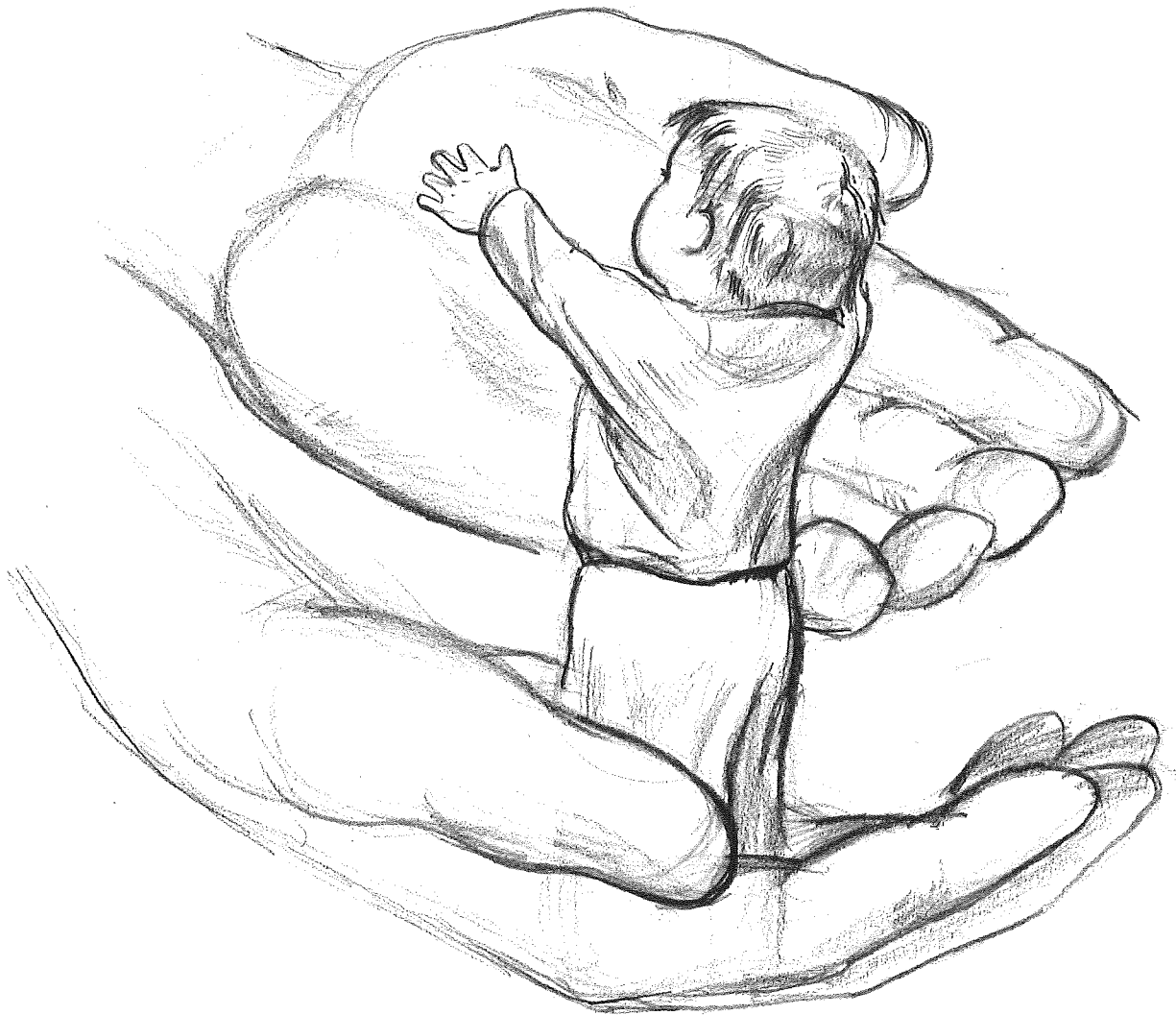


Chapter Two



The Nature of God

II. THE NATURE OF GOD

Introduction: *If someone has a low opinion of you it will certainly make a difference in the way he acts toward you. SIMILARLY, THE WAY WE FEEL AND ACT TOWARD GOD WILL DEPEND ON OUR OPINION OF GOD. QUITE GENERALLY PEOPLE HAVE TOO LOW AN OPINION OF GOD. THEY UNDERESTIMATE HIS POWER, HIS WISDOM, HIS WRATH AND HIS LOVE. IF WE KNOW HIM AS HE REALLY IS, WE WILL FEEL LIKE SINGING, "HOW GREAT THOU ART, HOW GREAT THOU ART!"*

