

IS GOD A MORAL MONSTER?

Interview with Dr. Paul Copan

How do we make sense of the Old Testament God who orders the wiping out of an entire civilization, who demands worship and sacrifice, and oppresses women and endorses slavery?

Why Paul Copan Wrote His Book *Is God A Moral Monster?*

One of the challenges that came up in recent years was after September 11 when a lot of writings came out basically reproaching religion for being the cause of all sorts of evils like September 11. New atheists, as Paul Copan calls them, like Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and others came out with their gloves off wanting to put religion in its place saying that it's not just Islam but all religion that's bad.

As part of their critique, there was a particular vehemence launched against what they called "The God of the Old Testament" through which Richard Dawkins talked about how nasty the God of the Old Testament is, how they don't want that kind of a God who is a horrific moral picture. He says, "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."

It was not very keen on the depictions of God in the Old Testament. There are, indeed, some challenging passages that we need to be grappling with but a lot of arguments that are being used by these new atheists are really very dismissive and don't take context, sin, and God's anger into consideration. It is indeed a righteous wrath which is part of the picture of God not only of the Old Testament but also of the New Testament. So, with some of those assaults on God of the Old Testament and some of the problems that often come with dealing with the Old Testament ethical challenges, Dr. Paul Copan wanted to undertake a book that addresses some of those issues in a fair-minded way that tackled the scholarship and some of the criticisms and put them in a proper setting.

How Effective Are the Arguments of the New Atheists?

They are indeed making an impact—no question about it. Those who aren't willing to do their homework contented with sound bites win rhetorical points. Paul Copan cited an example when he went to hear one of the new atheists, Richard Dawkins, at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale where he spoke on a scientific topic.

At Q&A, Paul Copan asked Richard Dawkins, "In your book *River Out of Eden*, you say that we're all dancing to the music of our DNA so there is no good or evil, nothing but blind pitiless indifference. So my question to you is, if we're simply believing what our bodies are pumping into us, what our brain is basically telling us to believe, that our beliefs are produced by forces beyond our control, then how can you say that the naturalist or the atheist is more rational than the theist since both of them have no control over the beliefs that they hold?"

Richard Dawkins replied, “Well, it’s because science works...” and went on to talk about Republicans and Democrats. He finished with, “and besides rockets fly people to the moon but religion flies planes in the buildings” as his final argument. The whole place erupted with about 3,000 people thinking how great the argument was.

If Richard Dawkins is right, then those Muslims who flew their planes into buildings did so, not because they had no control over themselves, but because they were dancing to the music of their DNA. Also, when Richard Dawkins himself said, “There is no good or evil” in his book *River Out of Eden*, it’s interesting how he accuses God of being evil or bad since naturalism has no basis for talking about good or evil, but only blind pitiless indifferences as he said. He is being hypocritical and playing to the crowd. On the one hand, he is saying ‘it’s all just a matter of genes’, but on the other hand he is saying ‘but we do have responsibility for our actions and that there really is good as well as evil.’ He wants to have it both ways, beating up on religion to which he is very hostile, but yet wanting his evolutionary picture in which there is no good or evil. It’s real hypocrisy, on the one hand disputing or denying that evil exists at all, but then beating up on religion saying that it’s the root of all evil. In fact, he did a BBC documentary on religion as the root of all evil. So, we are left scratching our heads.

Is God an Egomaniac Desiring Praise and Sacrifice Unto Himself?

Part of the bigger picture that we need to see is that when God is calling for worship, it is because, firstly, God is the worship worthy Creator and not because He’s an egomaniac. If He’s just a regular egomaniac then He would not be worthy of worship. If we don’t worship God, we’re only harming ourselves. To be worshiping God means we are actually in touch with reality - the God who is our Creator, one looking out for our best interest, intrinsically good, and worthy of worship. He is not a God who just happens to create us even though He is evil and therefore says, “Worship me!” A God who is some creator who is evil would not be worthy of worship. He is a God who is good and therefore, worthy of worship.

