

Should Christians be cremated?

By Dr. Stan Frye

Today I want to deal with a subject that has become of great concern for me as a child of God and also for many other believers who are perplexed by the larger and larger number of believers whose families are having them cremated at the time of death. For the past several years I have noticed a growing number of believers who are conducting memorial services for their loved ones instead of having a celebratory worship service with the bodily remains of the departed loved one present at the time of the service. And, as a pastor I have done much to observe and inquire about why saved children of God are resorting to this undignified and basically pagan method of disposing of their family member's bodies.

So, I have decided to deal with

"Only 5% of Americans were cremated in 1962; by 2000, it was 25.5%."

this subject and hopefully help many believers to make the right decision about this matter as they are faced with the death of another loved one. What you do with the information I am going to give you is left totally up to you, but I pray that you will follow the Biblical way to dispose of your family members instead of the pagan way which is being adopted by so many today.

I think first that I should tell you that there are many disagreements about when cremation started, but from my studies I have come to believe that it probably started

between 3000 and 2000 B.C. with the Cycladic Culture among the many of Southern Greece. After this time, cremation was carried out by numbers of other nations, especially in the Greek and Roman culture. Then as time progressed up until about the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries A.D. the act of cremation was practiced by many other nations which predominantly were given to paganism. Some of these pagan religions that practiced cremation were the Hindus, the Buddhists, the Sikhs, and members of Zoroastrianism. During the many centuries leading up to the end of this period, cremation was almost a universal custom of Aryan peoples, Indians, Greeks, Romans, Slavs, and Teutons. (Pagan Creation or Christian Burial by AJ Pollock, Page 1, website). Also, in England the Druids, Celts and early British burned their dead until the Christian reformation took place which led to Christian burial in the Biblical way. However, modern cremation as we know it today, with ashes in an urn or box did not occur until 1873 when an exhibition of a crematorium and cremated ashes were displayed in Italy. "The first cremation in America took place in 1876 accompanied by readings from Charles Darwin and the Hindu scriptures. For many years, relatively few persons (mostly liberals and freethinkers) chose cremation." Page 1 from "Cremation Confusion" by Timothy George, Christianity Today.

"Only five percent of Americans were cremated in 1962; by 2000 it was 25.5%. In Japan, where burial is sometimes illegal, the cremation rate is

98 percent. The rise in cremations reflects many factors: concern for the land use; the expense of traditional funerals; the loss of community and a sense of "place" in modern transient society; and "New age-type spiritualities." "Cremation Confusion" by Timothy George, 5/21/2002. Christianity Today. I would attest the fact that most Christians who practice cremation today instead of burial has more to do with the cost of funerals than anything else. In other words, our selfish American society is now reflected in the way we dispose of our dear loved ones. Isn't it amazing that we now make decisions about disposing of our family members' bodies based just upon financial cost rather than whether the funeral is one of dignity with a body lying in repose. It would seem to me that we who call ourselves believers have now allowed money to take priority over dignity.

Let me now show you some scriptures where we find that the people of God almost always buried their loved ones rather than to have them burned like the pagans. In fact, it was considered a curse for a dead body not to be buried. **Isaiah** wrote of the king of Babylon, **"But thou are cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcass trodden under feet. Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast**

destroyed thy land, and slain thy people; the see of evildoers shall never be renowned."

"Jezebel was one of the most wicked women who ever lived. She stirred up her husband Ahab to perform incredible evil, and because of this was cursed of God. Part of the curse prophesied by God's prophet Elijah was that she should not be buried, but her body would be eaten by dogs (I Kings 21:23-25)." "Should A Christian Be Cremated?" by William F. Dankebring, The Untold Story web site, page 2. Jezebel died the way the prophet predicted and indeed was eaten by dogs until nothing but a few bones of her were left.

The custom of the Israelites was never cremation! Burial was the proper means of disposing of dead bodies, according to the entire record of the inspired Scriptures. Human burial developed from the belief that the dead rise again. Like a seed, according to this belief, a body is planted in the earth to await rebirth." The World Book Encyclopedia.

