

Be ye holy, for I am holy
1 Peter 1:16

Holy (hagios)

What is my conception of “holy”? The definition I choose will greatly influence how I will organize my relationship with God.

Building a definition from context

1 Peter

“Holy” is used to describe conduct (1:15). If a small context is chosen (1:13 – 19), holy is seen to be the opposite of “former lusts.” However, “the former lusts, as in your ignorance” are clearly in the past. Peter does not seem to be cautioning his audience to leave these lusts, for they have already done so. The larger contrast seems to be between “former lusts” and “living hope” (1:3), “the power of God through faith” (1:5), love and joy (1:8), and salvation (1:9).

Secondly, imitating God’s holiness should not be described in terms of behavior, since God does not have behaviors, but rather character or nature.

Thirdly, in 2:11, Peter’s reason for cautions against “fleshly lusts” is contrasted with the effectiveness of the gospel, not with certain actions.

Finally, Peter repeats the same cautions concerning the lusts of this world, but the contrast is with the “divine nature.” (2 Peter 1:4) The fact that this is a repeated caution is noted in 1:12 -15.

The definition chosen will cause very different conclusions to be drawn from 2 Peter 2:21 and 3:11. (cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:13, 4:7, 2 Corinthians 7:1)

Holy Spirit If “holy” references good behavior, then the Holy Spirit is “the well-behaved spirit.” But the Holy Spirit is a facet of God, therefore having the same nature. So, “holy” seems to describe that which is of the nature of God, which harmonizes well with “the divine nature” of 2 Peter 1:4.

Holy things, places, and people. Holy Place, Most Holy Place, holy mountain (2 Peter 1:18), holy prophets (2 Peter 2:21, 3:2), holy women (1 Peter 3:5), holy nation (1 Peter 2:9), holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5), holy brethren (Hebrews 3:1), holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15). The adjective attributes to each the nature of God, not good behavior.

Jude 20 “Building yourselves up on your most holy faith.” We build ourselves up with faith like a divine being (Jesus) had. We do not build ourselves up our well-behaved faith.

Hebrews 12:10 “That we may be partakers of His holiness.” Compare to 2 Peter 1:4.

Saints The word translated “saints” is exactly the word also translated “holy.” The adjective may be used as a noun (saint = holy one). The saints addressed in the letters were not all well behaved, but all had faith, were partakers of the divine nature.