

# SOCIAL ISSUES

- Abortion
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WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?



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## Abortion

We want to examine the truth concerning abortion. As we consider the biblical stance concerning this subject, we must be mindful that this position is more than just a view or an opinion. According to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, as recorded in John 17:17, "Thy word is truth." In John 12:48 Jesus said, ". . . the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Therefore, as we examine the biblical perspective of this subject in the secular field, we must be soberly aware that this is the only true and accurate stance in the light of judgment and eternity.

We will examine such vital questions as, Does life begin at conception? When does one become a living soul? and Is abortion murder? Let us turn to that which shall be the criteria for our final judgment: the Word of God. In the light of the Scriptures, we must recognize that man is a soul, he has a body, and the body is merely an instrument of the soul. Genesis 1:27 records, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him [Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24 tell us that this image is righteousness and true holiness, or the spiritual part of man]; male and female created he them [this is the physical portion in the two genders]."

Man is a spiritual being and housed in a body. This truth is repeated in 2 Corinthians 5:1: "For we know that if our earthly house [the body, verse 6] of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Verse 4 says, "For we [the soul] that are in this tabernacle do groan. . . ." Notice that he said "we that are in this tabernacle." The Apostle Peter employed the same terminology in 2 Peter 1:13 when he said, "Yea, I think it meet, as long as I [the real person, or the soul] am in this tabernacle [the body]. . . ." In verse 14 he declared, "I [the soul] must put off this my tabernacle . . . ." He referred to this "putting off" in verse 15 as his "decease." With this premise established, let us go to what is, chronologically, the oldest book of the Bible, to read the words of the Patriarch Job.

Job 10:11 states: "Thou hast clothed me [the real me, or the soul] with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews." This plainly tells us there is life, or a soul, before there is skin, flesh, bones, or sinews. In verse 12 Job went on to say, "Thou hast granted me life and favour. . . ." When did God grant him life? Well, what act was Job describing? He was describing conception (Job 10:10). God granted him life at conception. How does God grant life? Verse 12 continues, ". . . and thy visitation hath preserved my spirit." Notice the words "thy visitation." At the time of conception, God visits that conception by placing a soul within it, and then life begins. This is not a truth isolated to Job's writings in B.C. 2058, but it is substantiated by the Psalmist David. He declared many centuries later in Psalm 139:15, "My substance was not hid from thee [what substance?], when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth." Again, this is a clear description of conception.

Now look at verse 16: "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book [a heavenly record] all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." Here we find that a divine record was made of what David described as "all my members," even when there were none of them! For his members to be recorded in "the book of life" (Revelation 13:8), there must be life, even before there are any members.

When does life begin? When one is "curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth" in the act of conception. Notice also the Psalmist's words "my substance" in verse 15 and "my members" in verse 16. Who is this that he referred to as "my"? Verse 13 reads, ". . . thou hast covered me in my mother's womb." Here we find that another sacred writer revealed that there is a soul before there is any covering, or body.

In Job 31:15 Job said, "Did not he that made me in the womb make him?" He was not merely referring to the body or that "in the womb," but he was referring to the act of God that made the soul when conception took place.

Why is it so vital that we establish this point of when the soul is placed in the body or of when life begins? In today's society men are making determinations as to when, or which trimester, abortions should be performed. However, in the light of these Scriptures, we find that life begins even before there is a body, when one is just a conceived substance. It is vital that we understand this clearly because in every age there has been the strictest penalty issued for the deliberate taking of life.

In the Patriarchal period, which predates the Mosaic Law, the moral law is stated in Genesis 9:6: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." In the era of the Mosaic Law, God made it even clearer. Exodus 21:22 reads, "If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine." This Scripture lets us know that if a miscarriage took place because of a man's activity, he was to be "surely punished." This was actually an accidental event. How much stronger would punishment have been meted out for a deliberate and intentional act!

God's law has always been as recorded in Exodus 20:13: "Thou shalt not kill." We have a clearer rendering by Jesus in Matthew 19:18, which states, "Thou shalt do no murder." What is the New Testament stance concerning the deliberate taking of life? In Romans 13:4 the Apostle Paul said that the state was vested with power or "the sword [for what purpose?] . . . a revenger to execute wrath . . ." Here we can see the biblical recognition of and sanction for execution in some offences. Whether we look in the Old or the New Testament dispensation, murder is a punishable offense.

