

# Should Believers Cremate Their Loved Ones?

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**Bible Text:** John 19:40

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So we're dealing now with the issue of what does the Bible say about cremation and this is coming from christianity.about.com and this is by Mary Fairchild. It begins with,

"With the rising cost of funeral expenses today, many people are choosing cremation instead of burial. However, Christians often have concerns about cremation. They want to be sure the practice of cremation is biblical."

So this study offers a Christian perspective presenting the arguments both in favor and against the practice of cremation.

"Although cremation accounts can be found in the Bible, it was not common or accepted at all for Jews or early believers to be cremated.

"Traditional Jews are prohibited under the law from practicing cremation. Eastern Orthodox and some Fundamental Christian denominations do not allow cremation."

This is such sloppy scholarship that I almost want to fling it up against the wall because the truth is she hasn't referenced anything yet. She says, "Cremation accounts can be found in the Bible." Okay, I'm looking for the citation. "Traditional Jews are prohibited under law from practicing cremation." Okay, no footnote. No citation. "Eastern Orthodox and some Fundamental Christian denominations do not allow cremation." And I would just like to have one representative fundamentalist Christian denomination that doesn't allow it.

"The Islamic faith also forbids cremation.

"The word cremation' is derived from the Latin word 'crematus' or 'cremare'"

Am I pronouncing it right?

Speaker. The best I can see.

Bill. "...meaning 'to burn up.'"

Speaker. Here's what I want to bring to your attention, Bill: this source is a primary source of information for lots of people.

Bill. It sure is.

Speaker. And she got paid to write this article.

Bill. Which is astounding to me.

Speaker. She got cash. She's seen as an expert and there are people that are on the bubble on these issues and go to a website like this and go, "Okay. It must be okay."

Bill. Right and in particular, the class I teach here at Berean Baptist Academy, I think that we have one of the foremost textbooks on world religions, for example, and yet it's sloppy in some places to the point where I'll have a student say, "Hey, why don't we talk about this paragraph," and here's why: because I don't want us to be sloppy students and there's not a single footnote in that paragraph. It's all for lack of a better term, he is the primary source and I don't want to take...

Speaker. First of all, these are more like op-ed pieces. Second of all, there aren't any footnotes in the newspaper and people read those and just take anything.

Bill. There's a little bit less at stake.

Speaker. Yeah, but some source is common knowledge too, so you don't have to cite everything in the paper if it's common knowledge but this information, I would say, is not common knowledge. Most of us aren't out there thinking, know what Jews or Muslims do with bodies after they're dead.

Speaker. Let's hit pause, Bill, and explain why we're talking about this today.

Bill. Alright. We do have families that have been faced with deaths and they are concerned about budgeting and they are concerned about debt and if you can save a few thousand dollars in some cases, you can save 60% of costs by having a loved one cremated, I don't think it's because they love their loved one any last. I don't think it's because they don't want their loved one to be cared for or honored. In some cases, most of the time, it is nothing but expedient either financially or even to the point where many people are not even having funeral services because it's emotionally expedient. "Let's just get this done. Let's get mom or grandmother or son or whatever or dad into this urn and let's just be done with this."

Speaker. Well, she says some fundamental Christian denominations do not allow cremation and so, Bill, we have a page on our website called "Contemporary Issues," and

what we're working on here is a paragraph for our webpage called "Contemporary Issues," and there might be somebody listening to this podcast as a church member that doesn't even know that page exists and can be a source of information for them. So what we're trying to do is provide an alternative to about.com for our church members in this webpage.

Bill. Right, which is full of scriptural references and when you go to that "Contemporary Issues," a lot of the brothers around this table can attest to the fact that we have spent hours trying to perfect a paragraph, one paragraph, describing everything from atonement to Jehovah's Witnesses to family planning. I think there are probably over 30 paragraphs written on it and usually because it represents the opinion of the pastoral staff, it takes a unanimous nod from everyone around the table to get it and so we have a draft for the cremation aspect.

Speaker. There are lots of citations of places in Scripture to support these paragraphs.

Speaker. Brian, do you have a copy of it?

Brian: I do not have a copy of it.

Speaker. Okay, I have it. "We reject the idea that God permits the bodies of Christians to be cremated," and that's a strong statement, Bill. Why did you choose to go in that direction right out of the gate?

Bill. I would, at the risk of sounding like our last author, I'm convinced because of what I've read in Scripture and that is, I suppose, the thesis statement of the paragraph and so the reader needs to prepare themselves to receive some Scripture.