"Lack of proper burial was considered a curse in the Bible, when a prophet of God foolishly disobeyed the direct commandment of God, he was told by an old prophet in Bethel, **"Thus said the Lord, Forasmuch as thou has disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, But camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place, of the which the Lord did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcass shall not come unto the sepulcher of thy fathers (I Kings 13:21-22).**

Should a Christian be cremated? The Untold Story website, "Not to be buried properly is a sign of the displeasure of Almighty God, or an act of foolish ignorance and disobedience. ,

When God curses a nation, He removes His blessing from them, He declares, **“For thus saith the Lord, Enter not into the house of mourning, neither go to lament nor bemoan them: for I have taken away my peace from this people, saith the Lord, even loving kindness and mercies. Both the great and the small shall die in this land: they shall not be buried, neither shall men lament for them...”** Jeremiah 16:5-6 Ibid.

What Does the Bible Teach?

The first five books of the Old Testament are known as the “Pentateuch” or “the Law”.

“God’s way for the disposition of the dead is BURIAL!

In the book of Genesis we read that Abraham, **“the father of the faithful”** (Gal. 3:9), who set us an example of faithful obedience to God, went to the children of Heth, after the death of his wife, Sarah, and said, **“I am a stranger and sojourner with you:” give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.:** (Gen. 23:1-4). Ibid

Abraham bought a field, that he might bury Sarah there, the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, and contained a cave. (Gen. 23:8-17). **“When Abraham himself died, his sons, Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah...there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.”** (Gen. 25:9-10). Ibid

Why does God give us all this detailed information in the very first book of the Bible as to the disposition of the dead? There must be a reason! Obviously, this instruction is written down for our admonition, as a guide for us today! Ibid The apostle Paul explained: **“For whatsoever things were written**

aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” (Romans 15:4). Ibid

Jesus Himself said, **“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”** (Matthew 4:4). Ibid

God’s way for the disposition of the dead is **BURIAL!** The practice of cremation is pagan—idolatrous—heathenish—and wrong! The practice of cremation was inspired by no less than Satan, the devil and his host of demons, as a part of his diabolical counterfeit superstition involving the belief of reincarnation and the immortality of souls. According to the pagans, the “purifying fires” of cremation prepare the soul for its flight after death of the body. Leslie V. Grinsell, in his book “Barrow, Pyramid, and Tomb” tells the story of the Ibn Fadlan who in A.D. 922 was an Arab emissary to Russia from the Kalif of Baghdad. As he witnessed the cremation of Viking chief on the Volga, he was told, “we burn him...so that he enters paradise at once.” Ibid. page 5

Surely by now we know that it was God’s intention from the beginning that the disposal of bodies after death was and is burial and not cremation. In the Old Testament we read of Joshua being buried. Then we read that Eleazar and Aaron died and were buried. Gideon was buried and of course, Moses was buried by God Himself on top of Mt. Pisgah. Samson died and was buried. Ruth made a promise to Naomi that wherever Naomi died and was buried that she too would be buried with her. Samuel also died and was buried. King David died and was also buried. You can read all of these stories in the Bible and God will attest the fact that it was and is His plan for God’s people to be buried in order to await the resurrection. “God intended men and women to be buried when they die, as a

symbol of awaiting the resurrection, when they will rise from their graves. The patriarch Job knew this. He exclaimed in living faith, **“If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shall call (at the time of the resurrection of the dead), and I will answer thee: thou will have a desire to the work of thine hands. (Job 14:14-15).** “Should A Christian Be Cremated?” from the Untold Story website, by William F. Dankenbring, page 8.

Later, Job exclaimed, **“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.: (Job 19:25-27).** Ibid, page 8.

