

Introduction

As Christians, is it important what happens to our earthly body after death?
Does it really matter whether we have our body buried or cremated?

This is a question that we should seek to find an answer to.
It is of vital importance that those who remain after we pass on, must understand clearly what we desire them to do with our body.

The Bible is the source of all teaching that Christians should follow.
As Christians, we need to lay aside our philosophies and traditions of men.

Col 2:8 (NIV)

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ”.

Mark 7:8-9 (NIV)

“You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men”.
“And he said to them : “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!

*Let us now search the Word of God and see what the Bible teaches us about
burial and cremation*

*God's people have always
Practiced burial:*

God's people in the Bible practiced burial. The example is clearly there. But are we bound to follow these examples.

The answer is given in Romans 15:4,
'For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope'. (NIV)

And again in 1 Corinthians 10:11,
"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come". (NIV)

*“... for dust you are and to dust
You will return”.*

Gen 3:19”By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (NIV)

Scripture teaches us that we were created from *dust* and God teaches us that we shall return to *dust*. When a body is cremated, it turns to *ashes*. This is contrary to what God tell us.

Webster’s Dictionary: Ashes.ASH’ES, n. plu.

1. The earthly particles of combustible substances remaining after combustion; as of wood or coal.
2. The remains of the human body when burnt, so, figuratively, a dead body or corpse.

Eccl 3:19-21, “All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return”. (NIV)

Eccl 12:7 “And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it”. (NIV)

Burial looks forward to Resurrection

Rom 8:22-23 (KJV)

22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

(See also 1 Cor 15:20-23, 2 Cor 5:1 and 1 Cor 15:51-57)

The reason God's people have always been careful to practice burial is not difficult to understand. We believe in a bodily resurrection. Yes, the buried body will decompose in time. Yes, there are occasions in which Christians die in ways which render burial impossible-in the sinking of ships, in house fires, etc. But when at all possible we bury. Why the trouble? Because it is our certain hope that the same individual will be raised in the same body, only changed.

The physical body is called the seed for the resurrection body. When planted, a seed decomposed, and the new plant comes forth. The bible uses this to illustrate resurrection.

1 Cor 15:35-44, “ But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? And what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain; But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. ... So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body”.

Notice that the Apostle answers those who would ask how it is possible for God to raise again a decomposed body. The terminology used by the Holy Spirit in this passage is that of husbandry – planting seed. The farmer does not destroy his seed; he plants it, then from the decaying seed comes forth the new life. Such is burial and the resurrection.

God Practices Burial

Burial is the will of God for His people is seen in the fact *that God Himself* buried Moses: (Deuteronomy 34:5-6).

“So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And *he buried him* in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day”.

The Old Testament Teaches Burial

Abraham was buried (Genesis 25:8-10)

Sarah was buried (Genesis 23:1-4)

Rachel was buried (Genesis 35:19-20)

Isaac was buried (Genesis 35:29)

Jacob was buried (Genesis 49:33, 50:1-13)

Joseph was buried (Genesis 50:26)

Joshua was buried (Joshua 24:29-30)

Eleazar was buried (Joshua 24:33)

Samuel was buried (1 Samuel 25:1)

David was buried (1 Kings 2:10)

Even when burial was difficult

Even in difficult circumstances God's people in olden days practiced burial. For example, Joseph's body was kept for over 400 years in Egypt and then carried through the 40 years of wilderness wanderings before being buried in Palestine, the Promised Land. We read of this in Genesis 50:24-25; Exodus 13:19 and Joshua 24:32.

How much simpler it would have been for the Israelites to have cremated Joseph, then carried his ashes with them in a tiny container! But this they refused to do. Joseph, a follower of the one true God, a man who looked forward to the bodily resurrection, was given an honorable burial. From this important example, we learn that even if cremation is less expensive or easier than burial, it is still to be rejected, as the Israelites rejected the economical and simpler way to carry Joseph to the Promised Land.

The New Testament Teaches Burial

John the Baptist was buried, Matthew 14:12 “And His disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and tol Jesus”.

Stephen was buried, Acts 8:2, “And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him”.

Lazarus was buried, John 11:17, “then when Jesus came, he found that he had llain in the grave four days already”.
(If they had cremated the body of Lazarus, how could Jesus have raised him from the dead?)

The Lord Jesus was buried, and He is our great example.

“Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury There laid they Jesus therefore” (John 19:38-42).

Please note, what took place when Jesus Christ died on the Cross at Calvary.

“And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And come out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many” (Matthew 27:52-53).

If we are buried, we will hear Jesus ‘voice when He comes again.

“Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the **graves** shall hear his voice” (John 5:28).

Cremation dishonors the Dead

Throughout the Bible the destruction of a human body or of an object by fire is used as a sign of divine wrath. Consider some examples:

The example of Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Peter 2:6)

The example of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1,2)

The example of the men who rebelled with Korah (Numbers 16:35)

The example of idols (Exodus 32:20; Deut.7:25; 2 Kings 10:26; 1 Chron.14:12)

The example of magic books (Acts 19:18-19)

The example of unsaved cast into the lake of fire for eternal punishment (Revelation 20:15)

For a Person Not To Have A Proper Burial was Considered A Dishonor

A key example of this is Jezebel who, because of her wickedness, was eaten of dogs (1 Kings 21:23-24). Again, we read of the Midianites “Which perished at Endor: they became as dung for the earth” (Psalm 83:9-10). Shall we dishonor our loved ones by failing to give them a proper Christian burial?

*The Christian's Body Belongs To God;
It Is Not Ours To Destroy by Fire
Or By Any Other Means*

“What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
When something does not belong to me, but is only borrowed from its rightful owner, I certainly have no right to destroy it. If the master destroys his own possession, that is his prerogative, but such does not belong with the borrower. This is true of death and the Christian's body. The body is not ours to desecrate or destroy. If God chooses to allow a Christian to die in a house fire, that is His prerogative. But the Christian himself has no such freedom to choose to destroy his own body. And Romans 14:8 reminds us that this is true both in life and in death!”... whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.”

*God Has Plainly Called Cremation
Wickedness*

“Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he **burned the bones** of the king of Edom into lime” (Amos 2:1).

Conclusion

God's people have had some knowledge of a bodily resurrection from the earliest days. The book of Job is commonly considered to be the oldest book in the Bible. There is no mention in the book of Job concerning Israel, or Jerusalem, or Palestina, the temple or the Jewish kingdom, and it is most likely that Job was a God-fearing man who lived in the days prior to Abraham. Yet we see in Job 19:25-27 that this ancient man of God had thorough knowledge of the bodily resurrection.

“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.”

God's people have always buried their dead with this magnificent hope burning in their hearts. “We will see that brother or sister again in that same body, only changed, glorified!” Hallelujah! Only through the death and shed blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ can we have this certain hope. He has taken upon Himself on the cross the punishment for our sins, carried our sins into the grave, and rose again in eternal triumph three days later. When an individual thoroughly acknowledges his sinfulness before God, repents (changes his mind about and desires to turn from his sinful, self-willful life) and be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38), the sin debt is paid, and eternal life and glory is promised from God the Father. Part of this heritage in Christ is the glorified resurrection body.

1 Corinthians 15:52

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the
Trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and
We shall be changed.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which
Are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent
Them which are asleep.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout,
With the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and
The dead in Christ shall rise first:

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together
With them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we
Ever be with the Lord.