

WHAT IS A HUMAN?



WHAT IS MAN THAT YOU ARE MINDFUL OF HIM?

To Bury or to Burn?

The cremation rate in the United States has been increasing steadily with the national average rate rising from 3.56% in 1960 to 48.6% in 2015 and projections from the Cremation Association of North America forecasting a rate of 54.3% in 2020. The rates vary considerably among the states with the highest rates (over 70%) being reported in the Western United States with the lowest rates (under 30%) being reported in the Southern United States. . . Wisconsin is #19 at 52.4%.

Why the increase?

1. Ecology: Cremation is viewed as more ecologically friendly.
2. Economics: Cremation is *generally* less expensive than a traditional funeral.
3. Philosophical: The burning of the body is the expected practice within eastern religions and the accepted practice of materialist.

What must a Christian consider?

1. Personal: Our funeral communicates our final message/values to those remaining.
2. Biblical: The text of Scripture should always influence our practices.
3. Cultural: Our choices (even in death) reflect an embracing of the world's values or an affiliation for God's design.

Process for Consideration

1. Exegetical References: Does the Bible directly speak to the issue? If so, in what manner? What conclusions can be drawn?
2. Theological Principles: Are there larger theological principles that impact decision making in this matter?
3. Historical Practice: What has been the practice throughout church history?

OT Exegetical Examples

1. 1 Samuel 31:8-13 – Saul and his sons are cremated after their bodies are mutilated in battle. David commends the action.
2. Amos 2:1-3 – God condemns Moab for burning the body of a Edomite king.
3. Amos 6:8-10 – After the devastation of Jerusalem, bodies are stacked and burned.

OT Exegetical Examples

4. Leviticus 10:1-2 – God uses fire from heaven to judge Nadab and Abihu.
5. Numbers 16:35 – God uses fire from heaven to judge Korah and his followers.
6. Joshua 7:25 – Israel was to burn the bodies of Achan and his family as a testament to the judgment of God.

OT Exegetical Examples

7. Leviticus 20:14 – A man who “marries both a woman and her mother” is to receive capital punishment followed by cremation.
8. Leviticus 21:9 – A priest’s daughter who turns to prostitution is to receive capital punishment followed by cremation.

OT Exegetical Examples of Burial

1. The combination of “to bury” and “grave” occur 200 times in the OT. Individuals are buried in: caves, under trees, beside roads, in deserts, in gardens, and on hills.
2. God buried Moses in the ground (Deut 34:1-5).
3. Culturally, burial of the body within the ground was the expected norm within Palestine and Egypt.

Conclusions from OT Exegesis

1. Burial of the body was the normal OT practice within Israel.
2. The references and examples of cremation in the OT are unique in nature.
3. Burning a body after death was culturally viewed as a sign of God's judgment.
4. Cremation was neither explicitly commended or condemned.
5. No final conclusion for a NT practice of cremation can be reached via OT texts.

Theology of the Physical Body

Creation: God first created the human body with dignity. God did not create a soul and place it in a meaningless vessel. He combined an uniquely designed body and infused it with an individual soul to become a human being.

“The body is as really and eternally a part of man as is his spirit, and the resurrection of the body is an indispensable part of his salvation.”

Theology of Salvation

Salvation: Salvation is not just a “spiritual” matter; salvation includes the body.

- Our body will be redeemed (Romans 8:23).
- Our body will be transformed to be like our Lord’s glorious body (Phil 3:21).
- Our body is a “member of Christ” (1 Cor 6:15).
- Our body serves as temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19).
- Our body was bought via redemption (1 Cor 6:20).

Theology of Death

Death is the separation of body from spirit. Neither ceases to exist. Both are limited without the other, but both represent the individual.

- In the NT a corpse is referred to as the person (Mark 15:44-47; John 11:43). A corpse is never *just* a body; it is the body of a *person*.
- The spirit without the “tent” is “naked” (2 Cor 5:1-4).
- A Christian views death as both an enemy of the cross and a conquered foe that produces gain (Phil 1:21-27).

Theology of the Resurrection

The resurrection is the bedrock of Christian hope. It is promised by Jesus (John 6), expounded by Paul (1 Cor 15), and provides the final hope of the revelation (Rev 20-22).

- The resurrection is a *bodily* resurrection (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:53).
- There is a utilization of the old body (seed), but a transformation of it in process (1 Cor 15:35-44).
- The reuniting of the body with the spirit is what completes glorification.

Church History

1. Burial has been the practice of the Christian church throughout history.
2. Culturally, Hinduism and Buddhism practice cremation. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism practice burial.
3. In missions, the practice of Christian burial is foundational to a church's identity.

Conclusions

1. The Bible does not explicitly condone or condemn cremation, thus we should not. It is not a sinful choice.
2. There is Scriptural evidence that suggests that the practice of cremation was not an acceptable option in either the OT or NT.
3. There is Biblical theology that emphasizes the role of the physical body in creation, salvation, death, and resurrection.
4. Throughout Church history, burial has been the dominant tradition at death.
5. A funeral is to be the proclamation of one's life message of hope in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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