



# Contexts of Worship

*Understanding worship in the various situations of life*

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M. V. Pereira



## **Contexts of Worship**

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## INTRODUCTION

The resonating chorus of God’s written revelation to humanity is that of worship. Scores of Psalms echo this chorus by declaring at various times and in various ways the theme of worship. The Scripture generally describes worship in terms of creaturely acknowledgement and response to the great and majestic worth of God the Creator, as in Psalm 96:8, “Ascribe to the LORD the glory of His name.”<sup>1</sup> This is a necessary response to the Holy One, and is not presented as an optional prerogative, but rather His people are called to “Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His holy hill” (Psalm 99:9). Although the form and style of worship has been the subject of debate and controversy within the Christian church for hundreds of years, its priority is generally not disputed. Indeed, the vast majority of Christians would agree that the “supreme duty of the creature for time and eternity is to worship the Creator”<sup>2</sup> and that even today worship is “the most important activity of the church, which occupies the central hour in the Christian week.”<sup>3</sup>

Assuming agreement that worship, individually and corporately, is our ultimate priority and avoiding debate over style and specific expression, this booklet aims particularly to

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of the Bible are from, *New American Standard Bible: 1977* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *The Ultimate Priority* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), vii.

<sup>3</sup> Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream: Hope, 1993), 96.

examine the distinctions of worship in various contexts and life experiences. At times, Scripture describes worship as an unceasing personal responsibility of each individual, and still at other times it describes worship as more of a corporate event at a particular location and time. Is there a biblical distinction between *all of life as worship* and *worship events*, between worship in *daily life* and in *church gatherings*, or between *private* and *corporate* worship? What are the implications of such distinctions? How might a better understanding of these distinctions improve one's perspective of worship and assist believers in becoming better worshippers of God in spirit and truth? Answers to these and similar questions will be addressed by means of exegetical analysis of relevant biblical texts.

An inductive examination of worship and its contexts will follow along with discussion that seeks to identify evidences of distinctions between worship contexts and explanations for such distinctions. Conclusions will be formulated by evaluating *descriptions* and *prescriptions* of worship in Scripture. The ultimate aim will be to pursue a biblically accurate understanding of Christian worship in the various contexts of human life and experience.

## THE FUNCTION OF WORSHIP

If we accept the definition of true worship as involving “reverential human acts of submission and homage before the divine Sovereign, in response to His gracious revelation of Himself, and in accordance with His will,”<sup>4</sup> we endorse the necessity of a broad description that intentionally avoids limiting true worship to specific acts in specific contexts. In an effort to formulate a discussion concerning the function of worship, the concept that worship involves an *act* that may be *expressed in various ways and in various contexts* will first be explored.

It may be argued that a biblical understanding perceives worship as involving an act—a creaturely action that has a purposeful *function*. Although true and acceptable ‘worship’ is predicated upon the inner person or spirit (cf. John 4:23) and its disposition toward the object of worship, it is portrayed in Scripture as an ostensible action—as Robert Webber has suggested, “worship is a verb.”<sup>5</sup> Though an act is portrayed, it is not just any act. Worship describes a very specific *kind of act*, and yet it does not necessarily describe a very specific *action*. Therefore, we may conclude that a biblical understanding of worship involves an act that is qualified in essence or substance without being limited to a particular form or style.

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel I. Block, “For the Glory of God: A Biblical Theology of Worship” (unpublished syllabus, The Master’s Seminary, Winterim 2009), 24.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Brandenstein, “A Pastor’s Survival Guide For Worship And Music Ministries” (unpublished syllabus, The Master’s Seminary, Fall 2008), 3.

Secondly, a biblical understanding of worship should capture the usage range of corresponding and related terms. Specific times, places, and expressions of worship vary considerably in Scripture, yet these varied instances of worship appear to function so as to serve toward the same ultimate purpose. Even the variety of words used in the original languages, to some degree, illustrates the variety of contexts wherein worship can be expressed. It has been observed that “in Scripture, there are two groups of Hebrew and Greek terms that are translated ‘worship’. The first group refers to ‘labor’ or ‘service’. . . . The second group of terms means literally ‘bowing’ or ‘bending the knee’.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the different kinds of acts that these word groups describe generally occur in different contexts and in different life experiences. Furthermore, even identical terms for worship find expression in a variety of circumstances. For example, the primary Hebrew term used to express worship is seen in a variety of circumstances and life experiences. For example, in each of the following instances the same Hebrew word is used to express worship. Abraham sets out to ‘worship’ God through the offer a burnt offering—even though he understood that it would be his own son (cf. Gen 22:5). Abraham’s servant responds in ‘worship’ as he spontaneously ‘bows low’ as a result of being overwhelmed by YHWH’s faithful lovingkindness to Abraham and in answer to his own prayer (cf. Gen 24:26–27).<sup>7</sup> Joshua “fell on his face to the earth

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<sup>6</sup> John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1996), 1.

