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# To Bury Or To Burn?<sup>1</sup>

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George Battey

## Questions:

- 1) What are the three most common reasons given for favoring cremation?
- 2) What was the common practice of God's people when someone died?
- 3) When someone was not buried in scripture, what did this indicate?
- 4) What does scripture mean when it says, "*They became as refuse on the earth*" (Ps 83:10)?
- 5) When people and bodies were burned in the Bible, was this a good thing?
- 6) Who practiced cremation in scripture—God's people or the heathen?
- 7) Was King Saul cremated and was this approved by David?
- 8) Why is the doctrine of the resurrection affected by the practice of cremation?
- 9) Would it have been wrong for the disciples of Jesus to cremate His body after He died?<sup>2</sup>

## **Introduction**

In March 2022 I preached on the "*Bodily Resurrection*" while visiting at a congregation in the brotherhood.

- That's all I did—preached on the resurrection of the body.
- When I was finished, within the next two days I had six people ask me about cremation.
- I explained to people that I'm opposed to cremation.
- My purpose in this study is to try to persuade you to believe like I do.

**Q:** Why were people asking about cremation when I only preached about the resurrection?

**A:** I believe there is a correlation between the two subjects. If one believes the body of man will be resurrected on the final day, then perhaps it matters how we treat the body when it dies.

How we treat the body speaks to the issue of what we believe about resurrection.

I'm not alone in this thought.

- Historically speaking, cremation was not practiced by Christians.
- Cremation has been practiced primarily by heathen nations.

- This distinction between God's people and heathens will be evident in a moment as we look at the scriptures.

**NOTE:** I find the reasoning of many brethren interesting.

- Many oppose the celebration of Christmas because it is of heathen origin, but think nothing about cremation on the same level.
- Many oppose smoking because they believe the body is the "*temple of the Holy Spirit*" and we should not defile the temple, but when a death occurs, suddenly the body doesn't matter.

## **Reasons Given For Cremation**

The most common reasons given by Americans opting for cremation are as follows:

### **1) Expense**

A traditional funeral and burial is much more expensive than cremation and the common idea is: "*The Lord would prefer we save the money and donate it to the poor rather than wasting it on a funeral.*"

This is the reasoning used by the disciples to criticize Mary when she anointed the feet of Jesus:

## **John 12**

<sup>3</sup> Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.

<sup>4</sup> Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, who would betray Him, said,

<sup>5</sup> "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"

What was the Lord's response?

Did He agree?

<sup>7</sup> But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.

<sup>8</sup> "For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."

## **2) Environmental concerns**

The idea here is that we're running out of room to bury bodies and we need to change our practices concerning burial.

- This may be an issue in Japan (an island nation),
- But it is an invalid argument in America.
- We're not running out of room to bury.

## **3) Ease of arrangement**

What this usually means is:

- We don't have to have a funeral right away.

- Relatives won't have to take time off from work to attend a funeral.
- We can cremate Uncle John now and have a memorial service later at everyone's convenience.

#### 4) **The body will turn to dust anyway—we're just accelerating the process.**

We don't think this way in regard to other matters.

**Example:** We cannot argue that everyone is going to eventually die, so I'm just going to accelerate the process that's going to occur anyway and kill my boss.

#### 5) **No scripture or Biblical principle is being violated.**

This is basically the argument: "*The Bible doesn't say 'Thou shalt not cremate.'*"

This is what people say regarding all innovations:

- "The Bible doesn't say, '*Thou shalt not use instrumental music.*'"
- "The Bible doesn't say, '*Thou shalt not use individual cups.*'"

But here is the very crux of the problem: cremation DOES violate a Bible principle—the principle of **having authority for all that we do.**

### **Colossians 3:17**

<sup>17</sup> And whatever you do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

What this passage means is: The Lord must authorize everything that we do.

- If someone asked me for Bible authority to bury, I could give a Bible passage authorizing this (Acts 8:2).<sup>3</sup>
- If someone asked for Bible authority to cremate, there is none.

### **My Plans In This Study**

So here are my plans in this study:

- 1) I want to demonstrate the usual custom of God's people was *burial*.
- 2) Second, I want to demonstrate that a *lack of burial* was considered a *punishment-judgment*.
- 3) I want to demonstrate that *burning* people in fire was considered a *punishment-judgment* that, I believe, prefigures everlasting punishment in hell.

