



Offering Method in the Early Church and Its Application for Christians Today



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Abstract

This study aims at finding out how offering in the early church can be applied to Christians today. The early church set an example for the church today in the right offering. Their offering is the whole property they sell to share, but they do not diminish. To examine the above phenomenon, a qualitative method was applied. The researchers examined and described the offering in the early church. Using the method, the understanding of offering in the life of worship is hoped to be understood by the Christian today to be applied in church life. Based on the investigation results, it is seen that the way the early church in giving offerings that can be imitated today is as follows. First, giving offerings should be based on willingness, accompanied by gratitude. Second, giving the best that is from the first fruits of a flawless income. Third, the early church gave an offering because God has the right to receive it. It must be realized by the church today. The last, they gave an offering according to their respective income.

1. Introduction

Worship has essential values in Christian life (Wadell, 2002). In worship itself, we worship God with heart, mind, soul and strength. During worship, all believers sing together to praise God, pray together, meet fellow believers and others (Hotz & Mathews, 2006). When believers worship, they give something to God called offering. The offering is one of the critical elements of worship (Milne, 2009). God deserves our offering because of who He is and what He has created. When we worship, we should ask ourselves what we will offer to God when present before Him (Grace, 2003).

Often, people in the church and people outside the church ask why the church should ask for offerings at every service (Dean, 2010). The fundamental reason is that God deserves our offering. He also commands us to bring our offering to Him. He wants us to acknowledge that all of our

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existence and all that we have is from Him. Our offering is one of the ways we show God that we understand the truth. When believers come before God without an offering that is worthy of His acceptance and asking, we say to Him, "I do not need You. I got this job on my strength. I have the energy to do it with my strength" (Evans, 2004).

The offer must be a sincere offering given sincerely. The offer must be the best, the "first fruit" of what we have (Djurubasa & Djurubassa, 2012). Our offering must state God's will, You are the great God who meets the needs of His people. The offering is not only a currency placed in a crate but how to give a worthy offering depends on the attitude of life towards service (Duba, 1980).

The question arises, is God not so rich that He must ask for tithes from us? God is the Creator of this universe. He is the owner of this world and all its contents. So every result of our hard work is in this world; God is entitled to it. We cannot be arrogant by keeping it all to ourselves. Doing so also means we have stolen (Torah 8) or taken what is not our right.

The early church is an example of the present church in the true offering. In Acts 2: 37-42, there is an early church way of life. Baker described the life of the church as follows: They gathered and praised God together and gave offerings, faithful to his faith, attentive, faithful to the teachings given by the apostles, united in fellowship, they felt bound by close love, persevered in prayer, rejoicing, humility, their whole life is to praise God. The wealthy call the poor to eat together. So they remain a group that is closely tied to each other and together serve the Savior. In everyday life, they are not selfish (Baker, 2000). Looking at the early church's picture described above, remarkable is the offering they give to God. Their offer far exceeds what we can draw. Their offering is not only in terms of their lives but also in terms of their wealth. They even sell their property to share, but they do not lack. What a wonderful blessing (Acts 3: 32-37).

That is the description of the offering that God wants. However, has the church today given a dedicated offering to God? What is the best? What is the first offering? The fact is that the offering in the church tends to be less than perfect. Many church offerings are the smallest money they have, for example, a thousand rupiah or two thousand rupiah.

Furthermore, even the offerings they give are not prepared in advance, when they will go to a new place of worship and then exchange their money for a stall or by buying something. The offering is not the result of a reflection of their faith in God, but only as a routine because if he goes to church, he has to give an offering. Moreover, The sad thing is that the money they give is less worthwhile money such as worn out, torn, and already squeezed money. How could the God they worship be happy to receive such an offering? However, that is the reality that is happening in the church today. Based on the phenomena, the researchers are interested in researching it.

2. Materials and Methods

The Early Church

The early church is a reference for the congregation today. The early church is the first church that stood after the gospel's preaching, namely the first church born on earth after Pentecost. In the Gospel of Luke 24:49 and Acts 1: 4, we know that the Lord Jesus instructed His disciples not to leave the city of Jerusalem to wait for the promise of God the Father. The promise was fulfilled, namely by sending the Holy Spirit and perching on the apostles like a flame of fire, on the day of Pentecost. It happened in Jerusalem (Bartlett, 2011).