Speaker. So this is not a lukewarm position, then?

Bill. No, although I don't expect necessarily everyone around the table to agree but my philosophy is, Ben, if I'm going to write the draft, I'm going to be as dogmatic on one position or another and I can always tame it down but rarely does it get more dogmatic.

Speaker: Alright, from the Gospel.... Go ahead, John.

John: That's true.

Speaker: From the Gospel coalition website, let me find the author because I want to make sure I give him credit, David W. Jones is the Associate Professor of Christian Ethics and Director of the program at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest so that's a school that we would definitely respect. This is what he says and I want us to discuss this for a moment, Bill, with regard to how dogmatic we can be. He says that the positive way of stating "do not steal," so Exodus 20:15, do not steal, the positive way of stating that is "respect material goods." Properly steward material possessions. "Properly steward material possessions and something and thus the cheapest

and easiest option, usually cremation, isn't necessarily the moral one." So he's trying to make a moral argument here that the positive presentation of "do not steal" is the imperative to lock your stuff up. That if the expectation is that we are not to steal, that that expectation creates a responsibility to take care of things that are material possessions. That the stewardship aspect of it is to take care of those things: lock your car; lock your house; pick that thing up; take it inside, it does better inside. So then by extension he's saying that that applies to the human body as well. Is he going too far? Because that's a strong argument if he's not going too far.

Speaker. I think it's an interesting illustration. I can honestly say that I never really thought about it that way.

Speaker. To be honest, I was thinking something different when I read this original statement. I was thinking of the positive way to say "thou shalt not steal" is to be a good steward by meaning don't take other people's stuff. That's the way I was taking the statement.

Speaker. Right, properly steward material possessions.

Speaker. So I don't take Brian's sweater vest because...

Speaker. Right, I would say to you that if...

Speaker. ...and it's too big.

Speaker. Right, it's very big.

Speaker. Alright, let's get ridiculous here and let's say that you finally purchased a great suit and you spent \$500 on that great suit and you paid cash for it, you didn't charge it and it fits great, it's worsted wool, you look great in it, it's good for preaching funerals, weddings, all that kind of stuff.

Bill. Or being buried in.

Speaker. Or being buried in, right because we're not going to cremate. I come over to your house, Joey, and you're changing your oil in that suit. I would say to you you're not being a good steward of that possession.

Bill: That's true.

Speaker. That you're not taking care of it. I don't think it's just fair enough to say you're not stealing. I don't think that's fair.

Speaker. Yeah, because there's got to be a change. The negative is "do not" do something so the positive has to be "do something," or the positive of the other side of the coin is, "don't let your stuff be in a position to be stolen."

Speaker. Right, it has to be. It has to be not just a negative.

Speaker. Like the sign at the mall, "Lock your doors."

Speaker. Yeah, so the thief has a commandment but you have a commandment as well in order to act responsibly.

Speaker. I think we know that we have a biblical stewardship of this body, don't we? We argue from Corinthians that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit so you are to do things, so how do you burn the temple of the Holy Spirit up?

Speaker. If we can agree that that's a good illustration, then we need to get a lot of Scripture to edify that position.

Speaker. It's huge, right? If what he's saying there is in fact a reasonable deduction, is that the right...if there's a negative, then there's got to also be a positive way of expressing it. We do that with not just "don't lie" but "tell the truth," and we would say...

Speaker. Omit and commit, you know.

Speaker. Right, we would say that if I know that Bill is understanding something that is not true and I allow him to continue to understand that and I know that he's understanding something that's not true, that that in and of itself is lying. I'll say, "I never lied to you," but I knew what you were understanding was not true. You thought that I had 15 years of experience in ministry but I was including my 7 years of teaching Sunday school but you thought I was making reference to that but I know that that's lying. So if he's right here, then we've got a major issue when we just say that, "You spent the last 50 years taking care of this body and now you're going to throw it in an oven and burn it to death." You can't burn it to death, right? You can't burn it to death, right. That was your point?

Bill: I wasn't going to say anything.

Speaker. But it caught it. I'm slow. But you're going to burn it up.

Joey. I guess maybe playing devil's advocate, 1. the body decays anyways and then 2, if we're dead and the Holy Spirit is gone out of our body, would it still be considered a temple of the Holy Spirit?

Speaker. Okay, but your body is dying right now, Joey. So eat more fast food. Get the arteries chocked up as much as possible. Do it now because it's dying so why not?

Speaker. I would also point out this is really not targeted at the living individual who is going to die, it's targeted to the people who are tasked with taking care of the body after you're dead.

