

Is Cremation Biblical? Poll Reviews America's Views on Consequences for Afterlife

A growing number of Americans are taking “ashes to ashes, dust to dust” literally when they die.

About four in 10 (41 percent) Americans say they plan to be cremated, according to a survey of 1,036 Americans from Nashville-based LifeWay Research.

Six in 10 (58 percent) say being cremated won't keep you from being resurrected to live in heaven. And few (14 percent) say that cremation is wrong.

The LifeWay online survey reflects the growing acceptance of cremation, which has become common in the United States.

About four in nine (43.5 percent) Americans who died in 2012 were cremated, according to the Cremation Association of North America (CANA). That's nearly double the rate from 1996 (21.8 percent).

LifeWay researchers found that few Americans have qualms about the practice.

More than seven in 10 (71 percent) disagree with the statement “I believe it is wrong to cremate a body after someone dies.”

Only three in 10 (30 percent) disagree with the statement “I plan to have my body cremated when I die.” Forty-one percent agree, while 29 percent do not know.

Scott McConnell, vice-president of LifeWay Research, says that cremation fits the way most Americans live these days.

“Few people stay in the same place all their lives, so they

don't have strong connection to a place they want to be buried," he says. "Cremation is also often less expensive than burial. And many of the social taboos about cremation are fading."

The survey found that few Americans think cremation has any consequences for the afterlife. Fifty-eight percent disagree with the statement "If someone's body is cremated, there is no way for them to be resurrected to live in heaven." Only 8 percent agree. One in five (20 percent) don't know. Fourteen percent say there is no resurrection to live in heaven.

Evangelical Christians have been wary of cremation in the past. And the practice does remain less common in the Bible Belt. In Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee, the cremation rate is among the lowest in the country, at 23.9 percent, according to CANA. By contrast, in Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington, the cremation rate is 60.3 percent.

In LifeWay's survey, self-identified born-again, evangelical or fundamentalist Christians are most likely (27 percent) to say that cremation is wrong and to disagree (42 percent) when asked about being cremated. They're also (70 percent) most likely to disagree when asked if cremation would keep someone from being resurrected to live in heaven.