Even if in our day societal changes make it tolerable, and even acceptable, in the law of God and in the eternal realm, its sentence is still death. Romans 6:23 declares, "For the wages of sin is death." Ezekiel 18:4 states, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Revelation 21:8 tells us, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers . . . shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. . . ." God will not hold one guiltless who is party to willful abortive activity.

Now let us consider a deeper aspect of this matter: foreordination, or God's will, and abortion as the limiting of that will. Read the Prophet Isaiah's declaration in Isaiah 49:1: ". . . The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name." Right from the womb, Isaiah was a person. He had already been assigned a name, and God Himself had made mention of his name.

Furthermore, God had intent and purpose for his life: "The Lord hath called me" or as verse 5 says, the Lord "formed me [Isaiah] from the womb to be his servant." Before birth ever transpired, verse 3 declares that God "said unto me [this is a call upon the soul], Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." How much glory has God been robbed of and how many of his servants were stopped before they could start by the murderous act of abortion? Only eternity will reveal this tragic number. What if Isaiah's mother had chosen an abortion? What if the Psalmist David's mother or Mary, the mother of our Lord, had chosen an abortion? Think of how tragic these events would have been to divine and even human history.

Isaiah was not an isolated case. Consider the weeping Prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah 1:4-5 reads: "Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." Nothing could be clearer than this passage as to the value of the unborn and concerning the fact that God has a definite will and purpose for each life.

In Luke 1:13-15 we see the angel's pronouncement concerning the birth of John the Baptizer. Note the angel's words in verse 13: ". . . thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John." Verse 15 says, "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord . . . and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb." It is very clear that his greatness or his uniqueness was not going to start with birth but in "his mother's womb." This text clearly establishes the fact that God has a will and a purpose for each individual and that abortion is a heinous intervention and circumvention of that divine will.

The proclamation concerning the birth of our Savior verifies that as well in Matthew 1:20-21: ". . . that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. . . . and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

Much more could be said to substantiate these Bible truths, but let it suffice to say as the Apostle Paul did in Romans 3:4, "Let God be true, but let every man a liar." The Scriptures that we have cited are God's words, and they are true. Regardless of the myriads of positions that men take, if those positions vary from God's Word, they give a strong denunciation thereof and charge all such men as being liars. In the light of judgment and eternity, the only view and the only word that matters is God's. This is the reason we ought to give the more earnest heed and consideration to the biblical view of this terrible act of abortion.

## Homosexuality and Lesbianism

To begin our consideration of homosexuality and lesbianism, we must go back to where this subject was first introduced in Genesis, Chapter 18. This alone confirms the truth of Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 1:9, where he stated "there is no new thing under the sun."

That which we are facing today in the twenty-first century was a sad reality in the Patriarchal era in approximately B. C. 1898. Genesis 18:1 says that "the LORD appeared unto him [Abraham] in the plains of Mamre;" and He was accompanied by "two angels" (Genesis 19:1). This visit was initially to utter the divine pronouncement that "Sarah thy wife shall have a son" (Genesis 18:10), but while there the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" Then in the succeeding verses, the Lord declared: "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me . . ." (verses 20-21).

Notice the words the Lord employed in this text. In verse 20 He said "their sin is very grievous." There was one outstanding sin that stirred the wrath of God and initiated destruction upon these people. The original Hebrew text uses the singular word *chattaah*, which means, "an offense or habitual sinfulness." What was this "habitual sinfulness" that was regarded as so vile and heinous that it invited judgment from God? We see it revealed after the angels had been dispatched to Sodom. Genesis 19:1-2 says: "And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night. . . ." Genesis 19:4-8 gives us insight into what the sin mentioned in Genesis 18:20 was when the news of their coming circulated: "But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them. And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof."