1. THERE IS ONLY ONE TRUE GOD

Is. 46:8ff Remember this and consider, recall it to mind...remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My purpose shall stand, and I will fulfill my intention." (NRSV)

2. GOD IS THE GREAT SOURCE OF ALL THINGS

He is a living, intelligent Being, not just a force or law of nature. He is a spirit, and as such has no material body or form. He is invisible, eternal, everywhere present, unlimited in power, and knows all things. We should not imagine that God has less personality or is in any way inferior to man whom He created in His image.

A. A LIVING SELF-SUFFICIENT BEING ON WHOM ALL CREATION DEPENDS

Acts 17:24-25 The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. (NRSV)

1 Thess. 1:9 For they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve **the living and true God.** (NIV)

B. A SPIRIT

Luke 24:39 (Jesus) "Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a **ghost does not have flesh and bones** as you see that I have." (NRSV)

John 4:24 "**God is spirit**, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." (NRSV)

2. (Cont'd)

C. ETERNAL

Ps. 90:1-2 Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (NRSV)

I Tim. 6:16a (God) "alone possesses immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light;..." (REB)

I John 2:25 "And this is what he has promised us, **eternal life**." (NRSV)

D. ALL-KNOWING (OMNISCIENT)

I Chron. 28:9 (David to Solomon) "And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever." (NIV)
(See also 2 Kings 6:8-23)

E. PRESENT EVERYWHERE (OMNIPRESENT)

I Kings 8:27 (Solomon's Prayer at the dedication of the Temple) "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (NIV) (See also Psalm 139.1-16)

F. ALL POWERFUL

Matt. 19:26 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but **with God all things are possible**." (NIV)

G. FAITHFUL - HE KEEPS HIS PROMISES

Ps. 145:13b The Lord is faithful to all His promises and loving toward all He has made. (NIV)

Jer. 1:12 The Lord said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled." (NIV)

2 Tim. 2:13 If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself. (NIV)

H. WISE

Rom. 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!... (NIV)

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (NIV)

2. (Cont'd)

I. JUST AND HOLY

Ezek. 33:11 Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live....' (NIV)

Hab. 1:13a Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. (NIV)

Matt. 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (NIV)

(*Rev. English Bible*) There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds. (REB)

Rom. 11:22 Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. (NRSV)

See also: *Exodus 34:5-7*

J. CHANGELESS

Ps. 102:25-27 "In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end." (NIV) (applied to Jesus in *Hebrews 1:10-12*)

Heb. 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (NIV)

K. HUMBLE IN HEART

Matt. 11:29b "...learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart..." (Jesus reveals the Father's heart) (NIV)

John 13:4-5 So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he had around him. (NET)

John 14:9 Jesus replied, "Philip, don't you even yet know who I am, even after all the time I have been with you? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking to see him?" (NET)

Phil. 2:6-8 (Jesus) "He was in the form of God; yet he laid no claim to equality with God, but made himself nothing, assuming the form of a slave....he humbled himself..." (REB)

James 4:6 ...Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (NIV)

1 Pet. 5:5 ...All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (NIV)

2. (Cont'd)

L. GOD IS LOVE

ALL OF THE AFOREMENTIONED CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD'S NATURE ARE CERTAINLY IMPORTANT. BUT IF WE ASK OF THE BIBLE, "WHAT IS THE VERY ESSENCE OF GOD'S BEING?" IT ANSWERS SIMPLY, "GOD IS LOVE." WHEN GOD IS OPPOSED BY EVIL, HIS WRATH AND PUNISHMENT HIDE AND OBSCURE HIS LOVE. BUT WHEN EVIL AND SIN ARE OVERCOME, THE CLOUDS ARE GONE, AND THEN THE FACE OF GOD RADIATES NOTHING BUT PURE LOVE. THE BIBLE ALSO TELLS US THAT GOD IS GRACIOUS, GENEROUS, KIND, MERCIFUL, FULL OF PITY AND GOODNESS. ALL THESE ARE JUST VARIOUS EXPRESSIONS OF THE MANY-SPLENDORED LOVE OF GOD.