After Peter, the Apostle of Christ and the other Apostles preached, then submitted themselves to be baptized, they persevered, and with one accord, they gathered every day in the Temple of God. They took turns breaking the bread in their homes and ate together with joy and sincerity while praising God. Moreover, each day, God added their number to the saved people (Acts 2).

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The time it happened was about 33 years which is three years from when Jesus began teaching at about 30 years of age (Luke 3:23). Thus we can know that the early Church (Church) began in the year 33 in Jerusalem, ten days after the Lord Jesus's ascension to heaven. The early church period started from the beginning of the apostle Peter, Paul and others in telling the story of Jesus until the conversion of Emperor Constantine I, approximately 33 to 325. During this period, the church and Christians experienced persecution, especially physical persecution.

The early church is also known as the first Christian congregation consisting of Jews. These Judeo-Christians continued to visit the Temple and synagogue and faithfully obeyed the Law (Acts 2:26; 3: 1) (Berkhof, 1995). Shortly after Pentecost, evangelism began to open up to the Gentiles. The Apostle Philip preached to the Samaritans (Acts 8: 5), and many believed in Christ. The Apostle Peter preached to Cornelius' household who were not Jews (Acts 10), and they also received the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul preached the gospel throughout the Greco-Roman world, Rome itself (Acts 28:16) and possibly even to Spain.

The following is a description of the early church described by Bavink: a) They are loyal to their faith. They faithfully followed the apostles' lessons with full attention. b) They are of one heart in fellowship. They feel bound by intense love. c) In everyday life, they are not selfish. d) They still obeyed Israel's customs. They faithfully went to the Temple, and there they often had great gatherings respected by all. e) They rejoice. Great joy filled the hearts of all of them; that is why there is sincerity to help each other. f) They are humble. g) They praised God. Their whole life is a praise to God and Jesus Christ. h) They are strong. The apostles performed miracles during the church. The inhabitants of Jerusalem liked them because they knew that they had a particular character and had something that unbelievers did not and i) Their number increased every day (Bavinck, 2000).

Life Context Early Church

Politically, the world in which the church was born and developed was divided into two major countries, namely the Roman Empire and the Parthian Empire (After 225 AD: Persia). The Roman Empire encompassed the Mediterranean Sea areas; The Partia / Persian empire includes present-day Iraq and Iran (Berkhof, 1995). Within this broad area, there are various religions. The Roman Empire contained a large number of tribal religions, faiths and many adherents to Judaism. However, every resident is free to follow their respective religions. The Jews were a colony of the Romans. Moreover, every year the Jews had to pay taxes to the Roman rulers. That is why the Jews expected the coming of Messiah, freeing them from the yoke of colonialism.

From a cultural point of view, the culture of Hellenism is most prominent. Hellenism's culture was most firmly rooted in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, especially in the cities (e.g. Alexandria, Anthiokia, etc.). Some Jews hated pagan cultures such as Hellenism, but Jews tried to marry Judaism with Hellenistic culture. From an economic point of view, the Jews were given the freedom to trade anywhere in the Greek world. So, of course, the Jewish economy was quite good. From a social perspective, the relationship between the Jews and other nations was not good enough. It was due to the obedience of the Jews to the Torah laws. They label other religions as kafir because they worship many gods, and everything related to other religions is considered unclean (Berkhof, 1995). So they cannot visit the entertainment places of unbelievers, cannot enter their homes and taste their food.

From a religious perspective, the early church was born in a Jewish community, where it developed. Judaism is mentioned only once in the Bible (Gal. 1:14). Judaism cannot endorse Christianity in its belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Savior. Some Jews were firmly against any influence of foreign religion and culture, and some were more open to the other it and culture.

Nevertheless, the Law remains at the core of their worship. Also, the Jews understood obedience to the Law as a condition for pleasing God. They faithfully maintain the customs of their ancestors.

The place where the Jews worship was the Temple in Jerusalem. But in every town and village. Where there are Jews, there is also one building of their worship, the synagogue. On Saturdays, they gather there to hear the Torah read and explain it.

Offering in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, offering to God is in the form of a sacrifice, which is a product of sheep or agricultural produce. After humans were expelled from the Garden of Eden, their relationship with God was restored through sacrifice (Gen. 4), this form continued until after Noah left the ark (Gen. 8: 20-22). Furthermore, for the first time, an altar was erected by Noah, to offer sacrifices to God (Gen. 8:20). Moreover, the tradition of building an altar to God continued until the journey of the Israelites out of the Land of Egypt (Ex 20: 22-26). Even God made the altar a place to meet face to face with the Israelites (Herlianto, 2006).