It is evident that the activity these men desired to engage in was to do, wickedly. What was this wickedness that they wanted to commit? Read their cry in verse 5: "Bring them out unto us, that we may know them." What does this mean? This same type of wording was used in Genesis 4:1, where it is recorded, "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain. . . ." It is obvious from this passage that the terms "knew" and "know" are referring to sexual relations. When these men cried, "Bring them out unto us, that we may know them," they meant to have sexual relations with them. Lot understood this and offered his "two daughters which have not known men" (Genesis 19:8).

Notice that Genesis 19:4 says, "the men of the city," and verse 5 says, "And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men . . . ?" Why was this so wicked? What was their wickedness, or their sin, that was so repulsive in the eyes of God? The men wanted sexual relations with men. Their sin was homosexuality. This account teaches us that God and the Scriptures consider it sin and wickedness to engage in homosexuality, and it reveals that such wickedness invites the judgment of God on a society. It also portrays that when one comes under the power of that spirit, he is captivated by it and becomes a slave to that evil passion; it becomes an all-consuming desire that overshadows all else.

When we view God's will and plan for mankind, we must always recall the words of our Lord. In response to questions about divorce and the marital union, Jesus said in Matthew 19:8 that "from the beginning it was not so." This phrase lets us know that if we want to properly understand God's will, we must go back to the beginning. In 1 John, John repeated many times over, "That which was from the beginning. . . ." (1 John 1:1). To receive understanding of God's perfect will, we must go back to the beginning. Genesis 1:27 tells us that in the beginning, "male and female created he them." The Lord said in Genesis 2:18, "It is not good that the man should be alone." Then, in verse 22 He said, "And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man." Here we can



see God's plan was a woman for man. When the Lord spoke to the woman in Genesis 3:16, He said, "Thy desire shall be to thy husband."

This is God's will, and this is what is right and natural.

When men desire men and women yearn for women, what do the Scriptures call this? Look at Paul's words in Romans 1:24-27: "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet."

Here Paul was speaking of the antediluvian world, but it parallels our day as well. Romans 1:24 says, "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves." This tells us that this sin is a result of rejecting truth and that it is uncleanness, or an act of lust. Verse 25 tells us it is worshiping and serving the creature. Verse 26 calls it vile affections, and then he got very explicit as to what that sin or vile affection is. In verse 26 the Apostle said "their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature," or another rendering says that "even the women turned against God's natural plan for them and indulged in sex sin with each other." What he was describing is lesbianism. In verse 27 he declared, "And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another. . . ." This is the sin of homosexuality.

How do the Scriptures describe such actions? Do they merely view these as alternate lifestyles? Certainly not! Romans 1:29 describes them as "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness," and many other descriptions of depravity. In verse 32 Paul said, "Who, knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death. . . ." We can see that scripturally there is no tolerance for this sin. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 the sacred writer declared: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God." Another rendering of verse 9 says, "None who are guilty of adultery or of homosexual perversion." No matter how many religious societies accept this type of activity or how many places are established for them to congregate, the Bible clearly declares, they "shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Romans 1:31 calls it "without natural affection."

This sin is contrary to God's plan for man and woman. In 1 Timothy 5:14 Paul instructed women to "marry, bear children, [and] guide the house." Perpetrators of the sin of unnatural affection cannot carry out this command. If the whole human race were to become engaged and engrossed in this sin, humanity itself would vanish. This sin flies in the face of all that is natural, healthy, and wholesome.

Today some are of the persuasion that there is no choice exercised in this matter, that it is a matter of genetics, and that some are born with this inclination. This is not so! Ecclesiastes 7:29 declares, "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright [the Hebrew word is *yashar*, which means righteous]; but they have sought out many inventions." Ezekiel 28:15 tells us, "Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee." Man in his original state is pure and becomes what he is by the power of choice.