- 4) I want to focus on the *loss of respect* that many are now showing for the physical body which God created.
  
- 5) I want to suggest that *the practice of burial preaches to the world* a message about resurrection which cremation does not preach.

(Like Abel who, "*though he was dead, yet speaks*," (Heb 11:4), we can preach to the world about resurrection even though we are dead.)

## **The Bible Practice of Burial**

The first burial mentioned in scripture is that of Sarah.

### **Genesis 23**

<sup>1</sup> Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; *these were* the years of the life of Sarah.

<sup>2</sup> So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that *is*, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

<sup>3</sup> Then Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying,

<sup>4</sup> "I *am* a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."

<sup>5</sup> And the sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him,

<sup>6</sup> "Hear us, my lord: You *are* a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places. None of us will withhold from you his burial

place, that you may bury your dead."

<sup>16</sup> And Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out the silver for Ephron which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, currency of the merchants.

<sup>17</sup> So the field of Ephron which *was* in Machpelah, which *was* before Mamre, the field and the cave which *was* in it, and all the trees that *were* in the field, which *were* within all the surrounding borders, were deeded

<sup>18</sup> to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city.

<sup>19</sup> And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre (that *is*, Hebron) in the land of Canaan.

<sup>20</sup> So the field and the cave that *is* in it were deeded to Abraham by the sons of Heth as property for a burial place.

I'm told that "*four hundred shekels of silver*" was an exorbitant price for that cave and field.

What do we notice here?

- Abraham did not drag Sarah's body to a deserted place and leave it for animals to devour.
- He did not make a fire and drag her body onto the fire and burn it.

If you or I did either one of these things, we would be arrested for "*desecrating a corpse*"—and



rightfully so.

But an entrepreneur can get a business license and do this for profit!

- Abraham did not argue that he should save his money and help the poor.
- He did not argue that the body was worthless now that Sarah had died and it doesn't matter what happens to the body.

### **Genesis 49:29-33**

<sup>29</sup> Then [Jacob] charged them and said to them: "I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that *is* in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

<sup>30</sup> "in the cave that *is* in the field of Machpelah, which *is* before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place.

<sup>31</sup> "There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah.

<sup>32</sup> "The field and the cave that *is* there *were* purchased from the sons of Heth."

<sup>33</sup> And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

Joseph and his brothers went to a lot of trouble to take Jacob to that burial place. Half of Gen 50 is describing the long journey and long burial practice.

When Joseph was about to die, he took an oath from his brothers about his own burial:

**Hebrews 11:22**

<sup>22</sup> By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

This was considered an "*act of faith*."

- These people didn't believe, "*It doesn't matter what happens to the body.*"
- They didn't believe in burning or disposing of the body as if it didn't matter.

(How different our society has become toward the body which God made for us.)

Mention is made of many who were buried:

- **Dt 10:6** = Aaron was buried at Moserah.
- **Dt 34:5-8** = Moses was buried by God and no one knows where he is buried.
- **Josh 24:30** = Joshua was buried in the hill country of Ephraim.
- **1 Sam 25:1** = Samuel was buried near his home in Ramah.
- **1 Kings 2:10** = David was buried with the kings in Zion.

- **Mt 14:12** = John the baptizer was buried by his disciples.
- **Jn 11:17-18** = Lazarus was buried by his family in Bethany.
- **Jn 19:38-42** = Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus went to much expense and trouble to lovingly bury the body of Jesus.
- **Acts 8:2** = devout men carried Stephen to his burial after he was stoned to death.

**Q:** Why didn't these people say, "*The body is worthless, just burn it or drag it out to the desert and let the animals eat it*"?

- God's people didn't think like that.
- They didn't view the body as worthless.
- They didn't argue that the body would eventually turn to dust anyway, so we'll just accelerate the process and burn it.

**John 19:40**

<sup>40</sup> Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, ***as the custom of the Jews is to bury.***

Think about what that passage is saying: "*The custom of the Jews is to bury.*"

The custom of the heathen is to burn the body.

## **Lack of Burial = A Punishment**

When people were not buried, it was considered a punishment and a judgment rendered by God.

