

**Burial and Not Cremation** – Cremation is a heathenistic practice and not taught in the Bible. When William Tyndale was captured and tried, he was strangled and burned at the stake. The Roman Catholic Church believed that he was a heretic and the way to demonstrate their hatred for what he had done with his life was to burn him to death. They did the same to John Wycliffe because they hated him. Both these men translated the Word of God into English so that their own people may have the Word of God. Wycliffe's ashes were cast into the River Avon to signify that they would rather he never existed. They did not wish to have a tombstone for anyone on earth to remember this man by, for they wanted the world to know that his life was not worth remembering. Many more were burned including faithful men such as Jon Hus (burned in 1415). Is the life of a child of God that meaningless to his own brothers and sisters in Christ, that after death one would callously destroy it by fire?

Burning was God's way of signifying His displeasure of sinful men and this sin-filled world. Fire and brimstone were sent from heaven to destroy the people who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah and its surrounding region as evidenced today by the Dead Sea which was once green and fertile like the Garden of Eden and the Nile region. Genesis 13:10 "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar." But the sins of the people there were full in the eyes of God. God judged them and they perished. The Dead Sea region is the stark reminder to all who have eyes to see that sin brings only death. Nothing lives inside the Dead Sea! Genesis 18:20-21 "And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; 21 I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know." And Genesis 19:24-25 "Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; 25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground." The sins of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are clearly stated in Jude 7 "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."

Why would the believer whose life has been redeemed by the blood of Christ wish to go the way of heathenism and be cremated as if he has been punished by God? God has already reserved this world for destruction by fire. 2 Peter 3:4-7 "And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. 5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: 6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: 7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." [Emphasis added] The book of Revelation reveals a detailed account of this fiery destruction where the sun, the moon and this earth will be burned up.

God's people, including Christ, were buried and not cremated. The first biblical record of burial was in Genesis 23 when Abraham purchased the cave of Mach-pe'-lah from Ephron. Burial to the people of Israel signifies home. Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah were all buried in the same cave when they died. This was an act of faith on their part because they believed the promises of God, that the

Land of Canaan would also be their Land of Promise. One day in the future their descendants would fill this Land. Purchasing the Land and being buried in that cave was their way of telling everyone on earth that they believed in the Promises of God. They did not ask to be burned and their ashes to be scattered! That would have been heathenistic. There was a line drawn clearly between who Abraham, Isaac and Jacob believed and what the rest of the Canaanites believed. The manner in which they buried their dead instead of cremation was the defining message of their faith.

The body of the believer is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? 17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." This is the body we are to witness for Christ in. It is to be offered to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God after receiving salvation in Christ (cf. Romans 12:1). It is to be kept holy which means putting off sins and every work of darkness and putting on the armour of light (Romans 13:11-14). This body has been chosen by God to witness in since birth. Burial is the noble and God honouring way of ending our life of service. It is dignified and peaceful. Since God created Adam by forming him out of the ground and breathed into him the life, then to earth this body must return. What is said at the grave site is, "And now unto the mercy of Almighty God, we commend the spirit of our departed brother/sister and commit his/her body to the ground: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; looking for the general resurrection at the last day when those who die in the Lord shall be raised to eternal glory and an endless life of joy and peace with God; through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen." [Jesse Jai McNeil, Minister's Service Book: For Pulpit and Parish, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961, page 63.] Then it is followed by the verse from Revelation 14:13 "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." It is a reminder of when God first created man, and because of sin man returns to dust. Genesis 3:19 "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." This is a very meaningful send off to the glory of God.

Conclusion – The basis and criteria for decision making in every believer's life is the Word of God, not the word of man. The word of man is based upon convenience and what is right in their own eyes. The Word of God has always been the believer's light and lamp to direct his feet along God's pathway of holiness and righteousness. It makes no sense that in death he would go the way of man and do what is right in his own eyes. The teaching from the Word of God is clear that burial is the way for all believers when God calls them home. Cremation is for the heathen and not for the child of God.

The church's position based upon the above understanding of the Word of God is burial only.