I must tell you that I could go on and on and on, declaring from the scriptures that God has intended for his people to be buried at death and not be cremated. In the Bible when it talks about death and fire, it always refers to fire being the destructive element which comes with God’s judgment upon wickedness, and also as reward for eternal punishment. Listen to the words of the prophet Malachi as he wrote very explicitly under the anointing of God. **“For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all of the proud, yea, and all that do wicked, shall be stubble: and the day cometh that shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch...” (Mal. 4:1).** Peter talks about the great fire of Gehenna, which will consume the bodies of the unrepentant wicked at the end of the age. He wrote, **“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night” in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the**

elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” (II Peter 3:10). And, the apostle John describes the final fate of the wicked in the book of Revelation. He says, **“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” (Rev. 21:8).**

Hopefully by now you have come to the conclusion that cremation was started with pagans and was never intended for saved believers. God gave us the greatest example of burial and resurrection when Jesus was buried and arose from the dead. Pay attention to what Jesus told His disciples about His forthcoming death and burial just before He dies when the woman with the alabaster box of ointment came and anointed Him for His burial. He said to His disciples about this woman who anointed His feet with aromatic perfumes after Judas accused her of wasting this precious ointment. **“Let her alone; why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come a forehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.” (Mark 14:6-9).**

“Jesus set the example of how a body should be prepared at death for the child of God.”

In other words, Jesus set the example of how a body should be prepared and treated at the time of death for the child of God. The body of the dead believer should be treated with dignity

because it has been housing the Holy Spirit of God. I personally believe that to burn through cremation the body of a saint who has gone on to heaven is to bring reproach upon the truth of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The idol Molech was presented as a protecting father figure. Images of him were made of bronze and their outstretched arms were heated red-hot. Living children were then placed into the idol's hands and died there or were rolled into a fire pit below. Some sources indicate a child might also be 'passed through the fire' prior to the actual sacrifice in order to purify or baptize the child. Molech worship occurred in the Hinnom Valley near Jerusalem. Because of this, the valley became associated with the idea of Tophet, or hell. You can read about Tophet or the hell mentioned here in **Isaiah 30:33** and **Jeremiah 19:12-15**. "got Questions?.org. "What does the Bible say about child sacrifice?" page 1.

God prohibited Israel from child sacrifice in general and Molech worship in particular. **Lev. 20:2-5** states, **"Say to the Israelites: Any Israelite or any foreigner residing in Israel who sacrifices any of his children to Molech is to be put to death. The members of the community are to stone him. I myself will set my face against him and will cut him off from his people; for by sacrificing his children to Molech, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. If the members of the community close their eyes when that man sacrifices one of his children to Molech and if they fail to put him to death, I myself will set my face against him and his family and will put them off from their people together with all who follow him in prostitute themselves to Molech.** Ibid, page1.

God was adamant against the burning of children in the worship of other gods, and I

believe this is a revelation of why burning the bodies of our saved loved ones associates this act with pagan worship as well. We must be very careful that we don't give any indication that we are associating the burning of bodies with the worship of other gods, and I fear that this truly might be what we are doing if we are not careful.

Finally, I would just mention that many of our Native American Indians burned the bodies of their dead loved ones for different reasons. Of course, each body that was burned had to do with the person's spirit and where it would go. Some tribes believed that the person's spirit would depart from the flames and fly up into the air and become the moon which was good. Others believed that the spirits would fly upward from the flames and become coyotes which was bad. The Se-nel Tribe in California was best known for this type of cremation. "The Wall Street Journal" website, "Native Americans: 'Cremation'". Page 1. Clearly, the burning of family members' bodies was a ritualistic type of worship and thus should be foreign to Christians who believe in death, burial, and resurrection. I could go on and on talking about different peoples who practiced cremation, but I believe I have covered enough to convince any objective minded believer that he or she should not have the bodies of saved family members or friends cremated.

Let me also tell you that I sincerely hope and pray that this article might be used by many believers to give Biblical direction for the disposal of our dear loved ones with acts of dignity and class. The Lord truly knows that we have too few believers who have convictions about these valuable Christ-honoring traditions. If you want to discuss this with me, you may do so by giving me a call. If this article has helped you make a decision to not cremate one of your family members or friends, I would like to know this.

May God give you His peace about this matter!