

The Origin of Giving Offerings to God

By Dr. Robert A. Morey

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Introduction

Have you ever wondered when, where, and why did people begin the practice of giving offerings to God? Why do we give an offering to God during the worship service? Can we omit this practice and just put a box at the door and let people drop in whatever they want? Instead of looking inside ourselves to human reason, emotions or experience, let us go to the Bible and find out what God says about offerings.

I. Giving to God Was a Creation Ordinance

God came down to man in human form in the Garden of Eden and taught man about all things including how to worship Him ([Gen. 3:8](#)). From the New Testament we learn that it was the eternal Son of God who came in the form of a man and walked and talked with them in the Garden. This is why the conversations between God, Adam and Eve are causal and quite normal. They were talking to the God/man standing in front of them. (See my book on the Trinity for the documentation.)

II. Giving To God Was Part of the Worship of God Before and After the Fall

- A. After the Fall, God still came to man in human form ([Gen. 3:8](#)). This is why the conversations between God, Adam and Eve recorded in [Gen. 3:8-19](#) and between God and Cain recorded in [Gen. 4:3-16](#) are casual and quite normal as one man talks to another. God was visibly in front of them in the form of a man.
- B. Notice that the giving of offerings was not something new or novel invented by Cain or Abel. The Hebrew text indicates that the giving of offerings is something that they had been doing all their lives. Luther commented:
"The custom of offering sacrifices was not a later innovation, but dates back to the beginning of the world ... the practice of offering sacrifices was handed down from Adam..."
- C. In his classic commentary on Genesis, Candlish states that the phrase "in the process of time" ([Gen. 4:3](#)) in the Hebrew text meant that God came to visit Adam and his family at specific times, and they gave Him offerings to show their gratitude for all of His blessings. Thus, God himself instituted the worship service as the time and place for man to worship Him. The text tells us that Cain and Abel came into the presence of the God/man at the appointed time and place to engage in public worship by the giving of their offerings. As Leupold points out in his commentary on Genesis:
"The brothers had many times before brought their sacrifices after the example of what they had seen their father do."
- D. Both Jewish and Christian commentators point out that Adam and Eve taught their children to

attend the stated worship service and give an offering to God. This is why Cain and Abel gave their offerings to the God/man who stood before them. From the story of Cain and Abel, it is clear that Adam and Eve clearly taught their children:

1. You do not come into the presence of God empty-handed.
2. You don't give to God what costs you nothing.
3. You give of your best to the Lord-not the least; the first fruits of your labor and not the dregs of what is left over at the end.
4. Your offering should be act of faith in the Lord.
5. If your offering is not given in faith, God will not accept your gift.

III. The Story of Cain and Abel

- A. It is amazing that the very first story given in the Bible after the Fall concerns the giving of offerings to God. Of all the spiritual truths to illustrate, God chose the issue of giving offerings to Him. This indicates the high priority He places on this issue. But is the giving of an offering to God a high priority in your life? Does His kingdom have first priority in your life? Or have you thought little or nothing of the giving of offerings?
- B. The story given in [Gen. 4:3-16](#) underscores the principle that God looks at what is in the heart as well as what is in the hand. If the heart is not right, He will reject the gift no matter how large or costly. Mere formalistic worship is not acceptable to God. As Leupold, points out:
- "It is evident that one [Cain] gave because it was time and custom to give-pure formalism; whereas the other [Abel] gave the best-pure, devout worship... With characteristic spiritual discernment the Scripture goes to the heart of things. Formalistic worship is of no value in God's eyes; it is an abomination in the sight of the Lord."
- C. Since Cain's countenance fell when he saw that his gift was not acceptable to God but Abel's gift was accepted, how did Cain know that his offering was not accepted? What did he see? Let us ask the following questions:
1. Are there other times in biblical history when God appeared in human form?
 2. When he was worshiped by offerings?
 3. When there was some kind of visible sign to indicate if the offering was accepted or rejected?

To all three questions we must answer, "Yes" (example [Judges 6:11-24](#); [13:1-23](#)). The God/man would consume with divine fire those offerings that were acceptable to Him. Evidently, Cain's gift was not consumed by the divine fire. It was left on the rock or altar as a testimony to his selfishness. It was obvious to him, his father, mother, brothers and sisters that God had rejected his offering. Thus it was the public shame in front of his family that enraged Cain.

- F. Why was Cain's offering rejected? There has been much speculation by both Jewish and Christian commentators. But [Gen. 4](#) and [Heb. 11](#) give us the specific reasons why Cain's offering was rejected.

The Story Given in Gen. 4:3-16

1. Throughout biblical history God has always demanded that we give Him the "first fruits" of our labor because this means that we have put God first in our priorities. It did not matter if this meant the first fruit, vegetables or grains or the first born of the flock or herd. The first fruit belongs to God. This even applied to the first born of our children. We are to dedicate

them to God.

2. Thus when we read that Abel gave "the first born of his flock" to God, this meant he gave the first fruit of his labor to God. He did not take the first born for himself. No, he put God first and himself second.
3. But the text also says that he gave "the first born ... of their fat" to God. This is the Jewish way of saying that he offered to God the best of the first born of his flock. They were fat and healthy animals without any physical defects. Instead of giving to God the worst animals he could find, he gave the best.

Oh, that we might learn the principle of giving only the best to God. Christians today ask: "What is the least I have to give to God? What is the cheapest way to serve God? What is the absolute minimum I have to do and still be considered a Christian?"