<sup>7</sup> The object of Eliezer’s worship is clearly YHWH, however, there is no particular presence or manifestation of YHWH in this episode.



and worshipped” (Josh 5:14, ESV) in response to the appearance of “the captain of the LORD’s host” (Josh 5:15). David “came into the house of the LORD and worshiped” upon discovering that his ill son had died (cf. 2 Sam 12:20). The returning remnant of Israel “bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground” in response to Ezra’s reading of the Torah in front of the Water Gate of Jerusalem (cf. Neh 8:6). Job “arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped” (Job 1:20) upon learning that his sons and daughters were killed. Notice that David’s worship in the above instance is seen in response to death in a generally positive sense, while Job’s worship in this instance is seen in response to death in a context of mourning. The same primary Hebrew word is used in each of these varied examples to express worship to God. This highlights the point that biblical worship is not confined to a specific act in a specific context.

So if worship that is acceptable to God, according to His revealed will in His written word, is so varied, what is the function of worship? It is plain to see that acceptable worship involves a variety of acts, in a variety of contexts, each of which “ascribes ultimate eternal worth to God alone . . . [and] expresses the recognition and celebration that God is the one, true, eternal Sovereign upon whom we are totally dependent and to whom we ascribe absolute spiritual allegiance.”<sup>8</sup> This broadly describes the function of worship in a manner consistent with the explicit theme presented in Scripture. This theme is concisely stated in Psalm 86:9, “All nations whom

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Mayhue, *Seeking God: How to Develop an Intimate, Spiritual Relationship* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 142.

Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; And they shall glorify Thy name.” To worship God is to glorify God, and when the act of glorifying God is an intentional and express response to His gracious revelation, it is worship. To speak of God’s glory is, in illustrative form, describing or alluding to His importance. “The word *glory* came to refer to all the trappings that reflect the importance or greatness of someone.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, whether personal or corporate, whether private or public, whether in rejoicing or in mourning, whether in thanksgiving or in petitioning, whether at designated times or in the daily and mundane activities of life, the human is called to glorify God and thereby worship his Creator. As the apostle so clearly exhorted, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31); herein is the function of worship.

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<sup>9</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 47.

## CONTEXTS OF WORSHIP

If we accept that all worship has as its ultimate goal the function of glorifying God and that various acts of worship may be expressed in a variety of contexts, then how are we to understand the meaning and differentiation, if any, of specific biblically prescribed contexts of worship? By “contexts of worship” we mean the situational categories within which human acts of worship are expressed, such as “the context of daily life” or “the context of corporate gathering” or “the context of ritual practice.” This is not to ignore the reality that some contexts may overlap in time and space, but is to identify situational distinctions. With that in mind, the question before is: *does God call us to worship in distinctly different contexts, each having as the ultimate goal the same function?* If so, what is their relationship to one another? Is there a corresponding significance that should be realized? Is there something to be learned that may aid the child of God in becoming a better worshipper of Him? The following sections examine distinctions of worship contexts with the intention of exploring the import of these aspects according to the Scripture.

### **Distinctions of Contexts**

As noted above, worship occurs in a variety of life experiences, but does God prescribe distinct contexts wherein He is to be worshiped? We have discussed distinctions of experiences and acts of worship, but are there formal distinctions of worship contexts prescribed in Scripture? Although an initial survey of material on the subject suggests that this particular facet of worship is not formally addressed at any significant length, the general concept is commonly

discussed under categories of worship relative to *space* and *time*. Some theologians refer to the contextual distinctions of worship in relation to space and time in terms of *broad* and *narrow*:

The biblical terms for worship apply to various stated occasions of public worship, particularly the worship at the tabernacle and the temple during the Old Testament period. But they also have a broader meaning, characterizing the believer's life in all its aspects.<sup>10</sup>

There is indeed abundant evidence that Scripture both portrays and prescribes worship as a participatory act to be expressed in both *broad* and *narrow* contexts—that is universally in the context of *all of life* as well as specifically in the context of *designated cultic services and activities*.