When we actually worship something other than God, we actually bring harm to ourselves because we are meant for relationship with God. When God calls us to worship Him, it’s because He has our interest in mind. We need to remember, too, that when God is calling on us to worship Him, it’s not as though God is somehow needy or that He somehow needs praise. God tells us in Psalm 50 that “If I were hungry I wouldn’t tell you.” Romans 11 says, who has ever given to God that He should repay him?

God doesn’t need anything from us, not even our worship. But rather God creates us—Father, Son, and Spirit—so that we might enter into the joy and love of being in the Divine Family. He has been loving and relational from eternity. He extends that relationship to His creatures that we can enter into a relationship with Him as well so that we can share in the joy of the Divine Family. God, in commanding us to worship Him, is basically keeping us from harm, from damaging ourselves, and from going in directions that we were not meant to go.

Pat Zukeran: Worship is for our sake, not so much His.

Worship is not as though it’s an either-or. It’s not as though God needs it but it is basically an acknowledgment of God’s rightful place - the God who is worship worthy. When we say it’s for His sake, it’s not as though God somehow needs it but it is right and fitting as the Psalmist says to sing praise to God. It is fitting

that we acknowledge God to be God because anything else would be flying in the face of reality. This also means that in acknowledging who God is and being rightfully related to Him, we're actually functioning as we were designed to function. When we don't worship God, when our lives are out of sync with God, we ourselves begin to malfunction.

Pat Zukeran: It seems like it's intrinsic in all beings to worship something.

Bob Dylan, in his song "Gotta Serve Somebody", says "it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord but you gotta serve somebody." We are worshiping beings. The question is whether you are going to worship the being who is worthy of worship or you're going to worship something that is not worthy of worship as Paul says in Romans chapter 1 worshiping and serving the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever.

Pat Zukeran: One of the things we have come to understand, believers in God and atheists, is that without God life is ultimately without meaning, significance, or hope.

Some people would say that they don't need to believe in God to have meaning or purpose, that they can be kind to their neighbor and so forth. However, the more basic question is not about knowing whether something is right or wrong or finding some sense of fulfillment, but how we came to have value in the first place. If we've come from this string of valueless processes since the Big Bang until today, then it's pointless to think that anything has objective meaning. Do we want to say then that Hitler found meaning and contentment in murdering Jews? It's a question whether there is some sort of objective basis for affirming that human beings have a certain goal that they ought to function in a certain way.

If nature is all there is—there is no way things ought to be—things are just like what Richard Dawkins says that there is no good or evil, no design or purpose, nothing but blind pitiless indifference, no ultimate purpose, then it is right to point out that atheism does not give us any basis for saying that you ought to live this way, or that human beings do have intrinsic dignity and worth. This doesn't come from the resources of atheism or naturalism. Whereas theism, especially Trinitarian theism or Christian theism, we have a very strong basis for affirming the emergence of personhood, the emergence of human beings having worth because they've been made in the image of God.

Pat Zukeran: That's why worship keeps us in proper perspective and understanding and in a joyful relationship. God emphasizes this so much - the worship of Himself - because that's what we're designed as beings created in the image of this God.

As for the imagery of jealousy in the Old Testament for some people, we could cite as an example Oprah Winfrey talking about how she couldn't stand the God who is jealous. It seemed so belittling and beneath God that she rejected the Biblical God because of this idea of jealousy.

It is just right for a husband to be jealous when a man is flirting with his wife. People can get jealous about silly and petty things that actually reflect insecurity. But when it comes to a relationship like marriage, when there's something that cuts in on that relationship that threatens it, jealousy is holy and properly warranted. In the same way, when God is not being loved, sought, or worshiped and we're running after other things, God is jealous. It's not because He's insecure but because He alone is worship worthy. When we run after

god-substitutes, God is rightly jealous because it's a denial of reality—who God is, and it brings harm to us as well.

Pat Zukeran: This jealousy is motivated by His love for us.