### **2 Kings 9:30-37**

<sup>30</sup> Now when Jehu had come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard *of it*; and she put paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and looked through a window.

<sup>31</sup> Then, as Jehu entered at the gate, she said, "*Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?*"

<sup>32</sup> And he looked up at the window, and said, "Who *is* on my side? Who?" So two *or* three eunuchs looked out at him.

<sup>33</sup> Then he said, "Throw her down." So they threw her down, and *some* of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses; and he trampled her underfoot.

<sup>34</sup> And when he had gone in, he ate and drank. Then he said, "Go now, see to this accursed *woman*, and bury her, for she was a king's daughter."

<sup>35</sup> So they went to bury her, but they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of *her* hands.

<sup>36</sup> Therefore they came back and told him. And he said, "This *is* the word of the LORD, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'On the plot *of ground* at Jezreel dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel;

<sup>37</sup> 'and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as refuse on the surface of the field, in the plot at Jezreel, so

that they shall not say, "Here *lies* Jezebel."""

When Jezebel was not buried, and her body was eaten by dogs, and became "*as refuse on the surface of the field*," this is equivalent to becoming fertilizer.

**NOTE:** One Christian told me, "*I don't care what you do with my body when I die. You can grind me up and make fertilizer out of me if you want. I don't care.*"

This kind of thinking is ignoring the punishment and disrespect being communicated by such acts.

**Psalm 83:9-10**

<sup>9</sup> Deal with them as *with* Midian,  
As *with* Sisera,  
As *with* Jabin at the Brook Kishon,  
<sup>10</sup> Who perished at En Dor,  
***Who became as refuse on the earth.***

When Moses was about to die, he warned Israel about what would happen if they departed from God:

**Deuteronomy 28:26**

<sup>26</sup> "Your carcasses shall be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and no one shall frighten *them* away.

**1 Kings 14:10-13**

<sup>10</sup> "therefore behold! I will bring disaster on the

house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male in Israel, bond and free; I will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as one takes away refuse until it is all gone.

<sup>11</sup> "The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Jeroboam and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field; for the LORD has spoken!"

<sup>12</sup> "Arise therefore, go to your own house. When your feet enter the city, the child shall die.

<sup>13</sup> "And all Israel shall mourn for him and bury him, for he is the only one of Jeroboam who shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something good toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.

#### **Psalm 79:1-4**

<sup>1</sup> O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance;

Your holy temple they have defiled;  
They have laid Jerusalem in heaps.

<sup>2</sup> The dead bodies of Your servants  
They have given *as* food for the birds of the heavens,

The flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth.

<sup>3</sup> Their blood they have shed like water all around Jerusalem,

And *there was* no one to bury *them*.

<sup>4</sup> We have become a reproach to our neighbors,  
A scorn and derision to those who are around us.

#### **Jeremiah 16:4-6**

<sup>4</sup> "They shall die gruesome deaths; they shall not be lamented nor shall they be buried, *but* they shall be like refuse on the face of the earth. They shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, and their

corpses shall be meat for the birds of heaven and for the beasts of the earth."

<sup>5</sup> For thus says the LORD: "Do not enter the house of mourning, nor go to lament or bemoan them; for I have taken away My peace from this people," says the LORD, "lovingkindness and mercies.

<sup>6</sup> "Both the great and the small shall die in this land. They shall not be buried ...

### **Jeremiah 22:19**

<sup>19</sup> [Jehoiakim] shall be buried with the burial of a donkey,  
Dragged and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

### **Ecclesiastes 6:3**

<sup>3</sup> If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, ... **but ... has no burial**, I say that a stillborn child is better than he—

### **Revelation 11:7-10**

<sup>7</sup> When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them.

<sup>8</sup> And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

<sup>9</sup> Then *those* from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves.

<sup>10</sup> And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

If what happens to your body does not matter after you die, none of these passages make sense.

To NOT be buried was considered a disgrace and a terrible punishment.

## **Burning Bodies**

If lack of burial was considered a punishment and judgment, then I suggest that burning the body was considered the ultimate punishment.

### **Genesis 19:24**

<sup>24</sup> Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens.