## **Worship in the Broader Context**

First, we will consider the broad context, which incidentally is often least prevalent in most modern conceptions of worship. This is unfortunate since *life as worship* is indeed a theme for the true worshipper of God in both testaments of the Bible. At the heart of the covenant relationship between God and His people is the notion of daily life as worship, which is exemplified in Exodus 20:1–21. The LORD declares Himself to be Israel's covenant Lord who “speaks to them with supreme authority and thereby governs every aspect of their lives.”<sup>11</sup> Following the reiteration of the covenantal Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5, a very profound exhortation is given in 6:4–9.

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<sup>10</sup> Frame, 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Catechized as one of the most recited passages of the Hebrew Scriptures, the *Shema* begins by exhorting Israel to be exclusively and holistically devoted to YHWH (cf. Deut 6:4–5). The stress that is placed on “*love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*” indicates that “the extent of man’s love for God was to be total . . . with unreserved devotion.”<sup>12</sup> The implication is that no area or aspect of life is to be “undevoted” to God. In addition to conveying the exclusivity of YHWH in a worshiper’s devotion, it also speaks of the pervasive nature of such devotion. Verses 6–9 apply this concept through a progressive and concentric series of contexts wherein the worshiper is to maintain devotion to YHWH; beginning with the personal commitment (v.6), moving to the family commitment (v.7), and concluding with the public commitment (vv.8–9). The repeated call to holy living in Leviticus, the recurring echo of the covenant Law in the Psalms, the charge “to keep” and esteem the Word of God by the comments of the historical narratives and the cries of the prophets, and the life application of its truth in the wisdom literature, all attest to the “life as worship” theme in the Old Testament.

As for the New Testament, this theme of life as worship is accentuated by the once-for-all sufficient sacrifice of our Savior, in whom Christians are made “a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5), so that “all of life is our priestly service, our homage to the greatness of our covenant Lord.”<sup>13</sup> It has

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<sup>12</sup> J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 122.

<sup>13</sup> Frame, 30.

already been noted that 1 Corinthians 10:31 exhorts the believer to glorify God in every choice of life, “whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”—in even the most mundane activities of life such as eating and drinking, we are to glorify God. This principle is complemented and reiterated by passages like 2 Corinthians 5:9, “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him” (ESV). Later in the epistle to the Colossians, in the context of the believer’s new life in Christ, Paul gives the imperative to, “consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry” (Col 3:5). The succinct ending to that statement, “which amounts to idolatry” is critically relevant to understanding right worship in the pervasive, *broad* context. The passage continues, dealing specifically in the context of daily life and corresponding choices—“living in them [deeds]” (v.7); or in Paul’s favorite idiom, the “walk” of life. It is in the latter portion of this passage that specific terms commonly associated with worship are employed in a striking way. It is “the word of Christ” that is to richly dwell within us so as to guard and direct our daily lives in a manner that glorifies God. It is within this literary context that the church is instructed, “whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father” (Col 3:17). It is not incidental that exhortations concerning family living and daily relationships follow, along with a reminder that even daily work is to be done in manner the glorifies God, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men” (Col 3:23). Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 1 John, and 2 John all use the idiomatic expression of “walk” as a call to living “in a

manner” that accords with the gospel; in other words, it is a call to live all of life so as to honor and glorify God. Why? Because Christ is worthy—this is *all of life as worship*.

Perhaps the clearest and most explicit attestation that all of life is to be worship to God is seen in Romans 12:1–2:

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Rich with Old Testament imagery, these verses overtly prescribe worship as a way of life. Both the external “body” (v.1) and the internal “mind” (v.2) are included in this holistic and *holy sacrifice* expressed through one’s living choices (“that you may prove”), which is *acceptable* to God as our “spiritual service of *worship*.”