God Calling Abraham to Sacrifice His Son Isaac

A lot of people raise questions about this saying how a good God could command this kind of thing, a horrendous one that God would issue to Abraham. However, as we read in Genesis 22, it's interesting that Abraham doesn't seem to be concerned. He seems to just step into this not even questioning it but matter-of-factly responds to it. Of course, as we put ourselves in Abraham's place, we would think how agonizing and utterly traumatizing this must be.

There are a couple of things to keep in mind regarding this story. First of all, what's going on in Genesis 22 goes back to the call that God made to Abraham in chapter 12 where God tells him to go to a land that He's going to show him. Likewise, God calls Abraham now to go to a place that He is going to show him to offer the sacrifice. God promises in Genesis 12 that He is going to give him offspring that through Abraham and his offspring all the nations, all the families of the earth are going to be blessed.

However, a failure then comes through Ishmael that God's purposes or methods are bypassed. Abraham takes Hagar, Sarah's handmaiden, thinking that it's going to come through his body but maybe not through Sarah's. So, he had a son through Hagar, Ishmael. After Isaac is born, there is a conflict that emerges when Ishmael eventually starts to denigrate, humiliate, shame, and dishonor him. Sarah tells Abraham she wants them both out of the house. Of course, Abraham has become attached to Ishmael, but God tells him not to worry, that God will make of Ishmael a great nation. Eventually, in chapter 17, they end up departing but God assures Abraham that even though it looks like a bad idea, He is going to oversee the matter and that he should listen to Sarah. In a sense, this is a testing ground that even though there is a precarious situation, God is in control.

Secondly, we are reminded that God is going to be the one who brings about a nation, not out of Ishmael, but out of Isaac. With Isaac on the scene as the promised child, we are assured that God is at work, who has brought about a miracle through Abraham's and Sarah's bodies, and that God is going to fulfill the promise. Abraham has this in the background as he is going to sacrifice Isaac. He knows that Isaac is the promised child and it can't be Ishmael even though Ishmael is going to become a great nation. He is not the one who is going to be the child of blessing.

So, he tells his servant as he goes to Mount Moriah, "We will go and worship and we will return." Abraham is confident that Isaac is going to accompany him even though he doesn't know how that is going to happen. That's why the author of Hebrews in chapter 11 says that Abraham believed that God was able to raise even the dead. In other words, he'd assumed that if it meant killing Isaac and God bringing him back to life then that's how He would do it. Abraham was so confident that God was going to fulfill His promise because he had seen God's track record in the past and that God was going to make it work somehow.

When people assess this picture and they criticize the Biblical record or they'll say that this is so utterly immoral - God could not do this kind of thing - they're assuming that Abraham is like any other old Joe who may

have had some sort of revelation out of the blue and says, ‘Well, God told me to do this and it’s something crazy.’ Abraham has had this track record with God so when we put ourselves in Abraham’s place, it’s not as though it is detached from the promises of God or from the workings of God in history.

We could think of it this way. Assuming, for example, that 18-year olds are immune from death, that no matter what you do to them—you can bludgeon them, you can stab them, you can blow them up—they immediately come back to life. This fact would change the moral picture of how you treat an 18-year old. You could play a game called ‘Kill the 18-year Old’ and it could be fun rather than horrific because 18-year olds are immune from death. They just come right back to life. It would definitely change the moral picture.

In the same way with Abraham, there is a God who makes a promise and who has brought about fulfillment of His promise to bring this miracle child about. This is part of the background picture to the command to Abraham to sacrifice his son which definitely changes the scenario in this bigger picture.

Abraham knows that God has been faithful so far so when God is making this command it is with the awareness that God’s promise to fulfill this blessing to Abraham is going to come true. This is part of the moral picture or moral facts that we need to be dealing with. It’s important for us to remember that we’re dealing with more than just an everyday scenario but with the historical backdrop of God’s workings with Abraham in bringing about this promised child Isaac.

Pat Zukeran: In such stories, you have to take a look at the entire context of what’s going on to really gain the insight and understanding of the story.

How Can God Be Moral When He Orders The Wiping Out Of An Entire Civilization?