Speaker. Sure, but that's a question they have to answer.

Speaker. The stewardship aspect...

Speaker. That's where really it's key because now I'm taking care of somebody else's possession basically and I think that's where his argument keys in. So it's really not even me, it's my children who have to hear this that, "Hey, you know, dad took care of himself or whatever until the end and then you just go and throw him away like..."

Speaker. We apply this stewardship all the time like to my left, Steve Wilson, and I would loan Steve anything that I own. I would loan him anything I own because I know that he has a track record and he knows how to take care of things. I mean, that's just the reality. But I wouldn't do that with any church member. I wouldn't take some of my new equipment that I've spent a lot of money on and say, "Here's my 48" mower. Go have fun with that thing." Who knows? Right? That's a stewardship perspective and so you're going to take care of grandpa. Grandpa is now in your possession, right? Isn't that what we're saying? Grandma's in your possession. Mom's in your possession. What will you do with mom during these last 48 hours that she's in your possession that shows your respect for mom? I'm going to get out as cheap as I can and I am going to have the body, it's already dead, but I'm going to have it cremated.

Speaker. Well, what about the...I've heard this argument from the cremation perspective, of being a steward of the finances. You know, because if I have the option to replace the clutch in my car and I can do it myself for the cost of parts or I can pay Acura \$700 to do it, am I a better steward for getting the same job done cheaper or....?

Speaker. And when does that stop?

Speaker. Exactly. I mean, what about the respect portion?

Speaker. What about the fact that grandma was made in God's image? I mean, that's God's body that God made her.

Bill. I think the real, when I think about this whole issue and we think about, "Well, if you burn it it's just going to be ashes." Ashes that will become dust, and I think that it speaks to what you think of the future of the deceased. Burning in any situation speaks of finality and when you want to do away with something, you burn it up. You just go to the Levitical precedent there in Leviticus when those priests are offering a sacrifice, they are to burn it up completely which speaks of finality, in particular the finality of the sins that were transferred to that sacrifice.

Speaker. That's what the Roman Catholic Church did with John Wyclif. He was still haunting them even after his death so they said, "Dig up his bones and burn them."

Speaker. And that's a way of communicating a finality. "We're done with him. He will never bother us again."

Bill. Whereas when you bury the body, it doesn't particularly matter that it looks essentially the same as ashes in an urn, am I saying it right? It doesn't matter, it is the action itself and when we talk about cost, I'd just like to address with Brian for just a second. I know he was talking about stewardship when it comes to finances and I'm about fiscal stewardship to be sure. I can't think of a better expenditure for someone on active duty or reserve to spend about \$18 a month to get \$100,000 on your wife and \$10,000 on each child. I know \$10,000 and I'm talking about life insurance, I know \$10,000 won't cover an entire funeral probably, especially if you want to relocate a child to another state, but I do know that that is, if you want to talk about wise stewardship, how about the cost of one fast food meal for your family going every month to insurance to pay for those funeral expenses so that it's a moot argument anyways.

Speaker. I would like to argue another point and see if you guys think it's ridiculous again. I'm looking up John 19:40 right now which speaks to the fact that it was the custom of the Jews to bury. Now, I bring that up because Paul said, "To the Jews was committed the oracles of God," so certainly the method by which the Jews took care of bodies should be an example to Christians if the oracles of God were committed to them. They become for us very foundational and we have to have a legitimate reason for abandoning a Jewish custom. We can't just arbitrarily abandon, for example, circumcision is no longer a legitimate custom that we follow because of the circumcision of the heart created by God in regeneration. So we have to have a legitimate Christian alternative when we abandon. We don't practice the Passover because we have the Lord's supper so that's a legitimate replacement. I don't believe that there is anything that we communicate that cremation is the legitimate replacement for the Jewish custom of burying bodies.

Bill. And see, that is a key element here is that in order for you to make that argument, you have to keep the treatment of deceased brothers and sisters connected with the body of Christ. In other words, for you to leap over the argument you're making, you have to dechurchify the treatment of a dead brother or sister. You have to do what is in vogue today and that is it's not a church issue, it's a personal issue; it doesn't matter what the body of Christ thinks about a funeral. And that is really the crime of us deciding that the church is no longer the center of the Christian family's life. So in other words, I can get married in my backyard and I don't necessarily have to have my pastor marry me.

Speaker. I can get buried at the funeral or I can get...