4. What a contrast between righteous Abel and wicked Cain. The text emphasizes that Cain only gave "an offering" of vegetables to God. There are two contrasts that should be pointed out:
 - a. Cain did not give the "first fruits" of his garden to God. The ancient Jews noted that Cain ate the first fruit of his harvest. And now he brings some later fruit to offer to God. This shows that God was not first in his priorities.
 - b. Cain did not bring the "fat" of the harvest to God, i.e. he did not offer the best vegetables he had. No, what he offered was some old, withered vegetables that he was not interested in eating. He gave the dregs of his labor to God.
1. These sins so controlled Cain that he thought he could offer trash to God and get away with it. No wonder God rebuked him and told him to master these sins ([Gen. 4:7](#)).
2. But Cain did not repent. Instead he murdered his brother in a fit of jealousy and rage. He buried the body and thought that no one saw what he had done. He did not see the God/man anywhere around and thus he concluded that even He did not know about the murder.
3. Then it was time once again for the worship service. Adam and Eve and **all** their children came before the Lord to give their offerings. Cain showed up with some vegetables. But Abel did not show up. So, God asked Cain, "Where is Abel, your brother?"
4. Cain pretended not to know where his brother was. But the Lord standing there revealed the murder and how Cain had buried his brother in the ground. Then God pronounced a curse upon Cain and sent him into exile.
5. Notice, that the conversation between God and Cain took place in the presence of Adam, Eve and their other children. It is recorded in the Bible because it was not a secret conversation but a public one. One can only imagine the pain and grief of Adam and Eve when they heard of the murder of Abel by their son Cain.
6. When we read that Cain was sent away "from the presence" of God ([Gen. 4:16](#)), this meant that the God/man would never appear before him again. Cain would never

again be invited to the public worship of God. He lost his soul, his God and his family.

7. [Genesis 4](#) goes on to record how Cain's descendants went into idolatry and such wickedness as polygamy and murder. The sins of their father were upon them, and they did as he did.
8. Lastly, notice that all these terrible events happened as a direct result of Cain's failure to honor the Lord with the best offerings he could give. By cheating God he cheated himself and brought divine judgment upon himself and his family.
9. Alas, there are some reading this who have the curse of God upon them because, like Cain, they offer only the dregs of their income to God! They do not give the first fruits of their labor to God but spend it on themselves. Will a man rob God? Yes, we can rob God by failing to give him the offerings that are due to Him. What we give to God is an indication of the depth of our love for Him ([Lk. 7:37-50](#)).

The Commentary of Heb. 11:4-6

The foundational principle is set forth in [verse 6](#): "Without faith it is impossible to please God." This is illustrated at the beginning of the chapter by contrasting the offering of Abel to the offering of Cain.

First, notice that Abel gave a "more excellent sacrifice than Cain," i.e. he offered the first fruits of his labor and the best of his flock. He had his priority right. The Lord had first place in his heart and in his life.

Second, Abel's offering was a witness or testimony that he was a righteous and godly man. What you put into the offering basket is a witness to your character and spirituality.

Third, God Himself publicly testified that He accepted the offering of Abel. This divine testimony happened when the divine fire consumed the offering.

Fourth, Abel's sacrifice was accepted because he offered it "by faith." What he gave with his hand was acceptable because of what he had in his heart.

Fifth, Cain offered his sacrifice without faith. Thus Cain's offering did not please God for without faith it is impossible to please Him.

IV. The Story of Abraham and Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20)

- A. The giving of 10 percent or a tithe to God also seems to go back to the Garden of Eden. It is mentioned in this story in such a nonchalant manner that all commentators, Jewish and Christian, acknowledge that the principle of tithing had been established long before Abraham.
- B. That it was later made mandatory by Moses should not be used as a reason to reject it today. Tithing was practiced before the Old Covenant was given on Mt. Sinai. It was practiced by Jesus and the apostles.
- C. To a new Christian, 10 percent seems almost an impossible amount to give to God. They do not see how they can possibly give a tithe and support themselves or their family. So they give to God the dregs of their income. They open their wallet to see what they have left after they have first spent their money on themselves. Their priorities are "Me first-God last." Jesus warned us about having "me first" priorities in [Lk. 9:59-62](#).

- D. But as they grow in grace and knowledge, they begin to see that God wants the first fruits of their labors and not just the dregs. The first thing they should do with their paycheck is to take 10 percent off the top and give it to God before they start spending their money on other things. Thus their priorities change to "God first, me last" ([Matt. 6:33](#)).
- E. Then a miracle happens, they discover that when they tithe to God with the first fruits of their labor, they did not go bankrupt. Somehow God provided for their needs better than when they took the first fruits for themselves. Their trust in what Jesus said in [Lk. 6:38](#) begins to grow. And as they grow in grace and knowledge of Christ, they learn that you cannot out-give God.
- F. But then another miracle happens, they begin giving more than 10 percent to God, and, Instead of ending up in the poor house, God blesses them even more. The tithe is the bare bones minimum of 10 percent. When you give above 10 percent that is called an offering.
- G. Now by grace, they discover that when they give to God out of faith, hope and love, they begin to prosper as never before. This has been the testimony of saints down through the centuries and has been proven over and over again.

To this we must add that [2 Cor. 8:1-15; 9:6-15](#) give us other general principles that determine whether our giving is acceptable to God.



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