

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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IS GOD OBLIGATED TO ACCEPT WHATEVER MAN OFFERS HIM?

by Lee Moses

Man was created and placed upon the earth to worship God. The apostle Paul noted that God *“hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth . . . That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us”* (Acts 17:26-27). Of all the wondrous life God placed upon the earth, only mankind has the capacity to desire God, to seek God, to appreciate God, to love God, and to adore God. And indeed man has worshipped; from the dawn of time until now, upon every corner of the globe. So universal is the concept of worship that many have concluded that man is created with a “God hole” in his being, which he will incessantly attempt to fill with all manner of worship. Today one can observe mankind attempting worship in many ways; from reverent prayer to wild hand clapping and dancing, from preaching of the Gospel to elaborate theatrical presentations. But is God obligated to accept whatever one offers Him?

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

Worship is man’s means of approaching God. The English word is effectively a contraction of “worthy” and “ship”; thus implying the worthiness of the Recipient of worship. The Old Testament word used for worship (*shachah*) means “to bow down, to bow down before God, to worship, to pay adoration, even without prostration.”¹ The New Testament word for worship (*proskuneo*) is a compound word, taking the Greek *kuneo*, “to kiss,” and *pros*, meaning

“toward.” Taken together, this compound word signifies an act of reverent adoration toward a Divine Object. Following are a few of the ways worship has been defined:

“The outgoing of the human spirit toward God.”

“A group of specialized activities in which we draw near to and commune with God in an extraordinary manner.”

“Worship is man’s response to God’s revelation of himself.”

“The overflow of a grateful heart under a sense of divine favor.”

“The outpouring of a soul at rest with God.”²

To further see what worship is, let us see how worship has been offered. Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord (Genesis 4:3-4). Job *“rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings . . . continually”* (Job 1:5). As the Lord passed before him, *“Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped”* (Exodus 34:8). Jehoshaphat the king of Judah *“bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD”* (2 Chronicles 20:18). Jesus worshipped the Father in prayer and song (Matthew 26:30; Luke 11:1); observing the worship instructions given in the Old Testament under which He lived (Matthew 26:17-20; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 9:16-17), and setting forth worship instructions that would be observed under the New Testament

following His death (Luke 22:19-20). From the establishment of Christ’s church, those who obeyed the Gospel *“continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”* (Acts 2:42).

IS THERE UNACCEPTABLE WORSHIP?

To ask the above question is to answer it for one familiar with the Bible. Oftentimes mankind has offered worship to unworthy objects. Very shortly after their deliverance from Egypt, the people of Israel were found offering worship to a golden calf they had made themselves (Exodus 32). This brought the fierce wrath of the Lord upon them. It is also significant that when the object of their worship was changed, their conduct surrounding their worship changed: *“And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. . . the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies”* (vv. 6, 25). The word for “naked” holds the idea of moral unrestraint, demonstrating the moral collapse that usually takes place when the one true God is not the object of worship (compare with Romans 1:22-31).

Years later, the descendants of some of these people had given themselves over to false and revolting worship practices and objects:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring evil upon [Jerusalem], the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. Because they have forsaken me, and have

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estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods . . . They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind (Jeremiah 19:3-5).

But even worship intended toward the correct Object can be unacceptable. In the first recorded acts of worship, Abel's offering was accepted, but Cain's was rejected (Genesis 4:3-5). Shortly after their sanctification as priests, Aaron's two eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, attempted to offer "*strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not*" – for which they were immediately incinerated by searing flames from the Lord (Leviticus 10:1-2). When King Uzziah sought to burn incense before the Lord, a task reserved for the priests, he was instantly smitten with leprosy (2 Chronicles 26:18-19). The Lord pointedly asked the people of Israel regarding their animal sacrifices, "*Ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an*

offering: should I accept this of your hand?" (Malachi 1:13). Jesus said of the scribes and Pharisees, the spiritual leaders of Israel, "*But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*" (Matthew 15:9). Ananias and Sapphira attempted to lie to God in what they offered, for which they were both struck dead (Acts 5:1-10).