Bill. ...and I can take the Lord's supper with Pepsi and Doritos with Chuck Swindoll in Israel on a holy land tour.

Speaker. I can get baptized in the bathtub. My husband can baptize me in the bathtub.

Bill. Right, and so funerals, that doesn't require the approval of the church because it's just a family issue but when you realize, no, it is a covenant of faith issue, this pastor, this body of Christ is poured into you, well, no wonder people are flippant about that when

you switch churches every 3 to 5 years. On four-day weekends, you can't be found within 7 hours of the church and you can't wait to PCS. Regardless of whether or not your family will be fed spiritually at the next place, you volunteer to go to the next place because you don't want to be stuck by the army in an undesirable place. You beat them to the punch. Why am I speaking so passionately? Because I did it. I did it. I didn't want to be stuck somewhere. You're going to be sent to Virginia if you don't volunteer for Hawaii, so that's what I did. In 2007, I didn't want to be stuck in Highway 1 traffic in Mount Vernon, Virginia again so I volunteered for Hawaii. You know, I'm not going to say that every part of that was distasteful but I will say that I have known since that decision that it was a selfish decision and it was a decision that was preemptive of the clear leading of the Lord.

Sean. Okay Bill, how about the number of people that we've seen in the last several years that buy homes 45 minutes, 50 minutes, an hour away because they've always wanted to live in the country and then they email and say, "Now, do you happen to know of a good, solid, Bible-believing, Christ-exalting, Gospel-preaching, God-glorifying church that exegetes the Scripture in," and then name your place?

Bill: It's getting to the point now, Pastor Sean, when we have white cards come in, I'm thankful for each one, that's true, but if it's outside Faith, I just don't even follow up with it.

Sean: Because we know, Bill, no matter what we hear and we'll hear it, I say, "You're moving that far away?" "Yeah." "That's a long way away. Are you sure you want to do that?" "Oh, we'll make the drive."

Bill. "This is worth the drive."

Sean. Right and that lasts for a week and a half. That's because there's no longer a legitimate connection. Or here's another one, this cat right here, I won't say his name but he is, this cat right here, I'm showing the card to the guys, he was here on our Tuesday event for our "stop the violence," right? He said, "I came and visited your church and we almost joined your church." And I said, "Oh, where did you end up at?" And he said, "Destiny Now." Now, I want you to think about that. How in the world?

Bill. One is another is another.

Sean. Right, I mean, you talk about apples and oranges, yeah we're fruit but man, they taste a lot different, there's orange color. We're so far apart but there is no longer, Bill,...

Bill. A lemon is a fruit.

Sean. Right, exactly and like, you have music and they have music and you have a Bible and they have a Bible. Doctrine is not really that important and what the Bible has to say about how to take care of the body is not really that important anymore. The fact that they contended for the body. The fact that Joseph's body was carried to the Promised Land.

Bill. And there was no indication before you go to Joseph, speaking of the other Joseph of Arimathea who did covet the body of Christ, there is no indication that any of them were expecting the resurrection.

Sean. No, this was respect for material possessions. That's what this was. God made this body.

Bill. I think you can go to that scriptural example and having Joshua is a good example. Why do we get an account of Moses was buried here? Because God thinks it's important. And who buried him? He burned up Korah. He burned up Hophni and Phinehas or Nadab and Abihu, which one was it? Nadab and Abihu? He burns them up, he buries Moses.

David. And then look at the treatment that Christ gets. I've read some accounts on the linens and the perfumes and the ointments and we're talking like 40, 50 pounds of stuff that they would have put on the body. I mean, that's expensive. You know, remember when Mary anoints...

Speaker. But they loved him, David, they loved him. That's the way they showed their love. Yes, he's gone but we can still manifest our love for Jesus.

Bill. We see with Lazarus as well. Lazarus isn't Christ and yet he's wrapped up and perfumed and ointmented up and all that.

Sean. How many guys did it take to carry Joseph from Egypt in a box? How many times did they think, this is getting a little old. There have been times when I've been carrying something, my rucksack in the army and I was like, "Okay, I'm done with this. I'll buy another one, okay?" And I just disregarded it.

Bill. He's not going to know. Let's just burying him right here. But here's why, they had a hope of the resurrection and there is no way, you've preached this I think before, there is no way Joseph wanted to wake up in Egypt.

Sean. No, no he wanted to wake up there. They wanted to be in the Promised Land. Moses was buried in the Promised Land.

