By: Michael Maples

The funeral industry is currently more expensive than it has ever been. A large portion of this high price tag is the signature piece of a funeral: the casket. This fine piece of craftsmanship, seen for only a few days before being placed forever out of sight, can quickly build debt for family of a deceased loved one. Whilst the materials and human labor may make it deserving of being costly, is it currently far too expensive for what is essentially an ornate box.

A large portion of why the prices on modern day caskets tend to run so high is simply because the funeral homes can get away with it. Quite often, prices can be hiked simply because the surviving family members are in no position to bargain and shop-around. Instead, they simply wish to move the process along as quickly as possible. Sometimes this means being pressured into the purchase of a casket far outside the budget of the buyer (Cobbey 8).

Often, to increase the price they can sell their caskets for, funeral homes take on even more underhand tactics. In many funeral homes, the high priced caskets are often placed in such a way as to capture the attention of the viewers. One article about caskets and an attempt to find a cheap alternative to the several thousand dollar show room pieces a woman states that "They led us to a hall on the way to the boiler room." The article goes on to speak of another woman being “taken to a basement full of cobwebs.” Still yet, when asking for a casket under $2000, they were given the reply “Oh . . . you want the welfare casket?” These are just some examples of the countless efforts by the funeral homes to achieve as much profit as possible, by any means necessary. (www.funerals.org)

These efforts are often successful: on average, a casket shopper will buy one of the first three caskets he or she is presented. To make matters worse, sometimes even the cheap caskets are modified to be as least appealing as possible. They may be painted uglier colors to turn away some potential buyers. Lastly, cheaper caskets require being ordered, and in order to even see the cheaper selection you may have to ask to view a catalog. (www.scambusters.org)

Speaking strictly in terms of money, these caskets simply are not worth how much they cost. Whether a casket is wooden or metal, they are often drastically overpriced. In today’s industrial age, caskets are quite capable of being mass-produced in factories almost anywhere in the world. In fact, books and websites are available to help you build your own if you so wish. As for the professional work, many of the special touches that allow for markups in the cost of caskets are almost insulting. Take for example the “protective gaskets” found on many of today’s high quality caskets. These rubber gaskets supposedly keep things on the outside such as dirt and water from entering the casket. These gaskets which can be produced for less than $20 often result in as much as a $700 markup. (www.scambusters.org)

Clearly these are not ethical business practices. When one considers
that the goal of a mortician is to organize and manage a funeral so that the friends and family of the deceased do not have to experience the added stress, it appears all the worse. They are not helping to relieve stress; they are creating it. Ironically, the motives of a mortician are often driven purely by greed, one of the seven deadly sins.

Works Cited