It is undeniable that there has been unacceptable worship in the past, whether in object or in action. There is no reason to think that there is not unacceptable worship yet today. Considering how God views such worship, one should proceed with the utmost caution to ensure that his worship does not fall into this category.

WHO SETS THE TERMS OF WORSHIP?

God created man a worshipful being, and He also created man an intelligent being. But does this mean that man innately has the ability to determine what should be offered to God?

Throughout the pages of holy writ, a recurrent theme is that self-directed man is also misdirected man. At the conclusion of the book of Judges, a book depicting Israel's repeated failure, comes the summary, "*In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes*" (21:25). It is not stated that they knew what was right, and chose wrong instead. They merely had individual **human** standards of right and wrong, which proved to be no standards at all. Solomon wrote, "*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*" (Proverbs 14:12). Jeremiah recognized, "*O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*" (Jeremiah 10:23). The apostle Paul wrote, "*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not*" (Romans 7:18).

These passages make clear that man needs Divine direction to "direct his

steps"; "to perform that which is good." Would not this especially be true of worship, as it is man's means of approaching God? Would not this especially be true of worship, considering man's long track record of unacceptable worship?

Consider the first recorded acts of worship: Why was Abel's offering accepted, but Cain's was not? "*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain*" (Hebrews 11:4, emphasis added). Since "*faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17), Abel clearly offered as God had instructed while Abel did not.

What was the problem with Nadab and Abihu's worship? They "*offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not (‘which he had not commanded them,’ American Standard Version)*" (Leviticus 10:1). It was not that Nadab and Abihu were given the prerogative of choosing how they would worship God, and made a wrong choice. It was not even that God had specifically forbidden them from offering the fire that they did. It was that they offered "strange," or unauthorized, fire that God had not told them to offer. God sets the terms of worship. Worship is for God, it is to please God; and no man or woman can conceive in his mind what pleases God unless God reveals it in His word: "*For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God*" (1 Corinthians 2:11).

While created intelligent, able to discern that he **needs** to worship, man needs God's revelation to know **how** to worship. And thankfully God has given His revelation for today, the New Testament, that man can understand how to worship God acceptably (2 Peter 1:3; Ephesians 5:17).

CONCLUSION

If most people were to be asked the question, "Is God obligated to accept whatever man offers him?", the answer would certainly be no. Most people

Nellie J. Hunt Crews 1909–2005 -A Tribute-

would acknowledge that God holds the prerogative of setting the terms of worship. Most people recognize that there is unacceptable worship, though they have varying definitions of what constitutes unacceptable worship.

But yet if the same people would consider their own worship practices in light of these plain facts, they might be shocked. Where in the New Testament does God say that rock and roll bands constitute acceptable worship? Where does He say that theatrical presentations constitute acceptable worship? Where does He say that a piano constitutes acceptable worship? Where does He say that partaking of the Lord's Supper on a day of one's own choosing constitutes acceptable worship? Where does He say that a divided assembly constitutes acceptable worship? Do not such practices put one in the class of Cain rather than of Abel? Do they not put one in the class of Nadab and Abihu rather than of Moses?

Is God obligated to accept whatever man offers him? Jesus Christ said, *"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:24). Let us be thankful that we **can know** the truth (8:31-32), and that we can know that we are worshipping God acceptably.

And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:21-22).

¹ William Wilson, **Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies** (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d), p. 490.

² Quoted by E.C. Meadows, "The Nature of Worship," in **The Church Today: Current Issues, Problems, and Challenges**, ed. William Woodson (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman College, 1975), pp. 133-134.

Romans 12:7 says to *"give honor to whom honor is due."* Sister Nellie Crews is certainly one to whom we at the **Fulton County Gospel News** believe honor is due.

Sister Crews was born in Mammoth Spring, AR March 26, 1909. She later moved to St. Louis, MO, where she spent most of her adult life. In 1998 she moved to Mobile, AL to be near her only child, a son, Hurley Crews. Sr. Brother Hurley Crews was as devoted in caring for his mother as any child could possibly be. Sister Nellie died January 3, 2005 in Mobile at the age of 95 years.