Bill. Well, Nebo, but raised in the Promised Land. He's on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Sean. There seems to be what we want to communicate, I think, is that this is the final opportunity you have to show respect for the contribution that this person made in your life. This is your final opportunity and that, in most cases, is not cremation. I mean, I just cannot imagine this scenario where that is... and I'm speaking from a guy whose both parents were cremated. It wasn't my choice in either time. I didn't even have a vote in the process and I was exasperated with it and one of the reasons I was exasperated is I have no place to go to.

Speaker. That's what I was thinking about. The other day we were doing something and I stopped by and saw, we were out that way so we stopped by and saw where Brandon is buried. This was a way to remember and think about him for a little bit. I couldn't have done that if he was poured over a soccer field where he played at. He'd already be gone. That's what I think about. I think about the sweet times that I had with my mom when we drove to Piedmont, Alabama and we went and worked on her dad's grave site and we planted new flowers there, we freshened it up and we were able to pray and she was able to tell me stories about him, this memorial, the memorial that was there.

Bill. That's a key point.

Speaker. And when you burn someone up, it's hard to do that. You think about the opportunity to have people come and walk through and see the body of a dear saint of God and then be able to account how they loved Jesus.

Bill. I think it's indicative of our lust for expedience, the whole cremation thing and I think that that lust for expedience is reflective of our euthanasia culture that says that once they're not good for vacations and once they're not good for reunions and once you have to remind them who you are every 3rd or 4th visit and once they're on lots of meds and may be gaining a little weight, then they lose their usefulness and you and I hate to even say it because I'm going to make some people mad here but, you put them in a home and sometimes you go and see them. That is reflected and I can see that and the natural end of that is cremation.

Speaker. I think it's more importantly we do not like to be reminded that one day we're going to have an end date. In our society, we put the idea of funerals and all those things as far from us as we can for as long as we can.

Speaker. Out of sight, out of mind.

Sean. That's why we don't attend those funerals, John.

John. And movies about older people are very few and far between. Most movies have young people, vibrant, healthy and occasionally you'll get a movie with old folks as the actors. But we just don't want to see elderly people. We don't want to see the end of life.

Speaker. I think Bill's point, it's utilitarian, it's take the humanity out of it. It's pragmatism and we love to do that. And to speak to Joey's point on a place to go, I can speak to that personally. My mom was not a saint but she has a grave marker and Christ didn't save me until after my mom was dead and do you know where I forgave my mom? It was at the grave site. A moment with God, a lot of moments with God. That's where forgiveness came and it was just a moment. She wasn't there but I was able to go to that marker and have that peace that God gave me and I don't know that I would have that in a living room. I don't know if I would have that looking at the ocean. I just don't think you have that. There's just something about it.

Speaker. We're instructed to make memorials.

Speaker. All over the place. Put some stones here. But why? So that when your children see those stones they ask that question. We don't take trips to cemeteries. We don't take grandbaby to go and talk about grandpa and the war that he fought and the freedom. That's becoming less and less and less.

Speaker. You know, this is another key thing that's out of this discussion and that is the church has got to stop giving in to pragmatism because pragmatism allowed other places, secular places, to build graveyards that were not by the church and I really have been thinking about this a lot lately and I'm really sad about that because not only do you go visit mom or dad or whoever at the grave site and then you look up and you see that steeple and you start to think about what? Your eternity, about church and it is related and it's right there and church is important in society. But now we see more and more weddings not in church. To me, even things like turning your ball cap the wrong way and wearing a hat in the building. Are these sins? No, they're not sins but we've got to stop giving in on pragmatism and stop saying heritage and respect and man-made ideas are not all bad. You know, we hear all the time, "Legalism! Legalism! Legalism!" Well, I just had this thought Sunday, you know, we have this thing upside down. It's not that, "we're not under the law," the point of justification of Christ is that the law can be fulfilled. It's not that he fulfilled the law, it's now we can keep the law through the righteousness of Christ. It's not that the law was ridiculous.

Speaker. The whole point Paul said you were given this liberty is to serve one another, else you can do whatever you want.

Speaker. That's what our professor is arguing with regard to the "don't steal," that the positive of that is you respect material possessions. Custom matters. Tradition matters. That's what we're trying to communicate.

Speaker. Another thought that I had was Ecclesiastes 3, "It's better to go to a funeral than a wedding," because you get this somber sense that, "Boy, this is getting away from me really fast. I need to get on the ball." Do you know what I mean? It reminds us of our brevity, that life is short.

