



Church of God by Faith, Inc. Position on Cremation

April 9, 2020

COGBF Executive Council

STATEMENT OF POSITION

The Church of God by Faith, Inc.'s viewpoint on internments is drawn from the Articles of Faith in the COGBF Ritual under Article IV – Holy Scriptures which states that...

“We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by that which we understand the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the Will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation, so that whatever is not contained therein is not to be enjoined as an article of faith.” (Church of God by Faith, Inc. Ritual, 2016, p.29)

Consequently, after a comprehensive biblical review, we've found no such directive that articulates how Christians should inter the deceased.

From the earliest editions of our Ritual, the following scriptures were adopted to facilitate the conduct of funeral services. On page 259, it reads, “Jesus said, ‘I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die’ (John 11:25-26). ‘I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes - I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me’ (Job 19:25-27 NIV).

We believe the Bible has not contained therein specific guidelines regarding internment of decedents and thus, families have the freedom to choose traditional burials or cremation to memorialize their loved ones.

This position is based on the following:

BACKGROUND

During a recent CTI Faculty and Staff meeting, a comprehensive discussion arose concerning The Church of God by Faith, Inc.'s position on the cremation of the deceased. The agreement was to submit the issue to the Executive Council. Presiding Bishop James E. McKnight, Jr. commissioned a literature, biblical and denominational review. This document is an analysis of the national cremation statistics and, the compilation of findings.

CREMATION STATISTICS

“Brookfield, Wis. (July 18, 2017) – The rate of cremation in the United States is at an all-time high and surpassed the rate of burial for the second year in a row according to the National Funeral Directors Association's (NFDA) 2017 Cremation and Burial Report. The annual report found that 50.2 percent of Americans chose cremation in 2016, up from 48.5 percent in 2015, while 43.5 percent of Americans opted for burial, down from 45.4 percent in 2015. NFDA expects the trend shifting from burial toward cremation to continue over the next 20 years, with the projected rate of cremation reaching 78.8 percent of deaths by 2035. Over the next eight years, cremation rates will likely exceed 50 percent in 44 states, up from just 16 states in 2010.

Simultaneously, the rate of burial is expected to decline from 45.2 percent in 2015 to 30.3 percent over the next eight years.” <http://www.nfda.org/news/media-center/nfda-news-releases/id/2511/nfda-cremation-and-burial-report-shows-rate-of-cremation-at-all-time-high>

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT CREMATION?

a. John MacArthur:

“Dust to dust...Scripture says nothing about a required mode of burial for either believers or non-believers. However, burying the body was the standard practice among the Israelites in the Old Testament and Christians in the New.

There were some exceptions: the people decided to cremate Saul and Jonathan and then bury their ashes because their bodies had been mutilated by the Philistines (1 Sam. 31:8-13). In another instance, Achan and his family were cremated after being executed for sinning against Israel (Josh. 7:25).

Obviously any buried body will eventually decompose (Eccles. 12:7). So cremation isn't a strange or wrong practice-it merely accelerates the natural process of oxidation. The believer will one day receive a new body (1 Cor. 15:42-49; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Job 19:25-26), thus the state of what remains of the old body is unimportant.” <https://www.gty.org/library/questions/QA177/does-the-bible-prohibit-cremation>

b. MacArthur’s Biblical Example: 1 Samuel 31:8-13 King James Version (KJV)

“8 And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. 9 And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people.

10 And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan. 11 And when the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; 12 All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. 13 And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.”

c. 2nd Samuel 2: 4-6: David then prayed blessings over those who cremated and buried Saul.

“Then the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David as king over the house of Judah. They told David: “The men of Ja’besh-gil’e-ad were the ones who buried Saul.” 5 So David sent messengers to the men of Ja’besh-gil’e-ad and said to them: “May you be blessed by Jehovah, because you showed loyal love to your lord Saul by burying him. 6 May Jehovah show loyal love and faithfulness to you. I will also show you kindness because you have done this.”

This scripture is not intended to be an explicit endorsement of cremation; rather to show an example of a time it was done.

d. Got Biblical Questions Website

“The Bible does not give any specific teaching about cremation. There are occurrences in the Old Testament of people being burned to death (1 Kings 16:18; 2 Kings 21:6) and of human bones being burned (2 Kings 23:16-20), but these are not examples of cremation. It is interesting to note that in 2 Kings 23:16-20, burning human bones on an altar desecrated the altar. At the same time, the Old Testament law nowhere commands that a deceased human body not be burned, nor does it attach any curse or judgment on someone who is cremated.

Cremation was practiced in biblical times, but it was not commonly practiced by the Israelites or by New Testament believers. In the cultures of Bible times, burial in a tomb, cave, or in the ground was the common way to dispose of a human body (Genesis 23:19; 35:19; 2 Chronicles 16:14; Matthew 27:60-66). While burial was the common practice, the Bible nowhere commands burial as the only allowed method of disposing of a body.