Some people will call this “ethnic cleansing”, but it certainly is not motivated by anything racial. The same language is actually used when God says to “utterly destroy the Canaanites.” God also uses the same language in Jeremiah 25:9 where He says, “I will utterly destroy” Judah through the Babylonians and leave their cities in everlasting desolation. At the end of the book, we can see that Judah is not utterly destroyed; it is still around; Judah still exists and that there are lots of cities that are inhabited even though there is Babylonian exile. The temple is destroyed also.

Basically, Judah is disabled politically, militarily, and religiously. The curtain is closed on Judah as a significant power in the ancient Near East and there is exile with Babylon. However, it doesn’t mean they are utterly destroyed as “the Judaites are no more.” It’s important to keep in mind that God does bring judgment on nations. However, it’s not ethnically motivated, but is morally and spiritually driven.

Secondly, let’s consider language of “utterly destroy, leave alive nothing that breathes” which we can see in Deuteronomy 7 and 20. In the ancient Near East, we often see this kind of language. In fact, in war text, we might read of a military commander who has a narrow victory over his opponent, but he’ll use the language of “utterly destroying, of leaving alive nothing that breathes.” In fact, a Moabite king is actually mentioned in the Scriptures, King Mesha. He says in one of his war texts in inscription that “Israel is no more.” It certainly wasn’t the case as Israel continued to exist. It was Moab that’s “no more.” There is the tendency to exaggerate or hyperbolize in the ancient Near East.

Some people insist that it plainly says that they “leave alive nothing that breathes” but as we keep reading we actually find out that there are plenty of people who are still alive. We’re told that “Joshua did all that Moses commanded” when it says that there were no survivors. However, we go on and read that there are plenty of survivors. In fact, the end of the book of Joshua talks about the nations that still remain among them as there were plenty of Canaanites who were there. In fact, Judges which is a continuation of Joshua, talks about all the entrenched Canaanites in its first two chapters but yet “Joshua did all that Moses commanded.” He didn’t literally wipe them out. Not at all.

Just as God overwhelmed the gods of Egypt through the plagues in the Crossing of the Red Sea, God is seen as the One who is more powerful than the Canaanite deities because He is driving out the Canaanites from the land. They are being dispossessed that the name of Yahweh, or the LORD, is going to prevail over against the Canaanite deities.

Some people might take the Bible here literally but both emphases can’t be taken literally. They say that they’re *literally* driven out, dispossessed, or they’re people who are surviving like the Canaanites couldn’t be driven out in Judges 1 & 2. They also take “utterly destroy” literally but not the “survivors” literally. It is *not* genocide. Neither is it ethnically motivated as we see lots of Canaanites surviving.

The same thing goes with the Amalekites in 1st Samuel 15. God tells Saul as he was about to go into a battle at a citadel to “leave alive nothing that breathes, utterly destroy them, man, woman, young and old,” etc., that all are to be destroyed. It’s not what was actually intended. The language of “young and old, man and woman,” is stereotypical but it’s not intended even literally. In 1st Samuel 15 where the Amalekites are being fought against, Saul is rebuked for keeping the animals alive as well as King Agag. Saul himself, in 1st Samuel 15:20, says that he obeyed the word of the Lord and that he did utterly destroy the Amalekites except for the animals and King Agag. Samuel comes along and kills King Agag. We are likely to get the impression that that’s all the Amalekites there are. However, in the same book you’ll see that David himself fights against the Amalekites in chapters 27 and 30. In fact, we see that there’s an Amalekite army that’s so large that 400 of them end up escaping from the clutches of David. So, even though Saul said he had utterly destroyed the Amalekites, we see that there were lots of them who still remained.

The language in 1st Samuel 15 is a war text language that involves hyperbole or exaggeration. A more realistic scenario in 1st Samuel 27-30 shows that there are lots of other Amalekites who happen to be around. In fact, they continued to live on up through the time of Hezekiah and even into the reign of Esther in Persia. We just need to re-examine the text more closely and we see that there’s more going on.