A sacrifice offering is an attempt to establish a relationship with God, as a “sweet-smelling offering”, as a confession of sins and mistakes and to please the day of God (Gen. 29:25; Gen. 28: 20-22; Mal. 3: 6- 12). Some sacrifices were offered directly to God by burning on the altar as a sacrifice for sin and guilt, while those that were not burned and other offerings (including tithe) were usually collected at the house of God (Deut. 12: 5-19; 2 Chr 31: 11- 12; Neh 10:38; 13: 10-12; Mal. 3:10) for the care of God and the livelihoods of the priests. The priest is an intermediary official between God and man, who is also given the task of carrying out the sacrificial ceremony on behalf of the people (Ex. 29; Num. 18) (Herlianto, 2006).

Azariah stated that there are three ways the Israelites provide an offering. (1) For devotionals; For that matter primarily needed was a meeting place, first in the form of a tent and then a house or Temple. The two places of worship took place because of a spontaneous and voluntary gift from the Israelites. To set up a tent of meeting the Israelites provided everything that was needed. Men and women brought gold, silver, copper, fine gauze, goat hair, acacia wood, oil for the lamps. The woman twins the goat hair herself. All of these people offered something as a voluntary offering to God (Ex. 35: 4-29). (2) For God’s servants, priests and Levites. Where they received no share of the land, each Israelite gave them a portion of the income. God considered it to be offering Him Himself. (3) For poor people. If there is a celebration, the Israelis must distribute gifts to the poor (Azariah, 2002).

Offering in the New Testament

In the gospels, Jesus never condemned the Jewish offering. Instead, Jesus’ sermon showed that the altar and the offering was a good part of worshipping God (Matt. 5:23; 23:18). Jesus indeed condemned the Pharisees’ attitude to remember that what God wants is mercy, not sacrifice (Matt. 9:13; 12: 7), but this does not mean rejection of offerings. The Temple was also judged by Jesus (as in Matt. 12: 6; 26:61; 27:40; John 2:19; 4:21), but it shows that the offering was secondary and would also disappear. , because the offering of the offering is part of this time that will soon pass. It is in Jesus that the truth is manifested so that the offering ends.

Therefore, we will see that the next teaching of Jesus is no longer about the offering in the Old Testament framework anymore, but about the offering in this new age. The freedom to offer offerings is a characteristic of this new age because the offering refers to what Jesus sacrificed as celebrated in the Lord’s Supper. The church is free to give like the Pharisee who gave the tithe (Matt. 23:23; Luke 18:12) or like Zacchaeus who gave half of what he had (Luke 19:18) or like the poor widow who gave all (Mark. 12:44) depends on the freedom given by Jesus Christ.

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As a continuation, Jesus no longer focused too much on the direct teaching on the theme of the offering, but had to do with stewardship as well as a view of belonging and what is in this world, as we see in some parables, such as (1) 'The rich fool' (Luke 12: 13-21) who helps the congregation not to rely on the property, but on God who is Owner and Ruler over life and life while humans are only borrowers; (2) 'The dishonest treasurer' (Luke 16: 1-8) where students are invited to understand that the treasures in this world, although very important, will not lead to the purpose of this new age, namely the 'eternal tabernacle'; (3) 'Faithful in small things, faithful in big things' (Luke 16: 9-15) which shows that there is freedom from God who gives according to his will, but believers will welcome him with the same attitude, whether small or large; (4) 'The rich man and Lazarus the poor' (Luke 16: 19-31) who reminded the disciples that the management of the property is very decisive and related to the present opportunity to enter eternal life. It was not wealth that kept the rich from Abraham's bosom, but his management.

Offering In Early Church

It has been explained above the types of offerings given by the congregation, then which offerings are made in the early church? The early church offering is described as follows: an atmosphere of togetherness in the early church who cares to share, meet the needs of others, share wealth equitably, and help ease the burdens of others. The early church members volunteered to contribute. It can be seen that they let go of their property willingly.

In literature, the early church is not depicted as offering a tithe; what they are giving is offering love. However, since the early church in Jerusalem was largely a Jewish background, they still tithed. It makes sense when we think about how much they wanted Gentile believers to follow Jewish traditions (KPR 15) (Teo, 2008). Brill agrees with this opinion that among the seven parts of public services in the early church there is an offering and tithing (Brill, 1999).