Isaiah 53:6 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray [why?]; we have turned every one to his own way. . . ." The sin of homosexuality and lesbianism is a sin of choice. It is not due to some pre-birth disposition; it is a result of a choice that was made. It is not, however, unforgivable or unpardonable. If homosexuals and lesbians will sincerely cry as David did in Psalm 51:3, "I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me," and are willing to repent and turn away from that sin, God will save them. Proverbs 28:13 says, ". . . whoso confesseth and forsaketh them [their sins] shall have mercy." Ephesians 2:4 says that God is "rich in mercy" and is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). However, to receive this mercy, one must acknowledge that he is in sin and that what he is doing is sin; then he must be willing to turn from it, give it up, and ask for forgiveness. He can then gain

salvation and "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

This sin is a vile, heinous sin that God hates, but if you are bound with it, you can be free. How can you be free from it? You must quit justifying and rationalizing it, own it as the sin that it is, repent of it, and then you can be free. The question is, Do you want to be free to enjoy the blessings of God and have the peace of God in your heart or do you want to remain under the wrath of God? The choice is yours. As the songwriter declared, "You can have salvation if you will."

## Capital Punishment

As we consider the scriptural stance concerning capital punishment, we want to clarify that "God . . . is rich in mercy" (Ephesians 2:4), and His will is "that ye sin not" (1 John 2:1). Unfortunately, not all respond to mercy's call, and sadly, some respond belatedly and must suffer the consequences of their misdeeds.

The Lord God is the moral governor of this time world. Psalm 22:28 declares that "he is governor among the nations." As moral governor, He has a moral nature, and from that nature emanates moral law. That moral law is inherently what is right and what is wrong. Just as in the natural realm laws are fixed and settled, these laws are not negotiable. For example, the law of gravity is never altered, amended, or suspended; it is an immutable law. There are laws of thermodynamics, laws of cause and effect, and many other natural laws in force. They have been in force since Creation, and they will be in force until the consummation. So it is with God's moral law. Since it emanates from God's moral nature, it is immutable and will stand as long as time stands. We are introduced to moral law in Genesis. It precedes the Mosaic Law, is incorporated into the Levitical Law, and succeeds it by its inclusion into the New Testament Law, "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25) or the "royal law" (James 2:8).

The issue of capital punishment was first addressed in Genesis 9:6 in the instructions to Noah and his family after the great deluge. After God destroyed mankind because He "saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5), He said, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." Why was this punishment instituted? First, a person who takes life usurps authority and presumes to take the place and role of the Divine. Acts 17:25 says, ". . . he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. . . ." Revelation 1:18 tells us that Christ has "the keys of hell and of death." Job 14:5 clearly states, "Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds. . . ." When one "sheddeth man's blood," he usurps authority that belongs only to God.

Another reason this punishment was instituted was due to God's moral nature. Moral law is just. Isaiah 45:21 says God is "a just God"; in other words, He is a God of justice. This is the reason we see the moral law of retribution throughout the Scriptures; it is morally right. Justice is right. It is an unalterable moral law. We see it in Genesis 9:6: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood [this is the deed or the act], by man shall his blood be shed [the retribution]. . . ." This moral law, or principle, is throughout the Scriptures. Consider Haman in Esther 7:10: "So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai." The Psalmist recognized this principle when he wrote: "He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealings shall come down upon his own pate" (Psalm 7:15-16). Solomon reiterated this in his writings when he said, "Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return unto him" (Proverbs 26:27). Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 26:52. He brought to mind the unalterable law of retribution: ". . . for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." The Apostle Paul penned it in its most familiar form in Galatians 6:7: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

From these passages we can see that this principle, or moral law, is timeless. Again, the Genesis account predates the Mosaic era, the writings of David and Solomon were during the legal era when the Mosaic Law was in force, and Paul's writings reach into the New Testament era. This teaches us that this law of retribution was not just a Mosaic injunction, or something that commenced with the Mosaic Law, nor did it culminate with it; it is a moral law.

Another reason this law of retribution was instituted was that God is a God of order. From the smallest molecular structures and atoms to the most vast universes, everything is in perfect order. First Corinthians 14:40 says, "Let all things be done decently and in order." For there to be order, there must be law; and for a law to be effective, there must be consequences for its disregard. As we view these texts concerning capital punishment, we must realize that when they were instituted, it was to establish civil order. These passages are not dealing with a man's spiritual state or the offer of mercy for one's soul. The Apostle Paul penned in 1 Timothy 1:9, "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless



and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murders of mothers, for manslayers. . . ." All men will not submit to spiritual law; therefore, there must be civil law for society's protection to set proper bounds and the punishment for violation of those boundaries. Without such the result would be chaos and anarchy. God is a God of order, and He established these bounds. On Mount Sinai, in giving the commandments, He declared, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13). A clearer rendering was given by Jesus in Matthew 19:18: "Thou shalt do no murder." What was the punishment for murder under the Mosaic Law? It was the same as in the preceding period: "He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death" (Exodus 21:12).

