

A QUESTION ABOUT CREMATION

Elder Ralph Harris

Several years ago we were asked what stand Primitive Baptists take with regard to cremation. I am not aware of any official position ever being taken on this issue by the Primitive Baptists as a body, but of the ones I have heard say anything about it that I considered to be among the more spiritually-minded, all of them have recoiled from it as a thing repugnant, inappropriate and opposed to nature and decency. I have never personally known of a devout Primitive Baptist being cremated, and I think I can say with reasonable certainty that, as a body, they are very much opposed to it. According to the limited information I have been able to gather on the subject, it appears that cremation is a pagan practice and has always been considered extremely revolting by the Christian community.

We do not find an instance in the Scriptures among the people of God where they were cremated in place of burial. Their bodies were entombed, and seemingly with some degree of ceremony. I personally find the thought of burning the bodies of loved ones to powder, and scattering their ashes to the four winds, very undignified and depressing.

We read in Amos 2:1 that the Lord punished Moab for burning the bones of the King of Edom into lime. And in Jeremiah 7:31 we find that the judgments of God came upon Tophet for burning their sons and daughters in idolatrous sacrifices, which the Lord said He neither commanded, nor did it come into His heart.

I personally believe cremation should be outlawed. It is a well-known fact that many crimes have been solved, or at least verified, by the exhumation of bodies, some of which had been in the grave for many years. Cremation destroys all traces of bodily evidence in cases of criminal death, and sometimes suspicions of wrongful death do not arise until after a person's burial.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I think the example of our blessed Lord is the one we should follow, in this and all other matters. He was not cremated but was given an honorable and loving burial. The words of Isaac Watts are very appropriate ones with which to close these comments: "Why should we tremble to convey—Their bodies to the tomb? —There the dear flesh of Jesus lay—And left a strong perfume.—The graves of all His saints He blest—And softened every bed.—Where should the dying members rest—But with their dying Head?" ---Elder Ralph Harris