

Holiness is self-affirming purity. In virtue of this attribute of his nature, God eternally wills and maintains his own moral excellence. In this definition are contained three elements: first, purity; secondly, purity willing; thirdly purity willing itself....

A. Negatively, holiness is not

(a) Justice, or purity demanding purity from creatures. Justice, the relative or transitive attribute, is indeed the manifestation and expression of the immanent attribute, is indeed the manifestation and expression of the immanent attribute of holiness, but it is not to be confounded with it.

(b) Holiness is not a complex term designating the aggregate of the divine perfections. On the other hand, the notion of holiness is, both in Scripture and in Christian experience, perfectly simple, and perfectly distinct from that of other attributes.

(c) Holiness is not God's self-love, in the sense of supreme regard for his own interest and happiness. There is no utilitarian element in holiness.

(d) Holiness is not identical with, or a manifestation of, love. Since self-maintenance must precede self-impartation, and since benevolence has its object, motive, standard and limit in righteousness, holiness the self-affirming attribute can in no way be resolved into love the self-communication.

B. Positively, holiness is

(a) Purity of substance -- In God's moral nature, as necessarily acting, there are indeed the two elements of willing and being. But the passive logically precedes the active; being comes before willing; God is pure before he wills purity. Since purity, however, in ordinary usage is a negative term and means only freedom from stain or wrong, we must include in it also the positive idea of moral rightness. God is holy in that he is the source and standard of the right.

(b) Energy of will -- This purity is not simply a passive and dead quality; it is the attribute of a personal being; it is penetrated and pervaded by will. Holiness is the free moral movement of the Godhead.

(c) Self-affirmation -- Holiness is God's self-willing. His own purity is the supreme object of his regard and maintenance. God is holy, in that his infinite moral excellence affirms and asserts itself as the highest possible motive and end. Like truth and love, this attribute can be understood only in the light of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Millard J. Erickson, in his *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), pp. 284-285, says:

There are two basic aspects to God's holiness. The first is his uniqueness. (This aspect of God's holiness could be considered another attribute of greatness, in this case with respect to moral matters.) He is totally separate from all of creation. This is what Louis Berkhof called the "majesty-holiness" of God. The uniqueness of God is affirmed in