Some would hazard to say that those who execute the death sentence are guilty of the same crime as the perpetrator. On the contrary, God authorized those acting in a governmental capacity to "put to death." This portion of the Law was reiterated throughout the Pentateuch. Leviticus 24:17 says, "And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death." In the Book of Numbers it is very explicit, not only in describing the punishment but also in giving authority to carry out the sentence. Numbers 35:16-19 states: "And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death. And if he smite him with throwing a stone, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death. Or if he smite him with an hand weapon of wood, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death. The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him." We can clearly see there was a prescribed manner of imposing punishment, and an officer of their society was commissioned and charged to administer the penalty to the offender.

Some might venture to say that this was in the Old Testament period and the Jewish economy and, therefore, was nailed to the Cross and abolished. However, we must remember that this Law had its basis in moral law, which comes from God's moral nature. In Malachi 3:6 the Lord declared, "I am the Lord, I change not." God's nature does not change. Moral nature is ever the same; thus, moral law is unchangeable.

We see capital punishment validated in the New Testament as well. Read the words of the repentant thief in rebuking the other malefactor: "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds . . ." (Luke 23:40-41). This thief recognized that his punishment was due, accurate, and legitimate. Notice also that though Christ dispensed spiritual mercy when He said, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43), He neither corrected him for faulty thinking or theology nor stopped his execution. Why? The words of the repentant man were "we indeed justly," and Jesus concurred with that admission.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:17, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am come not to destroy, but to fulfill." Christ is the embodiment of all the righteous principles set forth in the Old Testament. Does the New Testament, as did the Old, expressly deal with the power of the government in this matter? Certainly so! Paul dealt with it in great length in Romans 13:1-4. This passage in the Amplified Bible portrays the truth more clearly: "Let every person be loyally subject to the governing (civil) authorities. For there is no authority except from God [by His permission, His sanction], and those that exist do so by God's appointment. Therefore he who resists and sets himself up against the authorities resists what God has appointed and arranged [in divine order]. And those who resist will bring down judgment upon themselves [receiving the penalty due them]. For civil authorities are not a terror to [people of] good conduct, but to [those of] bad behavior. Would you have no dread of him who is in authority? Then do what is right and you will receive his approval and commendation. For he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, [you should dread him and] be afraid, for he does not bear and wear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant to execute His wrath (punishment, vengeance) on the wrongdoer."

Paul clearly let us know that the civil authority "does not bear and wear the sword for nothing." What is "the sword"? It is an instrument to injure, maim, or kill, or in the words of the text, "to execute." In this passage Paul reaffirmed the legitimacy of punishment, even capital punishment. Some may say that is not clear in this text, but the Scriptures are very clear that this was Paul's understanding. Consider his words in Acts 25:11: "For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die. . . ." This verse makes it explicitly clear that in this New Testament dispensation certain crimes are "worthy

of death," and that when one is guilty of such crimes, he ought to die.

I trust that you can see that this is a moral principle or law that transcends all ages. The Lord Himself instituted it in Genesis, in the Patriarchal period, long before the giving of the Mosaic Law. He reiterated it in the era of the Levitical Law, and the Apostle Paul validated it in this New Testament era subsequent to the legal era. It is a moral law that is still in effect as much as are the laws of nature. One may repent, receive a dispensation of mercy from God, and make Heaven his home, and we can rejoice in his salvation. Nevertheless, just as with the thief on the cross, this does not negate the justice, or the rightness, of one's receiving "the due reward for [one's] deeds" (Luke 23:41). Salvation will remove the spiritual penalties of men's sins, but it does not eliminate the consequences. This is the reason Solomon penned in Ecclesiastes 12:1, "Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. . . ." Again, this passage portrays the moral law of retribution.