This does not mean, however, that God is not the God of judgment and wrath. He undeniably judges. In fact, God Himself destroyed the city of Sodom and Gomorrah and brought judgment through a flood. Jesus Himself, a moral example whom many regard as the paradigm of virtue, is in agreement with the judgment of God on Sodom and Gomorrah and warns Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, as well as Tyre and Sidon. He warned them that greater judgment would fall upon them because they were rejecting Him. Jesus is not shrinking back from affirming what happens in the Old Testament.

On the other hand, we are living in another era in which we see things differently with the New Testament people of God. Instead of a nation which may use a sword to bring judgment capitally to its citizens or even death penalty, we now see Paul, in 1 Corinthians 5, talking about church discipline making sure that someone who is living immorally is excommunicated until he repents and returns. A new era has come indeed. But we can still see a God who is both kind and severe as Romans 11:22 says, “Behold, the kindness and severity of God.” There is emphasis in the Old Testament about God being gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness but also visiting judgment on those who hate Him as there is also in the New Testament with His kindness and graciousness as well as His severity.

Pat Zukeran: There’s indeed a balance in God just like there’s a balance in us. We’re gracious, kind, and loving at the proper times but in the proper context we can also be just and execute judgment on immoral or unjust conduct.

We need to be people who take those things seriously. In the context of the local church and church discipline, the New Testament certainly takes very serious those who are bringing division, living immorally, and even spouting heresy need to be dealt with. They can’t simply let them go. There are indeed terms of judgment that are used with regard to these scenarios.

In the end, Jesus Himself finally comes on a white horse to bring judgment to the world. While a lot of people say Jesus, Himself said to turn the other cheek, He also said many harsh things as well like those He said against the Pharisees with regard to their religious hypocrisy. In Matthew 18:6, Jesus is talking to those who believe in him about one who leads the little ones astray, Jesus said that it’s better for this person to have a millstone tied around his neck and drowned at the depths of the sea. Jesus also spoke about the nation of Israel which was going to be judged through the Romans in AD 70. He talked about how not one stone will be left on another and that judgment would be coming. In fact, in Matthew 21, He tells the parable of the vine keepers who are rejecting the king’s messengers and even his own son. Jesus asks His audience what the master or the king is going to do when he comes back. They replied, he’s going to bring those wretches to a wretched end. Jesus also had a vehement, anger at sin, and an awareness of divine judgment.

One of the things that Paul Copan points out in his book, *Is God a Moral Monster?* is that in western culture, we tend to emphasize how we need to be kind, gentle, and tolerant. We have a vocabulary of putting up with things and being compassionate. It’s important for us to remember, too, that God is also a God who brings judgment, hates sin, and hates what sin does to people.

Paul Copan, on page 192, quoted from Miroslav Volf. He is a Yale theologian who was born in Croatia and lived through the ethnic strife in the former Yugoslavia which included destruction of churches, raping of women, and murdering the innocents. As a theologian, he said, he once thought that wrath and anger were beneath God, but he came to realize that his view of God had been too low. He writes about those who think that divine wrath is just an awful thing and that we shouldn’t think of God in those terms. He said,

“I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God. Isn’t God love? Shouldn’t divine love be beyond wrath? God is love and God loves every person and every creature. That’s exactly why God is wrathful against some of them. My last resistance to the idea of God’s wrath was a casualty of the war in the

former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come. According to some estimates 200 people were killed and over three million were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed. My people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination, and I could not imagine God not being angry. Or think of Rwanda in the last decade of the past century where 800,000 people were hacked to death in 100 days! How did God react to the carnage? By doting on the perpetrators in a grandfatherly fashion? By refusing to condemn the bloodbath but instead affirming the perpetrators' basic goodness? Wasn't God fiercely angry with them? Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God *is* love."

Slavery in the Old Testament

Slavery in the Old Testament is usually the second major question people ask when they're dealing with various Old Testament issues. A few distinctions need to be considered on this matter.

