God Himself Ordained Burial As the Way To Return The Dead To The Ground And So Instructed Adam Before He Was Expelled From The Garden of Eden!**

GOD'S OWN BELOVED SON, JESUS CHRIST WAS BURIED

"Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. ... There laid they Jesus therefore. ..." (**John 19:38-42**)

Imagine the scenario if the Lord was cremated instead of being buried in the tomb. What proof of His resurrection will be recorded in the Gospels? There will be none. No stone to be rolled away. No guards needed to guard a small ash urn. No need for Mary and others to visit the tomb to anoint him on the third day. The two angels would not have appeared to Mary at the empty tomb. Peter and John wouldn't have run to verify when the Ladies told about the risen Lord and the empty tomb. There will be no record of the undisturbed linen that once wrapped around the lifeless body of our Lord. And there would be no scars on His blessed hands to show Thomas that it is He in the flesh of the risen glorified Body, truly as he was in life before death on the cross. The Gospels will be empty without its soul and heart. Cremation would have destroyed all evidence of the bodily resurrection of Jesus our Lord. No one would believe a Saviour said to be risen from an urn of ashes.

Just as the Lord Jesus Christ was laid to rest bodily in the tomb in the manner of the Jews according to the Scriptures, likewise the Christian is said to rest at death in the grave waiting for the rising. The third day He arose triumphant over sin and death and Satan's power, from the tomb, as the Saviour of believing mankind. This promise is now given to all believers, who have died in the normal course of nature. That he who believes in Him will bodily rise again in the appointed time. His gloried Body is proof of our future body and it has eternal value.

To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, as the Apostle Paul testified (**2 Cor. 5:9; Phil. 1:21-23**). The dead body of the believer *sleeps* in the grave though decomposed to the elements while his redeemed bodiless soul, waits in the presence of the Lord to be reunited with the body on that great resurrection day by the same power by which our Lord was raised. (**1 Thess. 4: 13: 18**)

An Exception Can Be Made To the Unpredictable Circumstances of Life.

Human life after Eden is unpredictable. When sin entered the world of man through the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, life has become unpredictable. The Ideal of Eden's life is lost and the ordeal of life is now the order of the day. Therefore, there are occasions in which Christians and others die in ways which render burial impossible as in the seas and sinking ships, in house and vehicle fires or eaten by animals, etc. There may be unusual circumstances such as in times of war, or plague, where disposal of the dead by burning may be needful. Of course, many martyrs were burned to death. They are the exception to the rule in the unpredictability of human life. But to die in the normal course of life is the norm for most people. While God's explicit rule from the beginning is burial for all man, God is still able to bring back bodily, unimpaired at the resurrection those whose bodies were destroyed in unusual circumstances. The bodies of true Believers will be resurrected to eternal life and the bodies of rejecters too will be raised to everlasting damnation. (cf. **Rev. 20: 11-15**)

What about those who have been cremated? We must let the Lord be the Judge. We know that the Lord has the power to raise all the dead, no matter what has happened to their bodies - **Re 20:13**. But in the normal run of life we bury because it is our certain hope that the same believer will be raised in the same body, only with a new body. Most importantly it is God's clear instruction for us to bury from the beginning of civilization outside Eden.

The way the body is disposed of, has no eternal consequences. However, cremation is contrary to Scripture as noted and therefore a Christian should not wilfully do what is made clear by God. The most important thing to ensure is to make every effort that our loved ones believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her Saviour and are born again before death. As the Lord has warned, "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 body and soul in hell" (**Mt 10: 28**). The soul of the saved person goes to be with Christ immediately upon death (**Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8; 2 Tim. 4:6; Lk. 23:43**). The soul of the lost man or woman descends to hell immediately upon death (**Lk. 16:22-23; Rev. 20:13**). That which is done to the body after death does not affect the soul's condition nor the future resurrection. All will be resurrected.

Whether someone is buried or cremated is a decision which affects the living rather than the dead. The rite of burial witnesses to our faith in the bodily resurrection, but the witness is to the unbelieving living. Burying our saved diseased honours their body, but this honour, again, is for an ongoing testimony of their lives to the living who witness the burial.

Is cremation unscriptural? There is no scriptural support for it. Burial is certainly a scriptural teaching. How much better it is to have a clear conscience supported by the revelation of God's Word.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

There is a desire to keep death out of sight as much as possible. Keeping death out of sight seems to be the humanistic trend today. The Crematorium and the Columbarium with a mystical peaceful atmosphere and without a sign of death about them are preferred than the 'unsightly cemeteries'. Death is sanitized by keeping the dead out of sight sealed in a coffin and then to incinerate out of sight, walking away without the stomach to watch the burning of the loved diseased. But in burial the grave and its grave stone is a constant reminder to the living of the Christian who once lived and died and now waiting to be awakened bodily one day.

But will this sinful human desire to put out of sight all trace of death alter the grim facts of death as the consequence of sin? (**Rm 3: 23**). The grave reminds man of death, man's mortality, hence raising the question of his eternity. It awakens the conscience to reckon with our Maker and to ponder the purpose of life and as to our origins and hereafter. The grave will warn man of what comes after death, the judgment? "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." (**Heb 9: 27, 28**). The impact of sin's consequences seen in the lifeless human body is a witness of God's curse upon mankind.

I have seen so many dead bodies at close range from my childhood as young as five. Viewing a dead body gave me insight to life and the quest for the meaning of life which led to my Saviour. I have often asked in my infancy, "***I know this person. The body I know but where have they gone?***" That has brought eternity's values in view every moment of my waking days since then.

I recommend every child to experience this reality of life. This is something we can afford, an open coffin, even in our death testifying to the truth of sin's penalty, the human bodily death; whenever feasible to warn of the eternal consequences. The open coffin was the way of the Jews in the Old and New Testaments. (**2 Sam 3:31; Lk 7: 14**)

King Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, one who had experienced life to the fullest in all its facets more than any, wrote, "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart." (**Eccl. 7:2**). The meaning is clear. A funeral provokes thought to ponder about eternity and ones standing with God his Maker before death. The dead reminds man of his Judge and Creator.

Whether in life or death, we do all to the glory of God and this includes a determination to be consistent with the biblical teaching to bury our dead. God's people have always buried their dead with this unwavering hope in their hearts, that they will see that saved beloved in Christ again in that same body, only transformed to a glorious body. Only through the death and shed blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ can we have this certain hope.

He bore upon Himself the punishment for all our sins, experienced hell for us, died hanging on the cross, buried in a borrowed tomb, and then bodily rose again from the grave in triumph three days later. Whosoever should acknowledge his sinfulness before God and repent (coming under God's rule from self rule) and receives Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Saviour, all sins are forgiven on account of Christ and will not be judged by God but will have eternal life in heaven together with his BODY and SOUL.

So beloved, let us commit our bodies to the ground from whence we came as ordained by God since the beginning of human life. Let's wait, earth to earth, dust to dust, until we rise again from our '*rest and sleep*' when Jesus returns to raise our bodies together with our soul.

Rest In Peace Till Then!

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17 August, 2008,

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