Capital crime should be punished with capital punishment. The way to eliminate capital punishment is to prevent the crime, by individuals gaining an experience of salvation while they are young, and then by heeding the admonition in Proverbs 3:6, which states, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." When one has truly yielded to Christ in his youth, not only is his soul saved but possibly his life.

## Cremation

The subject of cremation is a topic that many may not consider an issue; nonetheless, it is one upon which the Scriptures are plain. To begin this study, we must address questions such as these: When did this practice originate? Among what societies has it been prevalent? Is there a reason or a meaning behind it? What do the Scriptures teach concerning this matter?

First, let us consider the origin of the practice. The Cremation Association of North America states in an article entitled *The History of Cremation* that "Scholars today quite generally agree that cremation probably began in any real sense . . . around B.C. 3000 and most likely in Europe and the Near East." This article goes on to say, "Prevalent though the practice was among the Romans, cremation was rare with the early Christians who considered it pagan." The Concise Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, Third Edition, states in its definition of cremation that it is the "Disposal of a corpse by fire, widely practiced in some societies, notably India and Ancient Greece and Rome. The rise of Christianity ended the custom in Europe."

As we can see, that practice originated in ancient times among pagan cultures. Funk and Wagnell's *New Encyclopedia*, Volume 7, page 133, says: "Cremation was widely practiced in antiquity. . . . the early Jews forbade cremation, believing it was a desecration of the work of God. Similarly, later Christians prohibited the practice. . . ." We can clearly see that this practice originated in pagan cultures, and both Judaism and the early morning church stood against it. Why? Note that it was prevalent in India, Greece, and Rome, in cultures that were highly superstitious and pagan. The Apostle Paul told those in Greece in Acts 17:22, ". . . ye are too superstitious."

What is the belief behind cremation? The *Illustrated Columbia Encyclopedia*, Volume 6, page 1624, tells us: "[Cremation's] use is often related to a belief in the properties of fire as a purifying agent. Its object may also be to light the way of the soul to the other world, or to prevent the return of the dead." Why do the Hindus of India and other heathen religions cremate? They do it in the belief that the dead are not resurrected. They believe that the dead will be reincarnated; therefore, to destroy the body is to release the spirits of the deceased, allowing them to come back in another form. Also, some who practice cremation among the heathen think that by destroying the body of the deceased, the fear of that individual staying in the vicinity and haunting the loved ones is diminished. Can you see how heathenish and pagan such a practice is?

What do the Scriptures say? First, we will look at some general principles such as, "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22). A true saint of God should not want to be associated with the mythologies of the Greeks, the paganism of the Romans, and the Hindus of India. Second Corinthians 6:17 admonishes, ". . . be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing. . . ." Sad to say, with the decline of time-honored Christian values in American society, this practice is resurging and becoming more prevalent, but the Scriptures plainly teach, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil . . ." (Exodus 23:2). In all ages the Lord has wanted His people to be a separate and distinct people who followed Him and His will and not the customs or practices of the heathen. In Jeremiah 10:1-2 we see this principle reiterated when the Prophet Jeremiah penned: "Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen . . . ."

We can see that on the basis of general biblical principles, this practice should be avoided as heathenish and pagan, one with which the saints of God should not want to be associated but rather one from which we want to be separate. Is the Bible specific about this? What is God's will in this matter? What do the Scriptures specifically teach? Jesus taught in Matthew 19:8 that if one desires to know the perfect will of God, he needs to go back and view that which was from the beginning. Genesis 2:7 tells us, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground. . . ." In Genesis 3:19 the Lord revealed His perfect will when He said, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Here we can see very vividly expressed that man is to "return unto the ground," alluding to the act of burial. God Himself instituted the practice of burial as His will. This text also reveals to us that God's design is that, just as man was "formed of the dust" (Genesis 2:7), "unto dust shalt [he] return." The divine will is for man to return, through natural

processes, to the original state from which he came. To negate or circumvent this process is to circumvent the will of God. This divine will is reiterated in the writings of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12:7, which states, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Cremation is diametrically opposed to this process.