First of all, a lot of people when they read the word *slavery* or *slave* in the Old Testament, their mind immediately goes back to pre-civil war south Antebellum slavery and they see pictures of slaves whose backs have been just scarred from beatings with whips. We read stories like Frederick Douglass', the runaway slave who became a spokesman for abolition, where you read of the horrific testimonies of the abuses and cruelty of slavery. A lot of people just make that ready association. However, it's a far cry from what goes on in the land of Israel. There are three significant differences between Antebellum slavery and servitude in Israel.

Firstly, there was an anti-harm law in Israel that if a slave, more like a servant, were beaten, harmed, or if you gouge out his eye or knock out his tooth, he was to go free. It is not even lifelong slavery but it's what colonial America experienced - indentured servitude. You didn't have enough money to come to the new world; you promised that you would pay off the debt when you got here. You would get on the ship, find papers which would be a contract that was legally binding and come here to work for seven years until the terms of the contract were over. Then, you went about as a free citizen and your obligations were done.

That's basically how it operated in Israel. In times of utter poverty where you had to sell everything, and you still had nothing left, in order to sustain yourself, you would sell yourself into servitude. Although some would be voluntary but mostly were done in destitution. Usually you're in your tribal territory with your clan. You would parcel out your family members in servitude to be taken care of your food, clothing, and shelter. After seven years, you are free to go, get back on your feet and try to strike out on your own if you wanted to. Or, you could commit yourself to your master or employer and live within his household the rest of your life. This was also permitted. The law against harming your own servant remains. As mentioned, knocking out a tooth would set him free then you would lose your investment. The contract negated because of your striking out in anger or similar instances.

A second difference between the laws in Israel and the Antebellum slavery situation is that kidnapping in Israel was prohibited and punishable by death. With Antebellum slavery, it was basically built on the practice of kidnapping, grabbing people, taking them from their homeland, and selling them to slavery.

Thirdly, foreign slaves who ran away and sought refuge in Israel were to be allowed to settle in any of their cities. They were to be given protection from likely their harsh master from whom they ran away. This puts in perspective what the Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian law code, says that if you are harboring a runaway slave and don't return him to his master, you could be subject to capital punishment. Israel has a very different scenario where there is a regard for the wellbeing of the foreign slave. In fact, if you were an Israelite servant and you are not being treated well, we could say that you have the stronger right to run away and find refuge in another place.

Slavery in the New Testament

First of all, it's a different kind of slavery that we see in the New Testament where you have the institution of slavery, whereas in the Old Testament God wanted to keep people from being enslaved or from institutionalized slavery. They had ways to help foreigners who came so they wouldn't be living in grinding poverty. They would have gleaning laws, which allowed people to pick the corners of the field where crops have been grown, to gather grain. They could pick fruits from trees which pickers shouldn't have picked clean so that people, even sojourners in the land coming from another country, could find assistance through this kind of a system.

But in the New Testament, slavery has become institutionalized in which a slave is the property of the owner. However, a different scenario could be seen. Although some people will say that Jesus didn't say anything against slavery, Jesus Himself spoke against all kinds of oppression. In Luke 4 quoting from the book of Isaiah, said that He has come to bring relief to the captives and bring freedom to those who are oppressed. Jesus was one who is all about setting people free from oppression. Even in His ministry, Jesus had the sense and undermining of the practice of slavery.

Slavery, or Roman slavery specifically, is oppressive of human beings in many ways. Many people found it to be demeaning. Although there were others who found positions that were suited to them, they lived well even though they were the property of their masters. However, when it comes to oppression or to owning another person, these were the sort of things that Jesus was speaking out or testifying against. It's a subversive statement against the Roman system of slavery.

Paul himself in Galatians 3 talks about how in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, but all are one in Christ. Paul exhorts households where you have masters and slaves reminding the masters that they have a master themselves, so they are to treat their slaves with regard. In fact, in a household where you have Christian masters, you would have masters and slaves together sitting around the communion table. After they had their dinner, they'd have the Lord's Supper together and you'd have something that is very subversive in Roman society—masters and slaves eating at the same table basically indicating the equality that comes because they belong to Christ. The equality they have because they're human beings made in the image of God had already been mentioned but this is very significant.

