

Implications for the care of the dead body - burial vs. cremation.

1. The Bible gives no explicit command to bury the dead.
2. The Bible gives the consistent example of believers in both the OT and the NT being buried.
 - A. Care for the body is evident (Sarah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses)
 - B. Christ himself
3. Harm to the body after death is significant in the Bible
 - A. Impaling - a sign of cruelty or judgment
 - B. Burning (a sign of ruthlessness (Amos 2), animal sacrifices, Sodom & Gomorrah, Nadab & Abihu, certain sexual sins (Lev. 20-21), Korah's rebellion, idolatrous city (Dt. 13), Achan, hell itself)
4. Cremation - 1870-s - Practice of the heathen; practice of ones seeking to escape the resurrection.
5. Burial seems at least preferable, if not compelling (possible exception? epidemic/plague; truly no space)

"What is laid in the grave is still integral to the person who died" (J. Murray).

As the bodies of believers are said to sleep in Jesus it makes sense that we do not burn that which is asleep.

Here is a good summary by two Christians. In "A Case for Burial: An Excerpt of From Ashes to Ashes: Is Burial the only Christian Option?", Norman Geisler and Douglas Potter had this to say "From the Christian perspective, burial is the pattern used in Scripture and has been historically followed by the church. Of course, it should be pointed out that cremation is no hindrance to the act, or event, of the resurrection. God, in His omnipotence, is certainly able, if He so chooses, to collect every atom and molecule, no matter where it is found in the universe, and reconstruct our same bodies in a glorified state. It does not follow from this, however, that cremation is an acceptable general practice. Whereas burial is an important practice and symbol in Scripture, cremation is a poor symbol of scriptural truth. While cremation is not an intrinsic evil, it nonetheless symbolically vitiates some important biblical truths. In this sense, cremation is a hindrance to the promotion of resurrection truth and should not be a regular practice of Christians. We thus conclude that all Christians should practice Christian burial unless extraordinary circumstances do not permit it."

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Q. What is the communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death?

A. The communion in glory with Christ, which the members of the invisible church enjoy immediately after death, is, in that their souls are then made perfect in holiness,(1) and received into the highest heavens,(2) where they behold the face of God in light and glory,(3) waiting for the full redemption of their bodies,(4) which even in death continue united to Christ,(5) and rest in their graves as in their beds,(6) till at the last day they be again united to their souls.(7) Whereas the souls of the wicked are at their death cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, and their bodies kept in their graves, as in their prisons, till the resurrection and judgment of the great day.(8)

(1)Heb. 12:23

(3)1 John 3:2; 1 Cor. 13:12

(5)1Thess.4:14

(7)Job 19:26,27

(2)2 Cor. 5:1,6,8; Phil. 1:23 compared with Acts 3:21 and Eph. 4:10

(4)Rom. 8:23; Ps. 16:9

(6)Isa. 57:2

(8)Luke 16:23,24; Acts 1:25; Jude6,7