Ps. 51:17b ...a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (NIV)

Ps. 103:11-14 For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him. For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust. (NRSV)

Lam 3:33 For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men. (NIV)

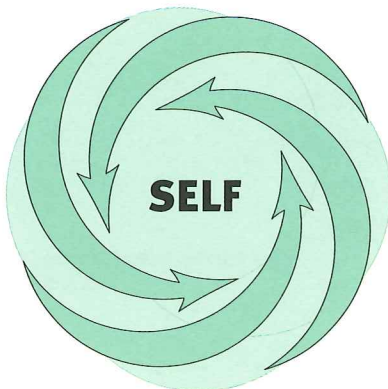
John 3:36 Whoever puts his faith in the Son has eternal life. Whoever disobeys the Son will not see that life; God's wrath rests upon him. (REB)

Rom 5:5b ...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (NRSV)

Rom 5:7-8 ...rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. (NRSV)

Rom 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NRSV)

Self
Curved
In Upon
Itself



Human Nature



The Burning
Furnace of
God's Love

**God's Outgoing,
Self-Giving Nature**

2.L. (Cont'd)

Eph. 2:4,5,7 "But God, who is rich in mercy, **out of the great love** with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),...**that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**" (RSV)

Jas. 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights... (NIV)

1 John 4:7-9 My dear friends, let us love one another, because **the source of love is God.** Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but the unloving know nothing of God, for God is love. This is how He showed His love among us; He sent His only Son into the world that we might have life through Him. (REB)

Note: God's love and human response: We do not have to change ourselves or make ourselves worthy in order for God to love us, but we do have to turn back to God (repent) and accept His offered forgiveness through faith in Christ in order to receive and appreciate God's love. When we are full of ourselves and ignore God's will, God's love is neither sought nor accepted by us. If we deliberately reject God's love by rejecting Jesus as our Savior, God's wrath will lie heavily on us.

*"O Lord, how happy should we be,
If we could cast our care on Thee,
If we from self could rest;
And feel at heart that One above
In perfect wisdom, perfect love,
Is working for the best.
How far from this our daily life
How oft disturb'd by anxious strife,
By sudden wild alarms;
Oh, could we but relinquish all
Our earthly props, and simply fall
On Thine Almighty arms!"*

– John Keble

3. HUMAN “LOVE” AND DIVINE LOVE ARE VASTLY DIFFERENT

What humans call “love” is really just a warm feeling toward those whom we like. This kind of “love” ends when we no longer “like” what we once did. To have God’s kind of Love in us we must be “born out of God” – we must have His life, His Spirit, in us, and that “life,” which God’s Spirit imparts, is one of real love, for only “**God is Love.**” St. Paul says the three greatest gifts which the Spirit imparts are **faith, hope and love**. But the greatest of these is **love** (1 Cor. 13:13). The “natural man” is incapable of this kind of love, and remains incapable until God’s Spirit “pours **God’s kind of love** into our hearts.” (Rom 5:5).

