

The Love of God

By James D. Nickel

In the summer of 1979, I journeyed from Hawaii to the Philippines and then to Indonesia. On the trip to the Philippines, I served as a guardian for two of my high school math students, daughters of *Youth With A Mission* (YWAM) missionaries, and another missionary lass. My task was to lead these girls through airports and procure the obligatory transportation (taxis, jeepneys, and

In July of 1979, James Nickel ventured into the land of the Philippines. The mountainous regions north of Baguio City form the backdrop of this meditation on the love of God.

buses) to get them safe and sound to Baguio City, about eight road hours north of Manila. It was a grueling experience, especially the extra long flight from Honolulu to Manila on a wobbly and ancient Boeing 707.¹ When this plane finally landed, the exhausted passengers, as one, heaved a

sigh of relief and then engaged in a spontaneous round of applause!

After arriving in Baguio City, I toured the area for a few weeks. Upon the recommendation of a local missionary, the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) at the local university asked me to teach a class on “How to Study the Bible.” They were a great group of young people as shown by the photo at right.

For a couple of days, I joined a YWAM



Source: *iStockPhoto*

outreach team and visited some of the beautiful backcountry, mountainous regions terraced with rice patties. One day, we visited a local hospital. We walked down the corridors and through the wards singing songs about Jesus. Several young children gathered around us. I am not sure if they understood what we were singing, but they were curious. Few of them probably never had the chance to inspect “white” skin so closely. As they surrounded us, we kept singing and one little girl approached me, albeit with caution. She reached out her hand and I responded by reaching out to her. Immediately she drew back. She did not yet trust me. We continued singing the praises of Jesus and moved to

¹ We were scheduled to make this flight on a DC-10, but these planes had been grounded when one (Flight 191) lost its number one wing engine after taking off from O’Hare International Airport in Chicago on 25 May 1979 killing all 271 souls on board and two on the ground.

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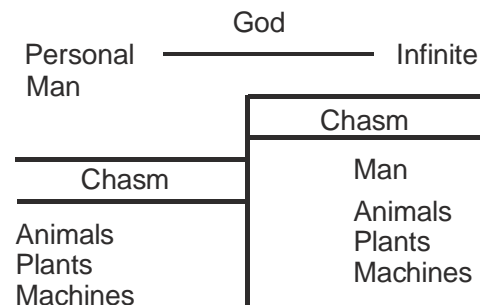
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another ward. Like bees descending upon pollinated flowers, the children followed us. I kept my eye of this little girl, continued singing, and focused my attention upon her. She again approached me and I reached out to her. This time she freely embraced my outstretched arms and for a few minutes, I held her on my lap. She was starving for love and acceptance.

The arms of God reach out to a perishing world (John 3:16-17). The song of God is an embrace that knows fully the sinner and the nature of sin. Many times, we are hesitant in our approach to God *because we do not fully understand the nature of His love.*

Love is the self-imparting quality in the nature of God. Love is God's personal and purposed desire seeking, actively and continuously, the highest good for His creation. This action is not based on the nature of the one being loved, but on the One loving. In most human relationships, a person sees something in another person that causes him to love that person. God loves the sinner, *not* because He sees something in the sinner that moves Him to love, *but because He is love.* Being from everlasting to everlasting, God's infinite love has no beginning or end. For eternity, this self-giving love has existed in Trinitarian fellowship. From before the foundation of the world, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have existed in loving communion.

God's love is *so* great, *so* immeasurable, and *so* boundless that He *chose* to create a universe, a habitable planet, and a people upon whom He could freely dispense His love. Years ago, Christian philosopher and apologist Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) drew a simple, yet revolutionary diagram. The truth it reveals has never ceased to amaze me. It shows that God is both infinite and personal. Because He is infinite, there is a chasm, a gulf, between God and the creation. God existed before creation and He is separate from creation. God, while infinite, is also personal. Being personal means God communicates. His Trinitarian communication overflows to man because He created *personal* man. A chasm separates the rest of creation from God because of this lack of interpersonal commonality. It exists *only* between God and man. This means that the infinite, personal God created man for the purpose of loving fellowship! Stand back and wonder!



When the Apostle Paul mediated upon the love of God, He saw that it was higher than the heavens, deeper than the deepest sea, and longer than the expanse of space (Ephesians 3:14-21). The outpouring of His love makes a trillion Niagaras a mere drop in a bucket. Unlike the modern conception of love, the love of God is holy and stern. *It transforms the person being loved into a lover like God.*

Nothing in the created order can separate God's loved man from God's love (Romans 8:31-39). His love is everywhere pursuing us wherever we are (Psalm 139). God knows everything there is to know about us, our faults, strengths, sins, hurts ... everything. Knowing this, He loves us still.

The final definition of the love of God, if we presume to fully define it, which we cannot, is revealed in Calvary's Cross. Man, created for love fellowship, turned from God's life of love into the death of hate (Genesis 3). Instead of drawing life and love from God, man chose to ever draw to himself, the ultimate act of unlove. Because of his rebellion, man, made to be a friend of God, has become the enemy of God.

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In this enmity, a diamond in the rough appears, a sparkling gem, because of its black background, *that could never be wondrously appreciated in any other context.*

Man is dead, alienated from the very Life and Love of God (Ephesians 2:1-3). Man runs from the hound of heaven, eyes blinded, ears covered, pounding wildly on the door of perdition. In this state, God, in love, still reaches out; He reaches out to sinner man with the song of the hill of Golgotha (Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:4-10). The Cross of Jesus Christ is not an afterthought of God; *it is the revelation of the way He is.*

By this the love of God was manifested to us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (I John 4:9-10).

The Cross is the revelation of God's stern and transforming love. Because God is holy and just, God cannot overlook sin. He must deal with it. Because the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), He dealt with sin in the death of His Son. Talk about love! This love is not cheap. It is costly because it cost the life of God's only begotten Son. When, in the mystery of the new birth and by the resurrecting power of God, God bestows His redemptive love upon a receptive sinner, that sinner is restored to favor and service to the King of love (John 3; Romans 1:1-6). God's enemy is now God's friend.

For the person who has responded to God's eternal song of Calvary, for the one who has jumped into "His lap," His love provides rest and security for the journey of life, in time and for eternity. Those redeemed by the blood of God's Son learn to judge each circumstance from the perspective of the God who is love. They recognize the false premise of judging the love of God based on one's circumstances.

Even in our darkest night, when everything within us cries out and says that God is *not* love, His day soon dawns and we come to realize that every event of life has come to us through His loving hands. As the Apostle Paul confidently affirmed, "All things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose ... that we might be confirmed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:28-29).