This burning of fire was a prefigure of the eternal "*lake of fire*" awaiting the wicked on judgment day.

### **Jude 1:7**

<sup>7</sup> as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, ***are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.***



The "*fire and brimstone*" the fell on Sodom and Gomorrah was a foreshadow of the "*lake of fire*" coming on judgment day.

When God or His people wanted to show the ultimate punishment and curse on the wicked, burning occurred.

- **Gen 19:24** = Sodom and Gomorrah were burned with fire as a divine punishment.
- **Gen 38:24** = when Tamar was guilty of adultery, Judah commanded that she be burned in fire.
- **Lev 10:1-2** = Nadab and Abihu were killed with fire from heaven.
- **Num 11:1-3** = those who complained against Moses were killed with fire from heaven.
- **Num 16:35** = 250 people were killed with fire during the rebellion of Korah.
- **Josh 7:25** = Achan and his family were burned with fire for rebelling against God's orders.
- **2 Kings 23:20** = King Josiah had the bodies and bones of the pagan priests burned on their idolatrous altars to defile the altars so they could never be used for worship again.
- **Daniel 3** = the heathen Nebuchadnezzar threw the three Hebrew men into the fire as punishment for not bowing down to his idol.
- In **medieval times** the ultimate punishment was to be burned at the stake.
- **John Wycliffe**, the first man to translate the Bible into English, died a natural death. But 13 years after he died, the Catholic Church had his bones dug up, burned, and the ashes scattered over the River Swift.

### **Amos 2:1-2**

<sup>1</sup> Thus says the LORD:

"For three transgressions of Moab, and for four,  
I will not turn away its *punishment*,  
Because **he burned the bones of the king of Edom  
to lime.**

<sup>2</sup> But I will send a fire upon Moab,  
And it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth;  
Moab shall die with tumult,  
With shouting *and* trumpet sound.

Moabites (heathens) burned bodies and God called this a "*transgression.*"

### **Amos 6:8-10**

<sup>8</sup> The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself,  
The LORD God of hosts says:

"I abhor the pride of Jacob,  
And hate his palaces;  
Therefore I will deliver up *the city*  
And all that is in it."

<sup>9</sup> Then it shall come to pass, that if ten men remain  
in one house, they shall die.

<sup>10</sup> And when a relative *of the dead*, with **one who  
will burn the bodies**, picks up the bodies to take  
them out of the house, he will say to one inside the  
house, "*Are there* any more with you?" Then  
someone will say, "None." And he will say, "Hold  
your tongue! For **we dare not mention the name of  
the LORD.**"

In this passage, the point to focus on is the fact that those who burn bodies are heathens who "*dare not mention the name of the Lord.*"

- **2 Kings 17:17** = the heathen caused their children to "*pass thru the fire*" in worship to their pagan gods.

Never was burning a body considered a blessing—nor was it a practice used by God's people for common funerary purposes.

## **Saul's Body Burned**

There is only one passage which appears to give approval to cremation:

### **1 Samuel 31:8-13**

<sup>8</sup> So it happened the next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa.

<sup>9</sup> And they cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and sent *word* throughout the land of the Philistines, to proclaim *it in* the temple of their idols and among the people.

<sup>10</sup> Then they put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.

<sup>11</sup> Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul,

<sup>12</sup> all the valiant men arose and traveled all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his

sons from the wall of Beth Shan; and they came to Jabesh and burned them there.

<sup>13</sup> Then they took their bones and buried *them* under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

First: Notice *a burial did occur here*—this was not just a cremation with the bones being crushed and the ashes scattered in a forest.

Second: Notice the italicized word that has been added.

- What is being burned?

Supposedly this passage shows that God's people did (sometimes) practice cremation.<sup>4</sup> But there is an assumption being made that the burning was a burning of the bodies of Saul and his son. It is possible that the burning refers to of incense in respect for the dead.

Concerning King Asa:

### **2 Chronicles 16:14**

<sup>14</sup> They buried [Asa] in his own tomb, which he had made for himself in the City of David; and they laid him in the bed which was filled with spices and various ingredients prepared in a mixture of ointments. ***They made a very great burning for him.***

Concerning King Zedekiah:

### **Jeremiah 34:5**

<sup>5</sup> 'You shall die in peace; as in the ceremonies of

your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so **they shall burn incense for you** and lament for you, saying, "Alas, lord!" For I have pronounced the word, says the LORD."