Let us consider the biblical practice concerning the dead. Nowhere in the annals of Scripture is cremation practiced by the people of God. The biblical practice has always been burial. In Genesis 25:8-10 we find the account of the death of Abraham, the father of the faithful. Verse 9 says, "And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him. . . ." Burial is recorded as the only method practiced throughout the Scriptures by the people of God. Consider the references to the burial of not only Abraham but of Sarah (Genesis 23:1-4), Rachel (Genesis 35:19-20), Isaac (Genesis 35:29), Jacob (Genesis 49:33, 50:1-13), Joseph (Genesis 50:26), Joshua (Joshua 24:29-30), Samuel (1 Samuel 25:1), and David (1 Kings 2:10).

Burial was an Old Testament practice, and the New Testament saints regarded it as the only proper procedure. Among those mentioned are John the Baptist (Matthew 14:10-12), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5-10), and Stephen (Acts 8:2). We are instructed in 1 Peter 2:21 that "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." What was His example regarding the handling of the dead? He said in Matthew 26:12, "For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial." Christ was buried, and He is our example in all things.

Biblically, for a person not to have a proper burial was considered a dishonor. In 1 Kings 21:23-24 it is recorded: "And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat." Not being afforded a proper burial was considered a curse and a dishonor.

Even in adverse circumstances, the people of God practiced burial. Consider the case of Joseph. His body was kept for more than four hundred years in Egypt, transported for forty years in the wilderness, and then buried in the promised land (Genesis 50:24-25; Exodus 13:19; Joshua 24:32). How much easier it would have been for them to have cremated Joseph and carried his remains in a small urn, but they never even considered that. Why? Joseph was a follower of the one true God and had hope of the resurrection. Thus, he was afforded an honorable burial. This illustration conveys a great and practical truth to us: even if cremation is easier, more convenient, and less expensive, it is still to be rejected, just as the Israelites rejected its more convenient and more economical way of transporting Joseph's body.

The Scriptures denounce treatment of a body being burned or cremated. Amos 2:1 declares, "Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime. . . ." Here we can see that this action (cremation) invited severe punishment from God.

Consider the body of a child of God. The Apostle Paul said, "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The body of a saint is the temple of the Holy Ghost and should be accorded special reverence and respect as befitting a temple. Notice that verse 19 says that "ye are not your own." Since we do not rightfully have ownership of our bodies, it is not a matter of our will but that of the Owner—God; it is a matter of His divine will. Romans 14:8 says, "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

Christian burial portrays the truth of the resurrection. Acts 24:15 tells us, ". . . there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." When one dies, the body is sown, or planted. The physical body is called the seed for the resurrected body. When a literal seed is planted, the seed decomposes and a new plant comes forth; so it is spiritually. When the body of a child of God is buried, the seed is planted for the resurrected body that shall come forth one day.

Look at the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:35-38: "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body." Verse 42 says, "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised

in incorruption."

When a farmer plants his crops, he does not destroy the seed or burn the seed, but he plants it in the hope of a harvest. So it is with Christian burial: the body is sown in hope and serves as a testimony of unwavering faith in the belief of a harvest, the resurrection. Contrast this with the cremation practiced by the heathens. They have no hope of a resurrection and no knowledge of a God who allows the holy to be "sown in weakness . . . raised in power" (1 Corinthians 15:43). The heathens are a people steeped in darkness and superstition, but "we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (1 Thessalonians 5:5); therefore, let us not practice deeds or acts that would associate us with those that have no light and no hope. Ephesians 4:20 says, "But ye have not so learned Christ." We need to do as Christ our example did and, even in our death and burial, show forth our faith in Christ and the resurrection which is to come. Thank God, we have a glorious hope of a coming resurrection, and should death overtake us, let our burial, the seed being sown, serve as a witness of our hope and faith in the words of Jesus in John 5:28-29: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life. . . ." We have a blessed hope and should not desire to do anything that would associate us with those who do not. Cremation is heathen and pagan, and it should be shunned by every believer. We should portray our blessed hope of the resurrection to the world, not only in life but in burial.

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