Speaker. Right, and to John's point with regard to the cemeteries, it's not just the cemeteries, John, it's also the auditorium that they create so that you don't have to do it in the church. You know, they have the little funeral room down there. You know, I don't want to be, don't have my funeral in a room that's got the menorah and it's got this and it's got that and they are all of equal size and they're all made of the same material because what you're doing, whether you realize it or not, dear Christian, listen to me, is you are legitimizing those symbols because they are not going to let you take them down. You guys have my funeral in the auditorium that I preached in. Have it where Christ has been exalted. Have it in a place where I was fed the word of God and was able to teach the word of God. You know, have it in those places. Don't have it under a tent somewhere. Don't have it somewhere that doesn't relate to who Christ is and clearly we would say that

a church that looks like a church and is a church will be the most symbolic representation of Christ on the planet.

Speaker. And that's where I strove, as well, because don't get me wrong, I'm a technology geek. I love new things, I love how we move forward, we invent new things but at the same time, there is a part of me that is conservatism is the concept of keeping things the same. You know, I know now it's reduced, liberalism, conservatism is reduced to talking points but really the idea of conservatism is to keep things the same. Make a church that looks like a church and has a steeple. You know, it doesn't look like an auditorium and I'm not saying if you meet in an auditorium you're not the body of Christ meeting, don't get me wrong there, but there is just something to that. In America where a church gives you when you're driving by it, a recognizable...

Speaker. It's a landmark. It's a landmark. It speaks to a particular thing and we're going away from that. We're going away from it as much as we can in the construction process, in the design process, everything to make it look not what it is and that's giving way to pragmatism.

Bill. Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3, "We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how you ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us." So we have him saying something about tradition and we have something about him saying following them. Apparently, I know that there's some doctrine involved with this idea of Paul's tradition and I don't want to reduce this to him bringing us some sort of extra-canonical body of truth that we're supposed to follow but certainly there were some things that were not on the level with doctrine but were still important enough to be observed.

Speaker. And those are customs and those are traditions. And is it a fundamental of the faith? No. Are we trying to create that? No, we're not trying to create that but are we saying that the way it was done in the past was the right way and we need to continue to do that? The answer is yes.

Speaker. Yeah, and there's nothing after those commandments in the Old Testament to tell us that we can do it a different way. There is no vision to Peter saying it's okay now to burn bodies. I mean, there wasn't that. Jesus is saying, "Let the dead bury their dead." That's important. That's what he said and if we're going to be like Christ, Christ buried his dead. You know, I mean, he was buried himself so I think there's a lot of just being able to be Christlike.

Speaker. Can you unpack this statement from the article, our article. It says, "Furthermore, it is noteworthy that many Eastern religions practice cremation from which we should be separate."

Bill. Well, it is quite acceptable, let's see, Eastern religions practice cremation. A lot of New Age religions are okay with pretty much any dispensing of the body and that could be cremation, particularly some sects of Buddhism. Although they do have lots of cemeteries there are some sects of Buddhism that don't reflect the true and living God and they do cremate. There are some sects of Hinduism, the same thing. So my point is just that if we're going to be Christian, let's be distinctively Christian. You know, "Learn not the way of the heathen," Jeremiah 10. And while we have some independent fundamental Baptist brothers who think that means you shouldn't have a Christmas tree in the context, I would say that there are maybe some more weighty matters, especially in the church today.

Speaker. Tell us about the missionary that we support in Japan.

Bill. Okay, for example, thank you, the Yamazaki's are in Japan. He has been there over 30 years and they have a church. I was thrilled to hear him say he had been at a church for over 30 years and we've been supporting them a good part of that and he has, I think, maybe 50 people, 50 regular believers and he has been now at his second church for a year. But, you know, that church of 40 or 50 believers and he doesn't take glory. It's not like he doesn't wish there were more converts. Of course, he wishes there were more converts but one of the things that that small church in Japan has done is maintained a particular garden and they call it "Resurrection Garden." Did you all see that in the slideshow that he did? Resurrection Gardens where the church members, it's a labor of love for them to keep the gardens where they have buried their loved ones in hope of resurrection day. Whereas the Confucianists, the Taoists, the Buddhists, there is very little to think about because they don't need their bodies again. Their whole theology reflects finality. They're not expecting resurrection, they are expecting reincarnation in the best case scenario and that's if they have to come back to earth. Buddhists, for example, depending on which strand of Buddhism you're talking about, believe in planes of existence after the earth, after your time here and those are realms of reincarnation. So why don't they mind abandoning the body? Because in their mind you can be what you need to be without ever being human whereas from a Genesis 1, Genesis 2 perspective, a human being is made up of the breath of God and a body.