There is an impression that the early church was revolutionary and did not participate in that era's culture. Therefore, they may look for other alternatives to channel aid to the poor and service (Teo, 2008). In the early church, the believers sold his property and then presented it to the apostles. The offered money was distributed to each person according to his needs. However, none of them is lacking; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; then distributed to each person according to his needs (Acts 4: 34-35).

Bavinck writes: "The feeling of love grows so fertile that the rich feel unworthy that they alone own the land and the houses. Many of them sold all their property, and the result was given to the apostles, as an offering to God. This act is not a contribution, because if so, they give it to the poor. Nevertheless, the meaning is an offering of thanksgiving to God, which is why the apostles' money was given (Bavinck, 2000).

From these facts and quotations, the early church gave offerings to God more than offerings and tithes offerings. They give all or all of the proceeds of the sale of their property to God. What are the features of offering above following the features of offering early church? With the following facts: First, their Early church offering is based on willingness accompanied by gratitude. Second, the Early church gave the "best" that the proceeds from the sale of his property were given directly to the apostles, which meant the first result of his flawless income. The early church gave all their sales, but they did not give in, for they gave in faith. The early church gave an offering because God had the right to accept it.

Bavinck writes that the offering given by the early church was based on love: "The feeling of love grows so fertile that the rich feel unworthy that they are the only ones who own land and houses.

Many of them sold some or all of their property, and it was given to the apostles as an offering to God” (Bavinck, 2000). There are six standards for implementing a good and regular offering, namely:

1. The offering of the “sacrifice” is an answer to faith. The answer comes from gratitude to God and expresses brotherly love.
2. An offering is a means - even though it is simple - for sharing the property with people in need.
3. The focus of the contribution of the offering is the poor people in the congregation itself.
4. The allocation of the offering and its recipients is transparent.
5. The offering’s transmission and distribution must proceed in an orderly manner and with great care.
6. Presumably, giving an offering should be preceded by suggestions that use encouraging and convincing words (Beyer, 2008).

3. Results and Discussions

The early church is an example of today’s congregation in the right offering. Their offering is far beyond what we can describe. Their offering is their whole treasure. They even sold their belongings to divide up, but they were not in need. The following is how to give an offering that can be replicated from the Early church:

1. *Giving Offering With Gratitude and Sincere Heart*

Giving the offering is interpreted as gratitude, which is a sign of gratitude because God has pleased to raise us to be his children through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Baker, 2000). It is clear that this life belongs to God, so it is only right that God wants us to make an offering with a sincere heart. The same as the early church, which willingly sells its assets to be offered to God and distributed to those in need, Christians today should do the same.

Early church giving is priceless, because when they gave all their wealth to God, they did not need, and no one was hungry. It is proof that God still cares for those who love Him more than themselves. In a sincere heart in giving offerings to God, it is not viewed in terms of number or size, because numbers do not limit a grateful heart. There is nothing before God that is too great or too small. What God counts is the heart that gives, whether he gives whatever he wants or what he can. Offer to God what you want and can offer (Darmaputera, 2005).

Today’s congregation needs to emulate this; giving a thankful offering is very pleasing to God; God does not please those who are complaining and insincere. See how God refused Cain’s offering, and how he ended up killing Abel. So great is the result of sin from those who are not sincere.

Today’s congregation should not see the offering as mere routine. There must be offerings in worship activities; thus, the congregation will only give what is just what it is. Congregations tend to forget the essence of the offering itself that God looks at the heart of everyone who gives to Him. Gratitude and a sincere heart are the primary keys in giving offerings.

2. *The Offering Is for God*

By remembering that the world and everything in it belong to God, we will realize that we and all the assets we have belong to God. God has mandated all of us to manage and maintain and use it according to God’s will. Therefore, humans do not have the right to take advantage of all God’s gifts for their interests, but also the sake of God’s glory. Darmaputer emphasized; “That what we own and develop is not our property. That what we own and use for our benefit. That consciously and deliberately, a certain amount is not too big and not too small that we must separate as a sign of our obedience to God and our solidarity with our neighbours.

