



I'm wondering about cremation. I'd prefer it to burial, but is it a sin?

This question came during a recent Bible study. We looked in the Bible to see if God addressed the issue in His Word. We didn't find any direct "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not" instructions regarding burial vs. cremation, so I promised to check further. I started with the LC-MS website and their FAQ section. Here's what I found there:

The LCMS has no official position on cremation. Cremation is increasing in favor, in part because of space limitations in some cemeteries and because of health considerations. The primary reason for the increase in cremations is economic, however, since it avoids such costs as the purchase of coffins and cemetery plots and substantially lowers the expense of a funeral.

Some Christians continue to oppose cremation, noting that cremation is never referred to positively in the Bible. It is true that early Christians rejected cremation and preferred burial because Jesus Himself was buried and because Greek philosophy looked down on the physical creation and thought that only souls, not bodies, survived death. The Christian burial of bodies was viewed as a way to proclaim the belief that our bodies will be raised from the dead.

In their textbook *Pastoral Theology* (used at our Synod's seminaries), LCMS Pastors Norbert H. Mueller and George Kraus offer this perspective: "Not too long ago, the church viewed cremation negatively. Because the general public associated the practice with heathen religions and/or an attempt to disprove the possibility of the resurrection, Christians were reluctant to consider it. In itself, the practice has no theological significance and may be used in good conscience." Synod's *Lutheran Service Book Agenda*, approved by the LCMS in convention, includes an instruction (rubric) for the committal of a person's ashes, encouraging burial or interment and discouraging the scattering of the ashes.

Those Christians facing the death of a loved one or planning their own funerals are always encouraged to consider the opportunity a Christian's funeral offers to give witness to our faith in Jesus Christ's victory over death and His promise of the resurrection of our bodies for eternal life (John 6:40, 44, 54).

It is therefore beneficial, as we face such occasions and the decisions they involve, to seek our pastor's support, advice, and counsel regarding the entirety of the funeral, including the question of cremation. However, this is a matter of Christian freedom and no Christian who chooses to have a loved one cremated rather than buried should be led to think that such a decision is sinful or in opposition to the Word of God.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net