In addition to these and similar passages that speak directly about daily life as worship, there are repeated themes in the New Testament that allude to the same and illustrate the biblical concept of worship as a way of life and not only something that occurs in specific places and at specific times. Many of these NT themes echo realities and themes familiar to the OT and are commonly associated with worship in the broad context of covenantal living. The theme of Christ’s lordship in the believer’s life echoes the lordship of YHWH to His covenant people Israel (cf. Matt 7:21–29; Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:5–14), the exclusivity of devotion to Christ in the believer’s life echoes that of the *Shema* (cf. John 14:6, 15, 21, 23; 15:5; Matt 6:24, 33), the Christian “walk” as a manner of life—inner to outer—echoes that of the Hebrew heart and hand (cf. Rom 6:4; 8:4; 1 Cor 7:17; 2 Cor 5:7; Gal 5:16; Eph 4:1; 5:2, 8, 15;

Col 1:10; etc.), and the multiple exhortations and imperatives given, especially in the epistles, echo the Old Testament theme of “keeping the Torah” of the Lord.

As understood in the broader context, “worship cannot be isolated or relegated to just one place, time, or segment of our lives. . . . Real acts of worship must be the overflow of a worshipping life.”<sup>14</sup> In the broad context of daily living, worship may be described “as living in the presence of God according to His will for His pleasure and glory.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Worship in the Narrower Context**

The broad context of *all of life as worship* is vitally important but not contrary to the importance of worship in the narrower context. There is a definite distinction in Scripture to that of the narrower context, which includes the mandate for corporate worship, in a designated location, at a designated time, according to a prescribed invitation. The call to worship God in all of life “should not be taken to imply that there is no New Testament mandate for corporate praise and prayer, teaching and sacrament, or meetings in which God draws near to his people in a special way.”<sup>16</sup> In the narrower context of worship, a prevailing theme is the particular presence of God and the creature’s cognizant response to Him in expressions of homage—seen individually and corporately. It is this narrower context that is generally associated with the concept of worship and most explicitly described in Scripture. The vast

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<sup>14</sup> MacArthur, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Mayhue, 142.

<sup>16</sup> Frame, 30.



majority of Hebrew and Greek terms that are translated “worship” are used in this narrower context and mode of worship (cf. Ex 3:12; 34:8; 2 Chron 20:18; Neh 8:6; Ps 95:6; Matt 14:33; John 4:20; Rev 7:11). Therefore, instead of developing the biblical perspective of this context of worship, only a select number of examples will be discussed in the scope of observing distinctions. The distinctions of context, then, will be explored through a concise analytical approach that considers the *who*, *where*, and *when* of worship as prescribed by the Lord.

The first distinction is clearly seen in the individual versus corporate context. By virtue of God making Israel a nation (cf. Gen 12:2; Ex 19:6) and likewise building His church (Matt 16:18), both being communities that are objects of His grace, we see that God’s purposes in “seeking such people to worship him” (John 4:23, ESV), though personally binding, ultimately calls for a corporate response. The most vivid portrayal of corporate worship is when it is seen as an invitation to a group of people to have an audience with their Lord, the King of kings (cf. Ex 19:3–17; Ps 122:1; 132:7). The Lord’s work of redemption is the means by which He calls to Himself a *company* of worshipers. These worshipers, though saved individually, are brought into His *flock*, into His *body* and made His *people*, not in some disconnected fashion but in unity (cf. John 17:11; 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:4; Col 3:15). Moreover, the eternal picture of worship is always a view of corporate worship (cf. Rev 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 14:7; 15:4). There is a distinction of context concerning the question: *who* is called to worship the Lord? Both the individual and an assembly of people are called. In the broader context, worship is continually a personal and mostly private matter, whereas in the narrower context it is often public and corporate.

In order for individuals to gather together for worship there must be a place to meet. In the narrower context of worship, this dimension is sometimes referred to as worship in *sacred space*. “In the Old Testament there are abundant references to a particular place or object regarded as sacred space (Bethel, Mount Sinai, the burning bush, the Ark of the Covenant, the Most Holy Place, etc.).”<sup>17</sup> Although there is not a designated geographic location for all New Testament Christians to gather and worship (cf. John 4:21), Jesus promises that when “two or three have gathered in [His] name” (Matt 18:20) He is present in a special—we may say *sacred*—way. Unlike the Old Testament, the New Testament is strikingly discreet on prescribed form and order for corporate worship. However, the practice and sharing of the Lord’s Supper has from the beginning taken the preeminent place of cultic activity for corporate worship in the New Testament and has always been “regarded as the inmost sanctuary of Christian worship.”<sup>18</sup> Incidentally, participation in the Lord’s Supper requires the church to meet together (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-22, 33). The church from the beginning has been committed to regularly gathering together in various places, whether “in the temple” or “from house to house” (Acts 2:46), and “devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42)—activities that were experienced in the context of community worship. Though a specific geographic location for worship is not

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<sup>17</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 152.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 1:473.

prescribed in the New Testament, there is a distinction of context concerning *where* worship occurs; both everywhere and distinctively wherever the church gathers, especially when the gathering is designated and devoted to corporate services.

