

Can a man study the universe in detail and keep his faith in God? Can there be some way to show someone who doesn't believe in God at all the reasonableness of His existence? I think that we can say yes to both of these questions, and I hope that we can consider them together for a few minutes.

Man is by his very nature a believing animal. He must believe something! These beliefs are a foundation for the way he lives, and unless that foundation is strong, it cannot support him. To have that strong ground to stand on for our lives, we must not believe just because our parents did, or because it is convenient, but because we have thought it out in our own minds. We must see the reasonableness of our faith. By reasonable, I mean that the balance of evidence and probability is well in favor of it. God gave us a mind and I believe that he meant for us to use it, for he tells us in Isaiah 1:18, 'Come, let us reason together.' Tonight's message is in no way a proof of God. It is merely a line of thought, a path of reasoning that I think open-minded people can accept with very little trouble.

To reason with someone who doesn't believe, we must find some common ground of belief, a starting point for our discussion. The concept of 'God' is something that is very abstract. We must begin our argument with something we can sense, something that we can 'sink our teeth into.' I believe that this something is the universe itself.

What is the universe, anyway, in the simplest of scientific terms? It is energy and matter; space and time. It is a complex web of forces and laws which act upon and govern these things. It is something that has challenged the imagination of man from the beginning of his existence, and as a result, he has studied it in great detail. A particular question that has bothered man is, 'How did it all get here?'

This question doesn't bother everyone, but there are implications involved which are so tremendous that everyone should at least consider it. Many scientists go to great lengths to explain its evolution from the cosmic explosion called the 'Big Bang.' But our question has not been answered. It is now, 'If all that is so, then where did the physical material that made up the 'Big Bang' come from? Science indeed cannot answer this question, for science can only deal with what exists physically now, and cannot cover anything else. We can use it, however, as a powerful tool in the process of reasoning about the origin of the universe.

Now there are only two ways of looking at the existence of the universe. Either it has existed for all eternity, or it has not. Besides the fact that the first hypothesis does not satisfy our curiosity concerning origins, it is also not substantiated by what physical laws we do know. There is something that is called the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which is the most important in this regard. After being put into extremely simple terms, it states that the universe is like a giant clock that is running down, losing more of its usable energy all of the time. This means that it has some finite lifetime, and could not possibly have been in existence always, for in an infinite amount of time it would have already run down and stopped by now. The second law represents a continual loss of order and design in the universe as a system as time goes on.

I am forced then to reject the idea that the universe has been in existence from all eternity, and choose the hypothesis that it has not always existed. The principle of the Conservation of Mass - Energy, which states that the sum of all of the substance of the universe in either of its two forms Mass or Energy is constant, destroys the idea that the universe could have just popped into existence all by itself. To resolve the question of origins, then, we must step out of the realm of the physical universe, and define the First Cause. Something had to start the universe going, and we will just call that 'something': God. He is not physical; we will for our convenience call his world the 'spiritual world.' Let us remember that the principles of this existing universe cannot be bound upon God, for he created them. Therefore we do not have to answer the question 'Who created God?' He needs no creator; he created time as we know it; He can step in at any time and do anything he wants to it! All of this may go against our feelings, but we must remember that we only know our physical experiences, and have no similar spiritual experience at this point to use upon this thing that we have called 'God.'

Let us follow the idea now that something called God created the universe. Now, He either created it by accident, or he created it on purpose. It appears absurd that this being could have so much power and

not be able to control it. The order and design and intelligence in the creation deny this idea totally! You don't get order by accident. There would be no meaning to a universe if this were so, and a meaningless universe is totally without moral standards.

God, then, must have created the universe for a meaningful purpose, and the only obvious purpose is the existence of mankind. Matter was created to support life, life was created to support man, and man was created with something different from all other animals: the ability to communicate abstract ideas easily, and the ability to reason and choose right from wrong. It seems as though, since man is the only creature that we know of who can really reflect to any degree the creative and intellectual power of God, he has been created by God for the specific purpose of being in some small way a companion to Him. God wants someone who has a choice to want to be like him and love Him. And since God is timeless, it is not logical for this relationship to be temporary, but eternal.

If this is so, then, God would have to communicate and interact with man so that man could know what God is like and what the relationship required of him. That this will be good for us, and not evil, follows from the fact that God wants us to carry out his purpose. We are something like a machine which needs operating instructions to run well. Evil, then, is what reduces our efficiency, which God would hate; so this communication would have to warn against it. It seems reasonable that this communication should have its roots in the very earliest days of man, and be given slowly, with signs of power, so that the mind of mankind could begin to grasp the various religious ideas involved. This progressive revelation would have to be totally unified, and climax in some final message when man was ready to receive it. This message would relate to the purpose of man and to his carrying out that purpose. It would reveal the way for men to act toward each other for each has the same purpose. It would also need to reveal God's nature to man. Of all of the major religions of the world, it seems that only the Bible has these characteristics. It is so significant to me that the Bible not only tells us to love each other, but it shows us how to do it by giving us the extremely personal and touching example of God coming to earth himself and pouring himself out for us. I recognize, then, the Bible as the only choice to be the authoritative word of God. If you don't believe that, then I hope that you will at least believe that it is something that should be investigated.

We have a tremendous choice to make, which the Bible says will impact our eternal destiny. We can obey, or we can disobey: there is no real in-between. Obedience in this life yields the full accomplishment of God's original purpose, which is the extension of this earthly relationship in a better way forever. Disobedience involves our separation from every quality represented by God, and this eternal chaos can only be a Hell which is so terrible that it defied description. God made us for the purpose of having a relationship with him, as the first and second greatest commandments show, but only if we choose it. Since He is a perfect being, he demands perfection. Man is imperfect, however, having sinned and come short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23. How can we then live? God's magnificent grace provides the way. Paul tells us in Romans 5:2 that we have access through Jesus Christ to this grace. He removes from our account our sins, so that they will not be remembered.

Let's think for a minute of sin, not as particular acts of breaking God's law, but as our general failure to keep up the relationship with God that He really wants. It is the failure to accomplish His purpose for us. This is what really breaks God's heart. God wants us to be close to him in our heart, involved in communication with Him in prayer and praise, spending time with him. But all that we do is to think of good works and bad works, and forget about Him, personally. If we believe that God created the universe to establish a relationship with man, and that the Bible is this word to us, then obeying that word from the depths of our heart is essential.