

## What About Cremating the Dead?

Most funeral directors can arrange for the cremation of bodies at the time of death, and people are asking about the biblical view of cremation. The body is placed in a container and is burned in a special oven for several hours at about 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. The bones that remain are then crushed into white powdery ashes. The ashes are placed in an “urn” and are given to the relatives of the dead person. They keep the ashes in their home or bury them or scatter them or do with them as they wish.

Cremation increasingly accounts for disposals of dead bodies, and is less expensive than burial. It is easier to send the remains to distant places, and the remains consume less space because the ashes take up only the size of a small shoe box. Is cremation something we should consider as an alternative to the more expensive burials?

*Three non-biblical observations:*

### 1. Cremation is heathen in origin.

The idea of reducing human bodies to ashes originated in ancient heathen lands. The Romans, the Hindus of India, and many other pagan peoples—burned their dead. The Egyptians were an exception because they embalmed the dead, soaking the body in a solution, and filling the cavities with tars and resins. Pagan people believed that burning the body somehow purified the soul, and released it from the earthly shell.

### 2. Cremation has been an aid to crime.

In the past, before the common use of DNA testing, if a person was poisoned before death—a proper analysis of what had happened could not be made after cremation. Thus, to cremate a body, was one way to try and hide a crime. In modern times, autopsies often reveal the cause of death, before cremation or before burial.

### 3. Cremation seems like a cruel barbarous act.

Cremation involves the incineration of the human body at high temperatures. When the heat becomes intense, the body twitches and moves due to the contraction and expansion of the muscles. It just seems like a gruesome and unkind thing to do to the body of one’s mother or husband or child. It is repulsive to think of the body of a friend being treated like a beef roast at the time of death.

*Three biblical principles:*

### 1. Cremation dishonors the created human body.

In Romans 12:1 we are told: “present your bodies” as a “living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” In 1 Corinthians 6:19 we are told that the body of the Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and this places great importance on the human body. That’s why we try and preserve the body by clean habits and good living. That’s why we show respect for the human body at the time of death. The body may become old and wrinkled and scarred, but it will be raised some day and transformed so that it is without blemish (Philippians 3:12).

### 2. Cremation does not follow the example of Jesus.

When Jesus was crucified, His body was lovingly and tenderly prepared for burial according to the Jewish custom (John 19:38-42). Throughout the Bible, burial is considered the proper manner of laying away the body. It was a dishonor and a curse for a person not to have a burial. In Jeremiah 22:19, King Jehoiakim was to be “buried with the burial of a donkey,” which meant no burial at all. Most of Israel’s kings were buried, including Manasseh (2 Kings 21:26) and Josiah (2 Kings 23:30)—but for Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:6), there is no mention of burial. The text simply says that he “slept with his fathers.” The prophet Amos (Amos 2:1) spoke against the people of Moab because they burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime (to powder). For the Christian—Jesus Christ is to be our example in all of life, and it certainly is proper to follow Him in the way we dispose of our bodies.

### 3. Cremation tends to destroy the sacred memory of the dead.

The ashes of cremated bodies are often not even claimed by the family. Funeral directors say that hundreds of urns are never picked up by family members. Usually the ashes are not buried, and so there is no grave to visit, no sacred spot where the remains of a friend lie. Cremation becomes a quick way of destroying the memory of the dead. Proverbs 10:7 says “The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot.”

The Bible does not directly say, “You shall not cremate bodies”—thus one can hardly say that it is a sin to cremate, but it is fairly clear what God thinks about cremation. There are those who have blatantly said that they want to be cremated and have their ashes spread over the countryside—with the belief that by this means they can avoid any future accountability. The idea that, if cremated, one can escape the resurrection is purely a rebellious thought against God!

*This article, written by Bro. Harold S. Martin, appeared in the **BRF Witness** some years ago.*