

Two spiritual forces are at work to influence where you spend eternity.

A world of choice

BY STEPHEN LIM

“From eternal ages past, God existed with a wonderful plan for the created cosmos we observe today.”

Scientists look at our universe and theorize that it has existed perhaps 10 to 15 billion years. That estimate changes from year to year. What doesn't change is the Bible's unequivocal statement that the Creator of the universe has always existed.

“Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Psalm 90:2, NIV).

From eternal ages past, God existed with a wonderful plan for the created cosmos we observe today.

In studying the universe, Einstein recognized the greatness of its Creator. “The harmony of natural law ... reveals an intelligence of such superiority,” he wrote, “that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection.”

Today, scientists recognize the complexity of the universe and Earth's striking suitability for human life. Agnostic astrophysicist Stephen Hawking recognized that many factors in the universe “seem to be very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life.” He admitted the difficulty of explaining how the universe could have begun the way it did, “except as the act of a God who intended to create beings like us.”

We do not need to peer into the distant skies or probe the beginning of time to appreciate God's magnificent creation. Our bodies demonstrate His careful design and provision for our every need. Look at the brain, eye, immune system, and DNA molecule for just a few amazing expressions of divine creativity.

IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Not only did God wondrously construct us physically, He also created us “in his own image” (Genesis 1:27, NIV). Among other things, this means the ability to think, to make choices and to be creative. Most importantly, however, we are enough like God to have relationship with Him. God is fully self-sufficient in every area including relationship — as perfect love exists eternally between Father, Son and

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Holy Spirit. While He didn't have to, God desired to create beings who could enjoy His love and creation.

A UNIVERSE OF LOVE

In creating us, God could have programmed us like robots only to obey Him. Instead, He wanted to create a universe of love, one with beings capable of love — toward Him and other persons. Love must be freely given, however, or it is not love. Love requires the freedom to choose. If I had the strength and power, I could make you my slave. But I cannot make you love me.

A world of choice, however, contains the possibility of choosing against God. Though staggering the thought, we have the capacity to rebel against the Creator. Yet God felt it was worth this risk to create a world in which love could exist.

CHOOSING TO EXPERIENCE EVIL

Intellectually, Adam and Eve, the first humans, knew what they should do and not do. They should take care of God's creation, as He had commanded them (Genesis 2:15). They shouldn't disobey Him by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17). Also the narrative implies that they were to love and obey God. So Adam and Eve already knew right from wrong. What they didn't have was experiential knowledge of wrongdoing. (In the Hebrew language, knowledge involves experience rather than simply mental awareness.) When they ate the fruit, they willfully chose to disobey God, doubting His goodness and rebelling against His command. This action led to tragic consequences for humanity.

DISTORTION OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

We were created by God to love and serve Him and to be rulers with Him (Genesis 1:26; Revelation 22:5), but our guilt separates us from Him. We try to find fulfillment apart from Him — whether in human relationships, success, wealth, pleasure or power — but these only satisfy partially and temporarily.

God is the greatest Reality and His laws describe reality. When we ignore the fact that He is Lord and reject the laws He gave to us for our good (Deuteronomy 10:13), our lives become distorted (Romans 1:21-32).

For example, God meant work as a fulfilling use of the abilities He gave us. Instead, work often becomes drudgery, stress and a necessary evil. He also meant for us to find satisfaction in relationships, yet too often we experience conditional love, alienation and hostility. Every aspect of human life becomes distorted — whether morality, art, commerce, education or government.

Sin's distortion leads to dehumanization in society — in ways subtle and brutal. People exploit and destroy others for their own gain. For example, there are an estimated 25 million slaves in the world today. More than half a million additional women and children are forced into sexual bondage every year, many dying within a few years due to abuse and violence.

DOMINION OF SATAN

Such distortion relates closely to the dominion of Satan. Jesus said that Satan is “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30). Paul refers

to this world as “the dominion of darkness” (Colossians 1:13). John states that “the whole world is in the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

In what sense are people under the dominion of Satan? Two spiritual forces exist in the world — God and Satan — who influence our lives. Paul writes in Romans 8:14 that those who are led by the Spirit are the children of God. When individuals shut off the influence of God, they open themselves to the influence of Satan, whether they know it or not. The more we yield to Satan's temptations, the greater his influence in our lives (Romans 6:16,17). These wrong choices — on our part and the part of others — create the distortion and dehumanization we see in society.

DEATH AND DESTRUCTION

Physical and spiritual consequences compound the natural results of our fallenness. God allowed physical suffering to become part of human existence (Genesis 3:16-19). All He had to do was withdraw the smallest fraction of His providential care of the world for flaws to emerge in our incredibly complex bodies and planet.

C.S. Lewis believed that this actually results from God's love rather than simply His judgment. In suffering, people tend to realize their own inadequacy and seek after God. And finding Him, they escape the greatest suffering and loss.

Another consequence of our fallenness is physical death (Genesis 2:17). God will not allow His universe to be forever marred by rebellious creatures. Finally, fallen humans will experience eternal death (Matthew 25:46; Romans 6:23).

Immortality is not something tacked onto mortal beings, but built into our nature by God. He desires that those He creates and loves should spend eternity with Him. He will not, however, force those who do not want to accept the reality of His lordship to spend eternity with Him. Instead He has prepared another place for them, which results in ultimate loss (Philippians 3:19; Hebrews 10:39; Matthew 13:42).

IS THERE HOPE?

Humankind, created in God's image for the highest possibilities, has fallen. We endure the consequences of our rebellion, unable to rescue ourselves from our dilemma. Is there any hope? In His love, God did not leave us to our fate. He became Man in the person of Jesus, taking the penalty for sin onto himself, so that we can be forgiven and restored to relationship with Him.

In Christ, the distortions in our lives begin to heal as we embrace the process of becoming a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). God wants to deliver us from the dominion of darkness and transfer us to the kingdom of His Son (Colossians 1:13). He reverses our march toward destruction, and we pass from death to abundant and eternal life (1 John 3:14; John 10:10; Romans 6:23). That's the best news in the world! **tpe**

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