

## DIFFICULT QUESTIONS: REAL ANSWERS

### TOPIC 2

#### FUNERAL RITUALS: CREMATION

**INTRODUCTION:** Due to the high cost of a funeral and due to the fact that the culture in which we live has each day more accepted cremation as part of the final rituals of a person at their funeral, it is good that as Christians we speak about this delicate subject. The difficult question is, “*Can a Christian cremate his body?*” First, we will see what we know for sure.

*During the Times of Jesus* the implication of burial was evident. The dead were taken to a place of burial. (Luke 11:11:12)

*In the Old Testament:* Abraham, who was the most important Jewish person and the father of the Christian faith was buried. (Genesis 25:7-9)

On the other hand, in the Old Testament we notice that the cremation of objects and people in different incidents came as a part of a punishment or divine penalty. (Ex. 32:20; Dt. 7:25; Nm. 16:35; 2 Reyes 10:26; 1 Crónicas 14:12)

*In the case of the Law* (in the Pentateuch), we find that cremation was used as a punishment, and not as a way of giving a farewell to a beloved after having died under normal circumstances. (Leviticus 21:9)

*The Teachings of Saint Paul:* In his letters to the churches, he mentions what the body signifies before and at the moment of death. We see in 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-44 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16. It seems that in the mind of Paul, the bodies of the believers that are “asleep” will enter into a place in anticipation of the coming of Jesus to participate in the resurrection. It is possible that they were buried because of their firm faith in that they would be resurrected.

#### CONCLUSION:

##### **-The Opposition to Cremation from a Biblical Perspective-**

1. According to the brief study that we have done, it seem that in the Bible, cremation was reserved for those who had committed crimes or because of some divine judgement.
2. On the other hand, in practical terms, if there is no burial place, then there does not exist a place where they can be properly honored.

##### **-The Favorable points about Cremation including a Biblical Perspective -**

1. In our study, there does not exist an explicit prohibition in the Bible against cremation except in the passage of Amos 2:1 and that was in reference to judgement as an act of vengeance.
2. Simply because a body has been destroyed by fire, does not mean that it will not resurrect corporally to a new life.

#### **-DISCUSSION QUESTIONS -**

What factors may influence the decision to cremate the body of a family member?

For what reason do you think that in Bible times (Old and New Testament) people opted to bury the people? What was the reason for cremation?

Will a cremated body be raised to new life?

#### **PASTORAL RECOMENDATION:**

The Bible does not prohibit cremation, but, it does speak about the body as created by God and as it says in Genesis 3:19 “... *dust you are, and dust will you return*”. **How is it that dust returns to the earth, is not clearly resolved.** The clearest interpretation, given the custom that we see in Scripture from the Old to the New

Testament is that people were buried. Even though cremation can be considered as another way of “returning to dust” the body decomposes be it buried (even though it is embalmed which is not a Biblical practice) or incinerated.

Christians should understand that it is not this body that will inherit eternal life, but rather it is a body without corruption that will be transformed by resurrection on the final day.

The end of the discussion is this: In the body or outside of the body, are we prepared to go with Jesus Christ? Whether we are incinerated or buried, or our body be torn apart on the high seas, we will all be resurrected.