Finally, the notion of *when* to worship presents another distinction of context. The church historian, Philip Schaff, described what he called *sacred seasons* as the periods of time necessary to the created order and ordained for the purpose of public worship:

As every place, so is every day and hour alike sacred to God, who fills all space and all time, and can be worshipped everywhere and always. But, from the necessary limitations of our earthly life, as well as from the nature of social and public worship, springs the use of sacred seasons.<sup>19</sup>

Just as concentrated corporate worship requires a place in sacred space to meet, so a period in sacred time is required. Here again, though the New Testament does not prescribe a specific time to meet, a pattern was established very earlier in the life of the church: “There are clear indications that the first day of the week was from the outset a special day to the Christians . . . [who] were accustomed to meet for worship.”<sup>20</sup> Even within a given time schedule for meeting, the question of *when* and *how regular* should the church partake of the Lord’s Supper has been a subject of debate for centuries. Designated celebrations, feasts, and other *holy days* were also established

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<sup>19</sup> Schaff, 1:467.

<sup>20</sup> Henry C. Sheldon, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Hendrickson, 1988), 1:273.

in the early church and recorded on what was referred to as the ‘church year’ and later the ‘liturgical year’. Although a specific day of the week is not prescribed by Scripture (cf. Col 2:16), God’s word does describe a regular periodic gathering of the church for services of worship on the first day of the week (cf. Acts 20:7). In each of these instances, a particular time for worship is described. In the broader context, worship occurs *whenever* a believer honors and glorifies God through the choices of daily life, while in the narrower context worship is realized as an *event* at a particular point in time, often anticipated with preparation.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The time *when* the narrower context of worship occurs is not always anticipated, planned, or even a corporate experience. The Scripture portrays numerous examples of unanticipated epiphanies and similar encounters with God wherein the creature’s response is fearful, reverential, and a particularly focused concentration of homage. These too are examples of the narrower context of worship, which are experienced as an *event* in time.

## HARMONY OF DISTINCTIONS

In the words of Dave Hall, “Worship is both an event and a lifestyle in which believers, by grace, center their mind’s attention and their heart’s affection on the Lord, humbly glorifying God in response to His greatness, His mighty acts, and His Word.”<sup>22</sup> Distinctions between contexts of worship do not necessarily suggest dissimilarity or incompatibility between contexts. This is to say that the distinctions identified above should be perceived as harmonious. In addition to harmony, as Hall suggests, the *broad* and *narrow* contexts of worship may bear similarities in practice and expression, and ultimately function toward the same goal.

So if our whole life is to constantly express worship to God, then the natural question is: *why the distinction between the broad and narrow contexts and what is their relationship?* A clear answer to this question seems to be lacking in the majority of worship descriptions and definitions. It has been suggested that “the difference between worship in the broader sense and worship in the narrower sense is a difference in degree.”<sup>23</sup> But this offers no meaningful description concerning the relationship between the broader and narrower contexts, nor does it offer a biblical explanation that addresses the *why* question—if there is one. Another explanation, which offers a helpful commentary on the relationship between contexts, suggests that

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<sup>22</sup> Ron Man, “Defining Our Terms,” *Worship Notes* 3, no. 7 (July 2008): 6

<sup>23</sup> Frame, 34.

in relationship to the whole life of faith, worship [in the narrower context] is actually the point of concentration at which the whole of the Christian life comes to ritual focus, for what we do in worship has a bearing on everything else we do in the faith, and how we live out our faith will impact our worship.<sup>24</sup>

Both of these statements are biblically accurate and offer some insight into the questions at hand, however the following questions still remain: *Why the distinctions, how are we to understand them? What are the implications of such distinctions? Is there something to be learned in light of them?*