Some people raise the question about Paul sending Onesimus back to Philemon, his slave owner, saying he is doing the same thing that the Code of Hammurabi says. You have to return the slave to his slave owner or else you're in trouble as you are undermining the law of the land. This, however, is different. There are a

number of scholars who dispute the reading that Onesimus is a runaway slave and that Paul is sending a runaway slave back. This interpretation came only in late 4th century so it's not even espoused from the very beginning by the Church Fathers. Rather, it's interesting to note that there aren't any *flight* verbs that are used like *runaway* or *fled*, nothing like that at all. Apostle Paul is clearly admonishing Philemon to allow Onesimus to come back, not as a slave, but rather as a brother. Paul uses the same language in Galatians 4 where we're no longer slaves but sons. It's not literal Roman slavery but rather a spiritual bondage. We are then adopted into God's family and freed from the shackles of spiritual slavery.

There's a very good reason for questioning the slavery that the people have spoken of with regard to Philemon and Onesimus. Paul says that rather than receiving him as a slave - someone who in Roman society would be seen as dishonored, of a very low status - receive him back as a brother, as an equal.

Is Religion the Cause of All Evils in the World?

This is a common objection of the new atheists. However, one of the things that we need to remember as Paul Copan points out in his book is that the Christian faith has actually brought more benefit to civilization. It has been responsible for the quality of rights, for example, for women and democracy. Even our language of human rights is a result not of enlightenment, or rationalism or secularism but it's actually anchored in not only Biblical text but also, through the Middle Ages, there was emphasis on natural right and natural law. We even see that in the Declaration of Independence, we are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, that there is the connection between rights and the existence of God who has made human beings in His image. The United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights which says that all human beings are equal in dignity actually comes from Christians in consultation with various Jewish rabbis who forged the language of human rights after World War II. It's really the product of Christians who were at the forefront of defending the integrity of human life against the assaults of government that could undermine and oppress those human beings.

It's actually the Christian faith, the Jewish Christian faith specifically, that has brought such great goods to our society. You could read a book like Alvin Schmidt's *Under the Influence* and see how Christianity transformed the West. It is an argument for the remarkable, dramatic impact not only with regard to rights and democracy but also to the beauty of music of Johann Sebastian Bach, arts, and literature. The Christian faith has inspired so many people to do great things, to achieve much. Even founding the modern science is attributed to the Christian faith as the earliest scientists were devoted Bible believers.

People say religion or believing in something very strongly leads to division. We wonder then what atheism or Communism brought about. A lot of new atheists don't want to identify their atheism with warfare. It's, therefore, unfair to do the same with religion. Just because you hold to something strongly doesn't mean that you are therefore going to destroy some of those who disagree with you. This is the very point of democracy—the acknowledgment of human beings made in the image of God that allows democracy to flourish. This viewpoint is what actually engenders the kind of tolerance and civility that the New Testament calls for.

So, it is a false representation to say that religion is the root of all evils. Obviously, there are things that are done in the name of religion that we all repudiate. It's a question whether what is being done in the name of

religion consistent with or inconsistent with it. We cannot imagine Jesus engaging in a crusade or taking up a gun at Auschwitz. Proper distinction is necessary.

Also, we need to look at the benefits that the Christian faith has brought. It's not the result of secularism but it's a result of the Christian faith. Rodney Stark in his book *The Victory of Reason* talks about this and documents how there have been great gains that have come through the Christian faith. The very benefits and the freedom that we are espousing in this country, in fact, sometimes beating up on the Christian faith, actually comes out of the context of tolerance and democracy that the Christian faith helped to engender.

About Paul Copan

Paul Copan is a Christian theologian, analytic philosopher, apologist, and author. He is currently a professor at the Palm Beach Atlantic University and holds the endowed Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics. Dr. Copan has a PhD from Marquette University and is the author 'Is God a Moral Monster?'