Concerning King Jehoram:

**2 Chronicles 21:19**

<sup>19</sup> ... [Jehoram] died in severe pain. And **his people made no burning for him**, like the burning for his fathers.

So it is possible that the "burning" in regards to King Saul was not a cremation, but a burning of incense in order to show their respect for Saul.<sup>5</sup>

**Respect For The Body**

Now let's talk about respect for the body which we should have.

- Humans are not just spirits.
- We are a body + a spirit.

God was pleased to combine both flesh and spirit when He created man.

**Genesis 1:31**

<sup>31</sup> Then God saw everything that He had made, and

indeed ***it was very good***. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Plato, a pagan/heathen philosopher, disagreed with the Bible.

- He did not believe the physical creation of God was "*very good*."
- He believed (taught) that the physical creation was "*very bad*."
- Plato popularized the thought that we are spirits only and that inside our bodies we are imprisoned.
- He taught the greatest thing that could happen to us is to die and be freed from our bodies and for eternity we would be free, bodiless spirits floating around.

For heathens, death is considered a beautiful thing.  
For God's people, death is considered a curse.

The apostles taught the creation of God was good. And they taught the resurrection of the body.

When Paul preached in Athens, Greece (the home of Plato), he taught the resurrection.

**Acts 17:32**

<sup>32</sup> And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, ***some mocked***, while others said, "We will hear you again on this *matter*."

Why were these Grecian philosophers mocking at the

resurrection?

- Was it because they didn't believe God could raise the dead?
- Or was it because they despised the physical body and could not imagine a resurrection of the body as being a good thing?

(This second reason is why they mocked.)

The idea that the future of God's people is to be bodiless spirits floating around in some physical-less outer space is the result of Platonic thinking. It does not come from scripture.

### **2 Corinthians 5:1-4**

<sup>1</sup> For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

<sup>2</sup> For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven,  
<sup>3</sup> if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.

<sup>4</sup> For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but ***further clothed***, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

Underline in v4: "*not because we want to be unclothed.*"

- This is what Plato wanted.
- This is not what the apostles wanted.

Underline in v4: "*further clothed.*"

- The resurrected body is a physical body that has been raised from the dead.
- It has been changed (not exchanged)—glorified, fortified so that it will not get sick or old or die again.

**1 Corinthians 15:42-44**

<sup>42</sup> So also *is* the resurrection of the dead.

*The body* is sown in corruption,  
it is raised in incorruption.

<sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor,  
it is raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness,  
it is raised in power.

<sup>44</sup> It is sown a natural body,  
it is raised a spiritual body.

There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

**"it is raised a spiritual body"** = does not mean it is raised a "*spirit-body*"—as if we will be bodiless spirits—for that idea completely erases and negates a resurrection.

- In the intermediate state we are already bodiless.
- If we receive an immaterial spirit-body that has nothing to do with our physical bodies, then nothing changed at the resurrection.

**"a spiritual body"** = means a glorified body energized by the Holy



Spirit which cannot die, get sick, get tired, get old.

- The resurrection is the ultimate medicine for our bodies.
- It is the ultimate medical clinic.
- It is the ultimate health food.

Everything we do on this earth to try to erase the signs of age and sickness are fixed by the resurrection.

**NOTE:** I believe a lack of understanding and a lack of respect for the body underlies the thinking of cremation. The Platonic thinking that the body is no longer needed—or wanted—underlies many who promote cremation.

## **Preaching At Death**

My final point is that when we die and when we are buried, we still speak and still preach.

### **Hebrews 11:4**

<sup>4</sup> By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it ***he being dead still speaks.***

How we dispose of a corpse says something about what we believe about the resurrection.

This is why: When I preached on the resurrection in March 2022, six people came to me asking about cremation. They saw the connection between this practice and the resurrection.

**NOTE:** I oppose cremation, not because I think God could not reassemble the atoms and molecules of the body if someone were burned—NO! God's abilities are not being called into question—neither by me nor by the Grecians in Athens. I oppose cremation because I believe it opposes the doctrine of resurrection.