Is cremation something a Christian can consider? Again, there is no explicit scriptural command against cremation. Some believers object to the practice of cremation on the basis it does not recognize that one day God will resurrect our bodies and re-unite them with our soul/spirit (1 Corinthians 15:35-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). However, the fact that a body has been cremated does not make it any more difficult for God to resurrect that body.

The bodies of Christians who died a thousand years ago have, by now, completely turned into dust. This will in no way prevent God from being able to resurrect their bodies.

He created them in the first place; He will have no difficulty re-creating them. Cremation does nothing but “expedite” the process of turning a body into dust. God is equally able to raise a person’s remains that have been cremated as He is the remains of a person who was not cremated. The question of burial or cremation is within the realm of Christian freedom. A person or a family considering this issue should pray for wisdom (James 1:5) and follow the conviction that results.”

<https://www.gotquestions.org/cremation-Bible.html>

WHAT DO OTHER DENOMINATIONS BELIEVE ABOUT CREMATION?

1. ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

“The first sentence in the Assemblies of God official doctrinal document, "Statement of Fundamental Truths," is: "The Bible is our all-sufficient rule for faith and practice." As such, the Assemblies of God believes that all teachings and practices, including those about death and interment, should come from the Bible. According to their view, if a teaching cannot be directly supported from the Bible, it cannot be considered authoritative. In the Assemblies of God position paper on death and burial, they note that the Bible does not offer any specific instructions about interment practices.

...The Assemblies of God believes in a bodily resurrection of all believers and that all believers will receive a glorified, eternal body. They are quick to point out in their doctrinal statement on death and interment that God is all-powerful and is fully capable of recovering and restoring the physical bodies of believers, regardless of how they were interred and even if they were completely destroyed.

The Assemblies of God position statement also points out that if a particular method of interment were critical for the resurrection of the body, then the Bible would expressly prescribe a method of interment. Because the Bible does not give a directive on burial or cremation, the Assemblies of God believes the choice should be left to the wishes of the deceased and their loved ones and that none need fear any impact on the eternal destiny of the deceased based on the method of interment.” <https://classroom.synonym.com/how-does-the-assemblies-of-god-feel-about-cremation-12085497.html>

2. CHURCH OF GOD

“The International Church of God, Cleveland, TN. neither suggests nor mandates any certain procedure for body interment. Burial practices are left to the discretion of the believer and their cultural pattern. The intention of this article is to provide information to assist individuals prior to and during the difficult event of death.

...So we return to the initial question. Is cremation an option for the believer? From a biblical perspective, the answer is “yes”. As believers, we know that after living a Christ-exalting life and finishing our earthly existence we have the assurance of a bodily resurrection regardless of how our earthly body has been put to rest. When it comes to the final interment of one’s body that decision rests with the individual and one’s family.” <http://churchofgod.org.s3.amazonaws.com/downloads/doctrine-and-polity-papers/Daffe-Cremation-English.pdf>

3. UNITED METHODISTS

“Our doctrinal statements affirm the bodily resurrection of Jesus, indeed the resurrection of the same body that entered the tomb. But for believers, many of whose bodies over the past two thousand years may have entirely decomposed, if they were not burned, lost at sea, or otherwise destroyed, our statements speak simply of the resurrection of “the dead.” This is consistent not only with biology, but also with the teaching of Paul in I Corinthians 15. There, Paul insists that resurrection is real, necessary, and more than a matter of revivifying dead bodies or remains. Instead, he speaks of a spiritual body that is raised of which our perishable, corruptible bodies are at most but the seed (see especially vs. 35-49).

For all of these reasons, United Methodists do not insist upon burial as the only appropriate means of committing our earthly remains to God, and so are generally open to cremation as a viable alternative. In some places burial or entombment is simply not an option, either because of costs involved or because of a lack of cemetery space. Ultimately, this is a decision that will be made and should be made in the context of the individuals, families, and cultural norms involved.” <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/how-is-cremation-and-organ-donation-consistent>

4. BAPTISTS

“While there are differing views among different churches and communities, Baptists commonly believe that people who have total faith in Jesus Christ will ultimately be “saved.” Those who accept Jesus Christ as their savior and become saved will live with Him forever in Heaven when they die. Depending on the type of Baptist community, a Baptist funeral service may be a joyful celebration of life, or a more somber event focused on the importance and power of God. In any case, the Baptist funeral service is a religious event, and will concentrate on the soul of the person who died reuniting with God.

There is no ban on cremation for members of the Baptist faith, and cremation may take place either before or after the funeral service.” <https://www.everplans.com/articles/baptist-funeral-traditions>

Liturgies

Many subject matter experts suggest tailoring these services to the needs and desires of the family’s wishes. Cremation services can be similar to a traditional service, where the body is viewed in the casket during the funeral and then later returned to the funeral to proceed with the cremation process. Services may be held as a memorial, with a picture and the remains of the person in an urn of their choosing.

What to do

Disposal of the remains or ashes is still a matter of preference for the family. We strongly recommend family conduct research as well as ask questions of the funeral homes to determine the best course of action for them. Provided is a websites to assist you with your research on what to do with the ashes of your loved ones.

<https://cremationinstitute.com/cremation-ceremony/>