What most people really mean when they say they “love” something is that they **like it—it pleases them**. Christians are not commanded to **like** everyone, but they are commanded to **love them, and this Christians can only do with God’s love active in their hearts**. You cannot “like” moldy bread* even if you are commanded to. But you can **love** unlovable (‘moldy’) people when **God’s kind of love enables you to love them**. (* C.S. Lewis’ statement)

Luke 6:27 “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” (NIV)

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (NIV)

1 John 3:13-14 Friends, do not be surprised if the world hates you. We know we have crossed over from death to life, **because we love** our fellow-Christians. Anyone who does not love is still in the realm of death. (REB)

Summary of God’s kind of love in contrast to human love:

1. Human love is **dependent** upon, and is elicited by, the beauty, attractiveness or desirability of someone or something. “I just **love** that gold bracelet!”
2. God’s love is **unconditional**; it is **not dependent** on the worth, beauty, or desirability of something or someone. (*Rom. 5:6-11, Luke 15:11-24*).
3. God’s love is **self-originating** and therefore independent of any outside influence. (*1 John 4:8, 10*)
4. God’s love is **indestructible**; it never ends because God never ends or changes. (*1 Cor. 13:7-8a* – a description of the Love which the Holy Spirit gives.)
5. God’s love is totally **unselfish, self-giving** and **self-sacrificing**. (*Luke 6:35b-36; Mt. 5:43-45; Gal. 2:20; Rom. 8:32*)
6. God’s love is **impartial**; it has no favorites. (*Acts 10:34; Eph. 6:9*)
7. God’s love can be “hurt” if rejected, and also “pleased” when it is received with thankfulness and also expressed to others. (*Is. 1:2-3; 1 John 3:22; Col. 3:20*)

4. THE TRUE GOD IS THE TRIUNE GOD — (TRI-UNE MEANS THREE IN ONE)

The Bible teaches that there is only **one true God**, but that there are **three Persons** within the Divine Nature—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each Person is fully God, yet there are not three Gods, but One. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are **THE ONE TRUE GOD**. We speak of God as **the Trinity**, since this word expresses the idea that **the Three Persons form one unity of Essence or Being**.

(That there are three Persons within the Godhead is at least hinted at in the Old Testament. Note, for instance, the next passage:)

Gen. 48:15-16 Then he blessed Joseph and said,
“May **the God** before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
(the Father)
the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,
(the Spirit)
the Angel who has delivered me from all harm—may he bless these boys...”
(the Son)
(words in parentheses added) (NIV)

Matt. 3:16-17 And when **Jesus** had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw **the Spirit of God** descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “**This is my Son, the Beloved**, with whom I am well pleased.” (NRSV)

John 14:23 Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and **we** will come to him and make **our** home with him.” (NIV)

See also: *John 17:11,21,22*

Acts 7:55 But Stephen, full of **the Holy Spirit**, looked up to heaven and saw **the glory of God**, and **Jesus** standing at the right hand of **God**. (NIV)

II Cor. 13:14 May the grace of **the Lord** Jesus Christ**, and **the love of God****, and the fellowship of **the Holy Spirit** be with you all. (NIV)

Note: **In the New Testament, the term “God” usually, though not always, refers to the Father. The term “Lord” almost always refers to Jesus, the Son of God. But the title, “Lord” (Greek, **kurios**) was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (The Septuagint) to translate the Hebrew name for God, **Jehovah**. Hence, the name “Lord” itself calls Jesus God.

Eph. 3:14-17,19b For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love...may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (NIV)

4. (Cont'd)

Matt. 4:10 Then Jesus said to him (Satan), "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall **worship the Lord your God** and him only shall you serve.'" (RSV)

John 10:29-33 "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. **I and the Father are one.**" Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because **you, a mere man, claim to be God.**" (NIV)

Note: Though Jesus is called the Son of God, this does not mean that He is in some way less than God. To be fully derived from God, as the only-begotten Son, is to fully and completely share in God's life and Being. The Jews understood this and thought that Jesus was claiming to be God when He called Himself God's Son (which He is!). Also note that God, in the Bible, forbids man to worship any one but God alone, yet the Father Himself commands all creatures to worship Jesus; and Jesus, while refusing to worship the devil, nonetheless accepts for Himself the worship of men.