Moreover, what we give is not a giving or charity, but obligations, namely debt that must be paid" (Darmaputera, 2005). From the above opinion, it is confirmed that what is owned by humans is God's. Giving an offering is an obligation for believers to implement their faith in God as a response to God's abundant love for humans.

In the early church's daily life, some of them sell their treasure to be offered. They presented it through the apostles. They acknowledge that God is sovereign in all of their possessions, that is why they offer up the entire sale of their property, but they are not lacking. The offering that they gave through the apostles did not prevent them from giving. They trusted the apostles to represent God in handling the offering. Did the early church suspect them? Not at all, even Ananias and Sapphira tried to deceive the apostles. They were put to death by God.

Today, the church may be suspicious of the church administrators who manage the offerings to be lazy to give offerings. It cannot be denied that there are still present in the church today, church administrators who are less able to manage church finances, as an example of unclear bookkeeping. Of course, this reduces the interest of the congregation in giving offerings.

Through the example of the early church, today's congregation is reminded that God is the offering owner. In giving offerings, the congregation must maintain that God is entitled to every property of the church, that it owns every inch, even all of the church's assets. Although there are caretakers of the congregation who are unable to manage the congregation's offering may even corrupt the offering money, one thing is sure; God will not let Himself be mocked. God will punish them for playing with Him like Ananias and Sapphira.

3. Offering It Has Been Prepared

Giving an offering is an obligation, so every Christian must have clearly understood that they have to make an offering when they are going to worship. So it should be, we prepare an offering to God long before the day of worship. It means that no time to go to worship and prepare offerings, for example, changing money to a stall.

Preparing an offering is a form of appreciating God's love. If we look at God's people in the Old Testament, God set the criteria for offering the Israelites to Him, for example, the blameless, the firstborn, the fat, and so on. Is this still true? The early church gave all of its sales to the apostles. Isn't that the best offering? Has the offering been planned? In literature, it is not clear whether the offering was planned or not. However, implicitly, of course, the early church has planned what to do, when it will sell its assets or when it gets income from these assets' sale. Moreover, the sole purpose is to present all of that income to God.

Today's congregation needs to take this as an example. When it comes to earning an income, it is necessary to prepare an offering worthy of God for tithing and collection.

4. The Offering Must Be Appropriate

The arrangement and percentage of giving offering have a little demanded a little and those who have a lot are required to give a lot (Darmaputera, 2005). In the early church, those with more wealth give a lot. Thus, those who are rich in wealth should give more, and lack should give little. The example Jesus gave was the Poor Widow in Luke 21: 1-4, where she did not wallow in wealth. But the widow made an offering of her shortcomings and Jesus saw it as a good offering.

But it must still be remembered that those who are wallowing in wealth in giving offerings must still be accompanied by sincerity. Giving an offering is not a place to show off wealth because Jesus criticized the Pharisees to give people so much to see and praise. The early church offers all the sale of its assets with gratitude for God's blessing. Why did they give up the entire sale of the property?

The concept is that those who have a lot should give more offering than those who have a little. Here the congregation gives everything they can because it is proven that the early church is not lacking.

It is time for the church today to apply this in their lives. We have many requests to God, we expect many blessings from God, and we want our requests to be granted by God, but we only give a little to God. Should we do that to God? That is the same as disrespecting God, He blesses a lot, but we give a little to the Giver. Thus, both the poor congregation and the rich congregation must offer according to their abilities.

4. Conclusion

The early church is an example of the present church, in this case, for acting true offering. Their offer far exceeded what we could imagine. Their offer was their whole property. They even sold their property to share, but they did not lack (Acts 3: 32-37). They were united in the alliance, and bound by close affection. The rich people called the poor to eat together. Besides, they together persevered in prayer. So they remain a group that is closely tied to each other and together serve the Savior. In everyday life, they were not selfish. Their whole life was a praise to God in Jesus Christ. The apostles performed many miracles and miraculous signs during society. Their numbers were increasing every day.

Offering early church is the life of those who are full of gratitude to God. In the church, the rich feel unworthy that they alone own land and houses. Many of them sold all their property, and the result was given to the apostles. So as an offering to God. This act is not a contribution, because if so, they give it to the poor.

Therefore, today's church should imitate or apply the method of giving an Early church offering as follows: giving an offering based on a willing heart accompanied by gratitude. The second gives the "best" that is from the first result of flawless income. The third, Early church gave an offering because God had the right to receive it, and the fourth gave an offering according to their respective income.

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