

Is It Un-Christian to Choose Cremation Over Burial?

When deciding what to do with a human body after death, the number of people choosing cremation instead of burial is skyrocketing.

Nearly 60 years ago, less than 4 percent of the population chose cremation. Now it's about 50 percent. One reason for the increase is that cremation is generally less expensive than burial.

However, evangelical pastor John Piper says Christians should choose burial, not cremation. He is quick to point out that he does not believe cremation is a sin, and therefore, Christians should not condemn or ostracize other Christians who choose cremation over burial.

But he does believe that burial is vastly preferable. In a recent blog, he offered Bible verses to support that view.

First, in teaching about the dignity of the human body, he says Scripture leads away from burning toward burying:

John 1:14 states Jesus "became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."

Philippians 3:21 says Jesus will "transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body."

1 Corinthians 6:20 says, "Glorify God in your body."

Secondly, Piper says fire in the Bible symbolizes hell.

"In relation to the human body, it is a dreadful thing," he writes. "It wounds and tortures and kills and destroys. This is the most prominent in relation to the body after death."

"As a Christian who believes in the judgment of God after death (Hebrews 9:27) the last symbol we want to use, in connection with death, is fire!" he continues. "Hell (Gehenna) is a place of fire (Matthew 5:22, James 3:6). This fire is meant to be felt by the body."

He cites more Scripture to support this view:

"It is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell" (Matthew 5:30)

"Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

"Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame" (Luke 16:24).

If and when Christians are persuaded to opt for burial rather than cremation, Piper suggests planning less-expensive burials. He further states church leaders should set the tone.

"I do believe that pastors should discourage expensive funerals," he writes. "In a Bible-saturated, counter-cultural church, made up of kingdom-minded sojourners and exiles (1 Peter 2:11), no one should be pressured into the mindset that the more expensive the coffin, the more loved the deceased."

"Pastors should lead the way in cultivating a church ethos where expensive funerals (and weddings!) are not the norm," he said.

Piper goes even further by recommending individual churches set-up special funds for people who can't afford a burial.

"My proposal in this article is that Christian churches be willing to help families financially with simple Christ-exalting funerals and burials, so that no Christian is drawn to cremation because it's cheaper," Piper blogged.

"I'm not thinking mainly of a line-item in the budget, but of a segregated compassion-fund that that church members may give to regularly or as the need arises," he said. {eo}

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