

“Is Cremation Against the Bible?”

I have become curious as to why certain Christian denominations claim cremation to be against the Bible. Is it?

Thanks for your e-mail. Although many Christian and Jewish groups DO permit the bodies of the deceased to be cremated, this is not the usual manner of disposing of the body. Furthermore, there are some groups who are strongly opposed to cremating a body. For instance, The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church states, “Cremation is normally forbidden in the Orthodox Church.” But WHY are some opposed to cremation? Is this practice unbiblical? These are good questions.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion states that some rabbis are persuaded, on the basis of Deuteronomy 21:23, that interment is a positive biblical command. This would make cremation an unbiblical practice. In addition, some rabbis argued that cremation was disrespectful to the deceased; others that it implied a denial of belief in the doctrine of physical resurrection. There is one clear biblical account of a cremation. In 1 Sam. 31:9-13, the men of Jabesh-gilead are said to have “burned” the bodies of Saul and his sons. Afterward, they buried their bones. Thus, The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion states that “in spite of the general prohibition against cremation”, most branches of Judaism permit it (even if somewhat reluctantly).

The situation today is similar for most (but not all) Christian denominations. The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* states, “Belief in the resurrection of the body made cremation repugnant to the early Christians.” The article goes on to point out that the practice was “revived in

the 19th century, largely in free-thinking circles, though among some Christians it has now come into favour." The Roman Catholic Church permits, but does not recommend, cremation. The Orthodox Church typically forbids it. Others sanction it, though somewhat cautiously.

In my opinion, there is no clear biblical command prohibiting cremation of the deceased. Traditionally, however, both Jews and Christians have been a little wary of disposing of a body in this fashion. There seems to be at least a twinge of conscience about whether it's really acceptable, or properly respectful (whether to God or the deceased), to cremate the dead. I can certainly understand this feeling (and even share it to a degree), but I do NOT think the Bible forbids it.

Furthermore, I do not think it creates any problems for the doctrine of a physical resurrection. Many people throughout history have been burned at the stake, eaten by wild animals, etc. Many of those who have received a traditional burial have already completely decomposed. The doctrine of physical resurrection does not require that the same atoms which once composed a body also compose the resurrection body. Indeed, if those scientists are correct who tell us that the entire atomic content of the human body changes every seven years or so this would clearly be absurd anyway. Whatever the precise nature of the resurrection body, the God who can create an entire universe *ex nihilo* (i.e. out of nothing) will obviously not be hindered in resurrecting the bodies of all men and women (cremated or otherwise) and assigning them to their eternal destination.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Is Cremation Wrong?”

Is it wrong to cremate the body at death? Most of my family members were cremated.

The practice of cremation is connected with pagan burial practices. Pantheists such as Buddhists and Hindus believe the body is bad and that the true self (sometimes referred to as the soul) is trapped in the body. Therefore, cremation symbolizes the deliverance from the prison house of the body and dissolving of the individual personhood. There are a few occurrences of cremation in the Bible but the reason is that the body was desecrated (1 Sam. 31:12). Under normal circumstances, Jews and Christians buried the body. For Christians the body is buried because the body is good and created and given by God (1 Cor. 6:19). We also await the resurrection of the body, which will occur when Christ returns and our bodies will be resurrected in their new glorified state (1 Thess 4:16-18).

Having said that, cremation is not the unpardonable sin. God will recreate the body no matter what state it may be in; that is no problem for Him. Burial is the Christian practice for the reasons I stated and as a general rule we want to honor God in our death and burial and not associate with pagan practices. However, there are times where cremation may be necessary or preferred and I am sure God grants grace in those circumstances.

I hope this helps.

Pat Zukeran

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