Throughout her years Nellie was a faithful Christian in word and deed. She worked (after her retirement) until she was 89 for St. Louis County's Older Resident Program (CORP) as a coordinator for their volunteer program. More than that, sister Crews was a generous and caring giver of her time, talent and money to benevolent and mission programs of the Lord's church, as well as her own personal selfless and liberal acts of charity and kindness directly to others. For many, many years sister Nellie sent \$100.00 a month to help preach the gospel through the pages of the **Fulton County Gospel News**. She has been our most liberal individual contributor over the years. Nellie believed the gospel should continue to be preached

to all the world and believed that she was helping in that effort by her financial aid to **FCGN**. Indeed, she was. We shall miss her personal love and prayers for our work, as well as her generosity. The world is diminished by her passing, and heaven is blessed by her presence. Nellie enriched the lives of all with whom she came in contact. We need more Christians to demonstrate the faithfulness and sacrifices of Nellie Crews. I am confident that sister Nellie would want us to remember the words of the apostle Paul, when he wrote: *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord"* (1 Corinthians 15:58). She now knows firsthand the reality of this promise of the great apostle. She truly is one who lived an example worthy of our imitation. May God bless and comfort her son Hurley and his family. Brother Crews is following in his mother's footsteps in supporting good works to the best of his ability. Doubtless, in a number of ways Nellie's influence will continue for years to come.

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THE BUSY CHRIST

by Eddy Gilpin

Our Lord was busy during His brief time on earth. He was constantly looking for ways to please the Father, benefit man and use His time in a fruitful way. Prior to healing the blind man (through His instructions for him to wash in Siloam's waters), Jesus made the statement, *"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is*

day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

This statement outlines in a wonderful way and teaches us many valuable lessons. If we will seek to emulate our Master, we, too, will be busy in being about our Father's business (1 Peter 2:21).

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Obligation Jesus said, “I must work” We, too, must be engaged in services for Him. We are told that only the obedient will be saved (Hebrews 5:8-9). Faith without works of obedience is dead (James 2:17-26). We were created “*unto good works*” (Ephesians 2:10).

Object Jesus’ next phrase reveals that His must be “the works”. Not just any system of works will do. A particular arrangement and order are under consideration by Him. Likewise, we must see to it that we are not only engaged in activity for the Lord’s Cause, but in the proper activity.

Overseer Jesus stated that the works in which He was to be engaged were those “*of him that sent me*”. Herein is revealed the particular system to which He was to prescribe—only those things authorized by God. The same is true with us. Any other system makes faith vain (Ephesians 2:8-9) and makes us to be our own masters (Jeremiah 10:23).

Opportunity Jesus said this must be done “*while it is day.*” Opportunity for Him was fleeting. He had an appointment with the cross. Opportunity for each of us is fleeting as death draws 24 hours closer with each passing day (1 Peter 1:24; James 4:14; etc.).

Obstacle Jesus stated that “*the night cometh.*” There is a time approaching that will prevent man from doing the Father’s will. The “night” to which Jesus alludes will be a night of rest for the faithful and a night of terror for the disobedient (Matthew 25:46). When the night comes, the day will be “*far spent*” (Romans 13:12). And the “*summer [will be] ended*” (Jeremiah 8:20).

Outcome With reference to this night that stands as the great obstacle of work, Jesus said it is a time “*when no man can work.*” The light of

opportunity will have given way to the shadows of distress for far too many (Matthew 7:21-23). Jesus spoke of five virgins who waited until the night to do what they should have done in the daytime. For them, the door was shut and no entrance was given (Matthew 25:1-13).

Are you working the works of the Father? Are you busily engaged in His cause while the light of opportunity yet shines? Or, are you waiting for twilight to begin your labors? If so, you might be like those five foolish virgins and wait too long. “*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

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GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God’s commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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