

Thursday, October 12, 2017

The First Gift

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. Gen. 1:31a.

Most of us would agree with the description of creation as "good." We live in the Texas hill country and see the beauty of creation each day. We see the rivers lined with trees. We enjoy the fields covered with wildflowers. We look at the sky on a clear night and see the array of stars and planets that evidences the vastness and majesty of creation. We are aware of the unique characteristics of our planet that enable it to sustain human life and the vast resources it provides.

God created a world that contained everything necessary to meet the needs of mankind. This creation was more than very good; it was magnificent, awe inspiring. It was God's best, and God gave this creation to man, to care for and to enjoy. It was a generous gift, and it was only the beginning of God's generosity. Everything we have comes from God, and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God gave us the path to eternal life with Him.

One of the earliest Bible stories, the story of Cain and Abel, centered on the use of possessions. In specific, the story involved offerings made to God. Abel was a herdsman and Cain was a farmer. As an offering to God, Cain brought "some of the fruit" from his gardens. Able brought the "fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock." Gen. 4:4a. We are told, "The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor." Gen. 4:4b. Both Cain and Abel made offerings to God from their possessions. Because the Bible does not mention the quantity of each offering, we can infer that either there was no material difference in the quantity of the gifts or the amount of the gift was not considered important by God. The important factor appears to be the spirit in which the offering was presented. Abel brought his best to God; Cain did not. Cain's offering of "some fruit" appears to have been the fruit he did not need or want. It was what was left over. The story of Cain and Abel shows clearly that both the offering and the manner in which it is made are important to God.

We are moved by generosity. If we receive a generous gift, we want to express our gratitude by giving something back and we want our return offering to be thoughtful and meaningful. This is the spirit behind Psalm 116. The psalmist asks how we can repay the Lord for his goodness. The simple answer is we can't. Nothing we can do will ever compare with what God has done for us. However, we can express our gratitude to God through our gifts of time, talent and money. We can give our best back to God. God deserves more than our leftovers.