

# Burial or cremation for Christians?

A biblical pattern for funerals

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## The body and soul and their ultimate destination

Believers who have come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ as a result of God's sovereign, elective grace have the assurance of the Bible's promise that, once they die, their immortal soul is at once translated to heaven to be forever with their Lord and Saviour. There is no warrant anywhere in Scripture for erroneous views such as soul-sleep, annihilation, purgatory or penance (see 2 Corinthians 5:8).

Whilst the fact that our immortal soul is at once received into glory is a great comfort at a time of bereavement, there does come the point when a decision has to be made about what to do with our earthly body. Should it be buried or cremated — and does it really matter anyway?

As we shall see, there are many pointers to the fact that burial should be the favoured option among Christians; although it should be stated that the Bible does not give any absolute *command* in the matter. Nevertheless, as we shall discover later,

some of the patriarchs did give very precise instructions that they were to be buried.

Let it be made clear at the outset that, although neither of the practices is in itself *sinful*, that does not negate the fact that careful and sympathetic thought should be given to decide how and where our loved ones' final remains should be laid to rest.

### The serious issues of life and death

More than anyone else, Christians do consider carefully the serious issues of life and death. The whole focus of the gospel is bound up with our eventual and final destination after death — whether we end up in heaven or hell! That being so, it is surely wise for believers to do a little practical preparation for their demise beforehand. Unless our Lord returns in the meantime, it is an undisputable fact that we shall all die at some point.

Bereavement is always a traumatic time for those left behind, and Christians are *not* immune to that grief and sorrow. After all, death is a constant reminder of the outworking of sin in the world. It is only right that we mourn and lament over the loss of a loved one, but we do not grieve in the same way as unbelievers who have no hope whatsoever (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). We have on record that our Lord was moved to weep at the grave of his friend Lazarus (John 11:35).

### The wisdom of planning ahead

To alleviate the anguish for our families as much as possible, a little forward planning can spare those left behind some of



Tranquillity of an English churchyard

the stress. The provision of a funeral plan, prior purchase of a burial plot, choice of venue and minister for the thanksgiving service, and the selection of hymns and readings are all things that can be done in advance. As time progresses there is no reason why amendments cannot be made as circumstances change.

By making arrangements beforehand, the deceased has the comfort of knowing that things will proceed in accordance with their wishes and that decisions do not have to be made at the last moment. That must surely ease the burden in some measure.

A funeral plan purchased in advance enables many practical choices to be made and once death occurs, a telephone call is all that is required to set things in motion.