Russell Moore wrote:

The question is not whether cremation is always [or ever] a personal sin. The question is not whether God can reassemble 'cremains.' The question is whether burial [or cremation] is a Christian act and, if so, then what does it communicate?

(via David Jones, "To Bury or Burn? Toward an Ethic of Cremation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 53, no. 2, June 2010, pp. 336-337)

Timothy George writes:

The real question for Christians is not whether one is buried or cremated but the meaning given to these acts.

(via David Jones, p. 336)

Albert Mohler writes:

There is no question that God can and will resurrect all

human bodies on that day—no matter the disposition of the body. The primary issue ... is a proper Christian respect for the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

(via David Jones, p. 336)

### Timothy Price writes:

The issue is not so much whether God is able to raise the body, but how one is to be a steward over the body which God has given to him or her.... Man has been made a steward over the body, and even in death the body should thus be respected.

(via David Jones, p. 336)

### At death:

- Heathens and pagans are saying: We're done with our bodies—*good riddance!*
- Christians are saying: *Our bodies will be raised back to life and glorified.*

### Francis Schaeffer wrote:

... the Romans burned their dead, the Christians buried theirs.

(*How Shall We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*, Old Tappan, NJ (Revell), 1976, p. 24)

Because of this, Schaeffer wrote that it is possible to trace the spread of the gospel across the Roman Empire by focusing upon cremation practices (via David Jones).

David Jones wrote:

The church historian Philip Schaff, identified Christians' display of "*decency to the human body*" in showing care for the dead as one of the main reasons for the church's rapid conquest of the ancient world.

(p. 338)

## **Conclusion**

I would like to encourage everyone to reconsider not only the subject of cremation, but the subject of death and burial in general—because I believe the church is being influenced more by the world than the world being influenced by the church.

- At funeral preachers will say: "*We're here to celebrate the life of Brother John.*" But in the Bible when God's people gathered to bury someone, they came to mourn (Gen 23:2; 50:10-11).
- One preacher said: "*This sister [pointing to the casket] is now healed.*" But the Bible teaches healing comes in the resurrection. Death is the ultimate state of being unhealed.
- Sometimes preachers say: "Even if it were possible to bring brother John Doe back to life, he wouldn't want to come back because he's in a better place now." Peter didn't talk this way when he raised Tabitha up from the dead (Acts 9:36-42).
- Likewise, the world looks at cremation as an inexpensive, convenient way of disposing of the body and giving no further thought to death. But God's people would go to the graves of their loved ones to

care for the graves and burial places showing they believed in a resurrection (Mk 16:1-2).

Every year there is "*Decoration Day*" in Jerusalem, AR. Everyone in the community gathers to decorate the graves and clean up the cemetery. My mother-in-law spends well over a \$100 every year to buy flowers to put on all the graves of her loved ones. I use to think this was a waste of time and money, but I've changed my mind. I think this old practice is a good thing.

## **End Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> The title for this study comes from the excellent, two-part article written by Rodney J. Decker, "Is It Better to Bury or to Burn? A Biblical Perspective on Cremation and Christianity in Western Culture Part 1." *Journal of Ministry and Theology Volume 11, No. 1*, 2007, pp. 38-48. To this article I also owe much of the basic material presented in the present study.

<sup>2</sup> The answer to this is not covered in this study. This is a thought question. If Jesus' body had been cremated and reduced to ashes, would it have been convincing to the Jews that He had resurrected on the third day? With the burial of a body and a guard set, the empty tomb speaks loudly to a resurrected body, but a cremation would have ruined the intended effect.

<sup>3</sup> Also: Jn 5:28; Rev 11:9. All passages where Jesus was laid in a tomb are passages authorizing the burial of a body in a tomb or grave.

<sup>4</sup> Some think David gave his approval for cremating the body. Actually, there is no proof that David heard anything about a burning. Look closely at the reports made to David about Saul's fate and it cannot be proven beyond doubt that David heard about the burning. See especially 1 Ch 10:12.

<sup>5</sup> To "*bury bones*" may well mean to "*bury a body*." See Josh 24:32; 1 Kings 13:31; Heb 11:22 where "*bones*" are used as a synecdoche for "*body*."