Speaker. Yeah, I think that those Christians, Bill, they don't want to be buried next to Buddhists. They don't want to be buried next to Hindus. They want to be buried in a traditionally Christian location with people who are like-minded in that. That's that same concept, you know, I've been a Christian all my life, don't put me over here in this funeral home where Islam is recognized as a legitimate entity on the planet. You know, I'm a Baptist. My dog tags say Baptist. Find a Baptist preacher to bury me. That's that same idea that we're losing. We're losing denominational associations and people are followers of Christ and really what that means is they can decide what Christ thinks, does, etc. It makes them what they want.

Bill. Well, a couple of things about that, it's also, it goes with the sloppy architecture too and I don't want to be mean here but look, we're getting into the age of metal frame

buildings and general-purpose buildings when it comes to worship and so when you have the nondenominational fad, it goes along with the idea of shucking all traditions whether valid or not as Jonathan pointed out, and it's reflected not only in that but it's reflected in how we design our buildings. We don't want the high archways to point us to God. We don't want high ceilings to make us feel like we are inferior to a holy and righteous God. We don't want anything that makes us behold something majestic or higher or transcendent and so we have a building that we worship in that looks like it could be a room for a big meal if you put tables and chairs in it. That goes with a nondenominational label. It goes with, "Don't worry about it, you can wear flip-flops to church Sunday morning and bring your spit bottle and your mesh hat and wear it and it's cool. Just bring it. Just come as you are." And typically when you come as you are, you leave as you came. That's typically what happens because there is no stalwart choosing of the sides and I think it just comes from a lax view of the Lord Jesus, the head of the church. Some would say that it's important for us to get together and bind arm-in-arm with the nondenominational label because it reflects sectarianism and division within the body of Christ whereas I would actually say that a student of church history could observe that these different factions and sects within religion are a reflection of a desire for purity in many cases.

Speaker. They came out from among them. That's the very idea. Presbyterians are doing that. There was a giant church in California that had to pay a colossal fine...

Bill. 7 or 8 million, I think.

Speaker. Right, to separate from the denomination but they were willing to pay that money in order to no longer be associated with a denomination that they perceived is going downwards, that's on a downward slide and so it isn't a divisive idea. I understand why churches use movie theaters to get started but I believe that there ought to be a moment in which you do all you can to get out of that theater. I don't want to be preaching in the same place in which there was sex on the screen the night before and, you know, just think about the association there. Friday night I was here eating popcorn and drinking Mountain Dew and watching nastiness and fornication on the screen and then Sunday morning I'm back there and you're standing up there and I make the association, "I didn't really like that movie and I don't really like what you have to say either." The environment lends itself towards that very idea.

Bill. Everything speaks, to include arrangement, planning, architecture, grounds, buildings and grounds, upkeep, landscaping. It all speaks.

Speaker. I don't know, I'm probably going get run out of the discussion by this but it's not that everybody wants and it was great in Acts but that's not America. I mean, there are church buildings to renovate that are about shut down. If you want that sort of church, go find a church building and do it.

Bill. Yeah, and that was the whole point of that church conference we went to almost 2 years ago where, it was only a year ago. They said the Southern Baptists Convention started 100 churches and closed 800.

Speaker. We're not hiding underground.

Bill. What was it? It was opened 900 and closed 800 so they had a surplus of 100 for the labor of 900. And he says they are being turned into rec calls, antique stores and...

Speaker. But the reason they don't do that is it's not cool. Old church building. They misunderstand the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not, "I'm going to be so cool and relevant that you come to the beautiful Gospel." That's not the Gospel. The Gospel is beautiful on its own.

Speaker. But they don't want to take that white church that's got those steeples on there because they're afraid they can't attract an audience there so they're going to meet at a gym instead.

Bill. The messages were different. We're not like church. This is a new church where we connect and where we care. You know, going to put like B3 and C 3 and D3.

Speaker. Church for people who don't like church.

Bill. Yeah, exactly.

Speaker. But the point in all this, I think, Bill, it is to say that the funeral is the same kind of an idea, it's an extension of preserving those things that are Christ exalting and the reason that we're assembling and we're looking at this body is we believe this body is coming back again. It's why we're not just throwing it in an oven and turning up the temperature. It's why we're preserving it. We're doing these things because our doctrine communicates our belief in a glorified body.