The Scripture does indicate that the relationship between the distinct contexts of worship is complementary. Psalm 24 illustrates this complementary harmony, namely by indicating that the one who may ascend to *worship* the LORD is the one who is *worshipping* the LORD in his daily life. The question, “who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?” (v.3) speaks of entering into the presence of YHWH, which seems to suggest “ascend to worship” (in the narrower context) given the context of verses 7–10. The phrase “he who has clean hands and a pure heart” (v.4) reflects a person who is living in covenant obedience, hence living a life that is abiding in the ways of YHWH, which is *life as worship* (the broader context). The implication is that the broader context of worship prepares the worshiper for the narrower context.<sup>25</sup> When the narrower context includes the notion of sacrifice before the LORD along with confession and repentance, forgiveness and

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<sup>24</sup> Ross, 50.

<sup>25</sup> A New Testament example of this may be seen in 1 Corinthians 11:28–34.

grace become more apparent, which enable and aid the worshiper in their daily life of worship. A simple and admittedly limited illustration of this can be seen in the analogy of a lord and his servant. The vast majority of time that the servant works in his master's vineyard he does so without seeing his master, all the while knowing that through his diligent work he honors and pleases his master (this is clearly the broader context). Occasionally, the servant is invited into his master's house to dine with him, and during these privileged opportunities he pays special homage to his master (this is clearly the narrower context). The relationship between these distinct contexts of worship is indeed complementary where one context may serve to influence, impact, and even shape the other.

In all of this, there appears to be a paradoxical dynamic to worship. Worship is both individual and corporate, both always and at particular times, both everywhere and at particular locations, and when we respond to the divine invitation, we bring nothing and everything we are at the same time. These distinctions may actually serve to complement one another and aid the worshiper in worship.

Perhaps a fundamental key to understanding a biblical meaning in the distinctions of the broad and narrow contexts of worship may be gleaned from the function of the Sabbath. The covenant Law was to be observed everyday of the week, yet the Sabbath was set apart, consecrated, sanctified, or made *holy* and distinct from all other days to be observed with special regulations and privileges. The tremendous importance of the Sabbath is alluded to by the fact that it was the sign of the covenant between YHWH and Israel, to be kept in order "that you may know that I am the LORD who *sanctifies* you" (cf. Ex 31:13). Though the people were called to

be holy in their daily living (cf. Lev 11:44), this was a distinctly *holy* day (cf. Ex 16:23; 20:8; 31:14; 35:2; Lev 23:3). Built into the weekly cycle of time, the LORD sanctified and blessed one *holy* day amid the *common* days (cf. Gen 2:2–3; Ex 20:11); later to be declared *holy* to both the people and the LORD (cf. Ex 31:14–15) and “a holy convocation” (Lev 23:3).

These clear distinctions in the context of time appear to parallel, and even relate to, the various distinctions in the context of worship. The Sabbath was described as a day of rest and devotion to the LORD (cf. Ex 16:23; 20:10; Lev 23:3; Isa 58:13), but had as its ultimate view a designated time for *worship* (Isa 66:23; Ezek 46:3). If indeed “it was the symbol of sacred [*holy*] time as it looked to the future and to its fulfillment in something far greater than itself”<sup>26</sup> then the Sabbath was an instructor of holiness and a tutor of worship. The nature and limitations of our creaturely frame are most prone to reduce worship in daily life to a level of common and even rote experience. Though worship is certainly valid and significant in every place and at every moment in our daily lives, if every day and every place were the same in our worship experience, our worship would lack the profound sense of holiness which is a most necessary aspect of being in the presence of Almighty God—and this is the ultimate view of worship in our future.

So what is the relationship between the distinct contexts of worship—particularly the *broad* and the *narrow*? Both have the same function and serve to glorify, honor, praise, and pay homage to our great God. Both are prescribed and substantially important to our relationship with the Lord and

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<sup>26</sup> Webber, 169.



eventually one another. The broader context prepares the worshiper for the narrower context, yet both complement and impact the other. Moreover, the said distinctions imply that these two major contexts of worship instruct and cultivate the worshiper in at least two fundamental aspects: worship is *always* due the LORD and the LORD is *holy*. The corresponding significance of this observation is that our worship of God is to be so *common* in our life experience that it characterizes our daily lives and yet it is to be so *holy* that it overwhelms us. The more holy one's perception of God is the more humble, earnest, and acceptable will be his worship—*always*.

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