See also: *John 8:56-59*

John 20:28-29 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (NIV)

Heb. 1:6-8 And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels **worship him.**" In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." But about **the Son** he says, "Your throne, **O God**, will last for ever and ever..." (NIV)

The teaching of the Bible that there are three Persons in the one Godhead (the Trinity) has been the subject of considerable debate and disagreement within the Church, especially in the earlier centuries. One of the early creeds of the Church spells out the Bible's teaching precisely:

"THE CATHOLIC (OR UNIVERSAL) FAITH IS THIS, THAT WE WORSHIP ONE GOD IN TRINITY AND TRINITY IN UNITY, NEITHER CONFOUNDING THE PERSONS NOR DIVIDING THE SUBSTANCE. FOR THERE IS ONE PERSON OF THE FATHER, ANOTHER OF THE SON, AND ANOTHER OF THE HOLY GHOST...SO THE FATHER IS GOD, THE SON IS GOD, AND THE HOLY GHOST IS GOD. AND YET THERE ARE NOT THREE GODS, BUT ONE GOD."

– Quoted from the Athanasian Creed

Conclusion: This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: **that he understands and knows me**, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

– Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NIV)

The Priorities of Love

The Ultimate Reality: God is Love – I John 4:8

*The Greatest Motivation: The love of Christ control us. . .
II Corinthians 5:14*

*The Greatest Commandment: This is my command-
ment, that you love one another as I have loved you. John
15:12*

*The Greatest Virtue: Now abides faith, hope and love, but
the greatest of these is love. I Corinthians 13:13*

*The Most Enduring Power: Love never ends.
I Corinthians 13:7*

*The Greatest Exhortation: Beloved, let us love one another.
I John 4:7*

*The Substance of Christian Character: Knowledge puffs
up, love builds up. I Corinthians 8:1*

*The Fulfillment of the Law: He that loves has fulfilled the law.
Romans 13:8*

Life's Greatest Goal: Make love your aim. I Corinthians 14:1

*The Essence of Fellowship With God: God is Love and he
that abides in love, abides in God, and God in him. I John 4:16*

*The Greatest Gift: God's love has been poured into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. Romans 5:5b*

*The Ultimate Test of Life: We know that we have passed out
of death into life, because we love the brethren. I John 3:14*

*Life's Perfect Attitude: Let all that you do be done in love.
I Corinthians 16:14*

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WORKSHEET FOR CHAPTER II (page 1)

I. On the basis of this lesson, can you answer the following questions?

1. Of what significance is it to you and to me that God is a spirit?

2. God is eternal. How is this important for you and for me?

3. When we are tempted to sin, what characteristic of God's Being should we keep in mind? _____

4. What is the most important characteristic – the very essence of God's Being?

5. How is God's Triune (Trinity) nature illustrated in Christ's baptism? (Mt. 3:16-17)

II. Problems for further study.

1. A little girl who was sick with a serious disease said, "I love Jesus, but I hate God." Why does her statement reflect a misunderstanding of God? _____

2. A French priest rebuked a peasant for a sin he had committed. The peasant replied, "But, my father, I thought Christ died for our sins so that we could go on committing them and reach heaven just the same."

Explain why his answer was wrong, and not in keeping with God's nature: (For references see: Exodus 34:5-7; Romans 2:1-5; and Galatians 6:7-8.) _____

3. If someone gets sick, people often blame God for making them sick. Read Luke 13:10-17, and see whom Jesus blamed for the woman's sickness. Quote His words in v. 16 _____

4. Many people approach God with the attitude, "Let God perform miracles and then I will believe in Him." How successful is this approach liable to be on the basis of Matthew 13:58? _____

WORKSHEET FOR CHAPTER II (page 2)

- III. Jesus Taught Us Many Things About God—What He is like, and what He does for mankind. In the drawing below, one activity or quality of God is mentioned on each line. Read the passage and write the words which best describe this characteristic or activity of God.

G O D

1. God is Kind & Merciful Luke 6:35-6

2. God Provides Matthew 5:45 & 6:30

3. God Forgives Matthew 6:14

4. God Judges Matthew 5:21

5. God Shows Concern & Care Matthew 10:30

6. God Gives the Holy Spirit Luke 11:13

7. God Gives Salvation John 3:16

8. God Gives Eternal Life John 10:28-9

9. God Gives the Kingdom Luke 12:32

10. God Justifies The Penitent Luke 18:14

11. God Rewards Man Matthew 6:1 & 4