Bill. Right, and what I would love to see happen at Berean as one of the pastors is that, first of all, the Lord's supper be honored as it should be because that, I think, is the real issue is that we have almost no esteem as a body of Christ at large for ceremony in the church. Really, I understand we call it an ordinance, we never call it a sacrament, I get that but it is a ceremony. We are doing something that symbolizes something and certainly you would think a military culture would be able to appreciate that. So to have baptism and the Lord's supper elevated to the point where most of the body of Christ local returns would be a delight but long-range, I would love to see weddings and funerals elevated to that same, maybe not the same symbolic importance but at least the same attention.

Speaker. Right and that's why the other day I was in this office and I was counseling and I would commend you guys to take the same stand. Almost without even thinking about it, the couple said, "And oh, by the way, we're going down to the courthouse to get

married in 3 days." I said, "Oh, that's wonderful. Then I won't be marrying you." Bottom line. You know, you're not going to go down there and get a courthouse wedding and then 3 weeks later we're going to reenact a ceremony here and then I'm going to say some funk like, "I now pronounce you man and wife," when that statement has already been made by a secular guy downtown. That's not happening. You can go do that if you want but I am not going to perpetrate the fraud and now act as though I married you when the certificate has already been signed by a judge and the wedding date has already been determined by somebody else. So when I told the wedding coordinator here, one of our wedding coordinators that to make sure that she understood that policy, she said, "Well, there have been several others that have already done that." Guys, we need to put an absolute stop to that. If you want a church wedding then you wait and I'm the guy that signs it or you're the guy that signs it and the witnesses that sign the certificate are the witnesses that were at the church wedding. But we're not playing this dualistic idea and that's what you're talking about, Bill.

Bill. I am.

Speaker. Is that weddings are important. This is a big deal. Why? Because Christ loved the church in such a way that he gave his life for it as a picture of this thing.

Bill. Right, and my desire is that those who come behind us as church leadership are not spending half their life learning this is ecclesiology. I'm 36. I wish I would of had this view of weddings and funerals in the church 10, 15 years ago and that I'm not, you know, I'm just coming to an understanding of what I really believe Scripture says and what I would like is that it may not be my son who is the next preacher in the Sturm family but there are many other young men in the area that need to become pastors and deacons in churches both this one and churches to come and I hope that this study and this discussion will facilitate a quicker realization of what we believe the Bible is saying about the centrality of the, centrality if you will, of the church in these matters of marriage and burial of the dead.

Speaker. And the Roman Catholics have that, Bill.

Bill. That's true.

Speaker. I mean, if the church says that this is wrong and you're a good Catholic, then that's the stand that you take.

Bill. Right.

Speaker. That's what we're also fighting.

Speaker. We did fight that but they retain the helm of that very idea because they knew that once you diversify this all over the place, the next thing you have is people getting married on the beaches and getting married everywhere and marrying anyone they want. I mean, the Catholics won't marry somebody that is not a Catholic. You've got to become a

Catholic. My dad had to become a Catholic in order to marry my German Catholic mom. Of course he wasn't a true Catholic but he went through the catechism in order to get the marriage.

Speaker. They won't bury you if you're not a Catholic either.

Speaker. That's exactly right. They are very adamant about that because of their strong belief in who they are and the fact that they have an authority. And our departure from that, Bill, in the independent of us allows Tom, Dick and Harry out there to have an affair and then go across the street and put up a sign that says, "Preacher for hire," and then he starts his own church.

Is there anything else on here that we need to pay attention to in this paragraph? Because I thought that there was another line beginning with Abraham which, I think, is a great point. You list us through all the people that have been buried. Our bodies belong to God and his will should be done with them. Some may inquire about those who have previously been cremated or those who are burned up in martyrdom to which you want to respond that God is more than capable of resurrecting their ashes, right?

Bill. Right, and that's the whole point of Abraham. Abraham believed that God could resurrect a cremated body or he would not have had the mind of burning his son, a burnt offering, and then promising their companions that they would be right back, that he and the lad are going to go and worship and then return to them. So knowing that he was about to kill his son if God didn't intervene, he was willing to kill his son and yet he made the promise, "We'll be right back." Abraham believed that God could raise up his son from ashes on rocks if he needed to to fulfill his promise through the seed, Isaac.

Alright so, you may not have agreed with every point of this and some of us, I think, like disagreement so if you have something that you would like to add to this conversation, I wish that you would email me at [bsturm.bbc@gmail.com](mailto:bsturm.bbc@gmail.com) or you can go on the open mike and comment directly on this recording and the whole world will see it probably.

Speaker. Thanks for listening.