

*I don't have enough* **FAITH**  
*to be an* **ATHEIST**

with Dr. Frank Turek

PODCAST

## Paul Copan

(December 24, 2022)

Ladies and gentlemen, Is God a vindictive bully? Is the God of the Old Testament different from the God of the New Testament? What about some of these moral problems that we have in the Old Testament - slavery, apparent genocide, misogyny - is this really the true God? What do we have to say about this?

Well, we have one of our favorite guests, Dr. Paul Copan, on to talk about it. He originally has been on this program to talk about a similar issue with his first book, *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God*, but now there's a brand new sort of updated version of the book that's called, *Is God a Vindictive Bully?: Reconciling Portrayals of God in the Old and New Testaments?* As you know, Dr. Paul Copan teaches at Palm Beach Atlantic University. He's written a number of books. He has his PhD from Marquette. He's an all-around great guy. He's the king of puns as well. Do you have any puns for me today, Paul?

**Paul:**

You'll just have to wait and see.

**Frank:**

You'll have to wait and see. Okay.

**Paul:**

I might do a Punjabi on you.

**Frank:**

[laughing] All right. Well, let's start with what people don't know about you. First of all, married.

**Paul:**

Happily.

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**Frank:**

How many kids?

**Paul:**

Six kids.

**Frank:**

And where are they all now?

**Paul:**

They're scattered throughout the United States and one is in Paris, France.

**Frank:**

What's she doing in Paris, France?

**Paul:**

Married a guy who is in Paris and they have two kids. They met it met at church in Paris.

**Frank:**

Why was she there?

**Paul:**

She had gone over as an au pair, without knowing French, and learned French and is fluent and can keep up with them all.

**Frank:**

That's amazing. And then you have two grandkids in the US.

**Paul:**

Yeah, right. In New Orleans.

**Frank:**

All right, good. And are any of the kids in full time ministry?

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**Paul:**

Well, I'd say that our son in law in Paris is involved in a kind of ministry through the arts. He's had film at the Cannes Film Festival, a short film, and just more recently at the York England Film Festival, called Aesthetica.

**Frank:**

Now this new book, *Is God a Vindictive Bully?*, what is new in this book that wasn't in *Is God a Moral Monster?*

**Paul:**

So, it's not a second edition or something like that, it is completely new content. So, I have chapters on the imprecatory Psalms, those harsh Psalms, I have material on God hardening Pharaoh's heart, was David, a man after God's own heart? What about Uzzah touching the Ark and being struck down by God? What about Elijah and the bears? What about some of those challenging passages like the firstborn of Egypt, and the flood, and so forth?

And what I'm trying to do is address some of the other challenges that have come up, in which there are some I call critics from within and critics from without. The critics or without are like Richard Dawkins, the atheist. Then there are critics from within, who are people like Greg Boyd, and Peter Enns, and Eric Siebert, and so forth, who are within the church but they differentiate between the actual God and the textual God. The textual God, for example, is the God of the Fallen Ancient Near Eastern prophet or narrator, who's violence prone, and so forth, so when it says, Thus says the Lord, well, that's not a guarantee that the Lord is speaking, that's probably just a misinterpretation. In fact, Greg Boyd says things that look like people are faithful and committed in the Old Testament, from a New Testament point of view, or from a Jesus lens would be considered demonic.

The actual God, however, is the God who is understood through Jesus and especially his act on the cross. When he says, Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing, this act of forgiveness of enemy, love, and so forth, this shows us the heart of God. And so, Greg Boyd says that this is what we need to look at, and that anything that deviates from that cannot be from God, that must be from Satan, that must be from fallen human beings. So, I'm pushing back on the New Atheists and others from outside the church. And I say that my key verse is

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Romans 11:22, Behold then the kindness and severity of God. And to those critics from without the church, I say that God is much more kind and gracious than you realize. And to those who are critics from within, that God is more severe than you realize.

For example, Jesus himself, he is one who is seen as one who will not snuff out a smoldering wick or break a bruised reed. But on the other hand, as Revelation 12 says, he will rule the nations with a rod of iron. So, you see the kindness, you also see the severity. And if people are resisting God, resisting Jesus, then you can expect severity, but Jesus would rather show love, and compassion, and graciousness, and so forth. And he's willing to relent on any threat of judgment and that's the theme that we see coming across both testaments. It's not just something that is, you know, there's harshness in the Old Testament and kindness in the New. You see kindness and severity in the Old Testament, kindness and severity in the New. But you do see a glimpse of what God's heart is, that he loves even his enemies and is willing to do whatever he can to bring them into reconciled relationship with Himself. But also, God will not leave the guilty unpunished either.

**Frank:**

You know, I think that a lot of people don't recognize, when it comes to the Old Testament and the difference between the Old and the New is, the Old Testament covers 1000s of years and the New Testament covers about 60. There's a lot more time to mess up in the Old Testament, right? I mean, you're gonna have more instances and opportunities for God to judge in the Old Testament than you will in the New, although Jesus does say that you're gonna see the son of man coming with great power on the clouds, basically judging Jerusalem.

**Paul:**

Yeah.

**Frank:**

And he really unpacks hell much more than anything from the Old Testament. So, you're getting both of those in both Testaments.

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**Paul:**

Right. And there are texts, for example, as I go through Greg Boyd's book, it's a 1400 plus page book, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God*, and I find that there's a high degree of selectivity of the verses that are chosen. There are some verses that are ignored. For example, in Revelation chapter two, in red letters, Jesus is saying that he is going to cast Jezebel - this false prophet is on a bed of sickness - and strike her followers dead. So, that doesn't sound like this picture that Greg Boyd is portraying. Or, here's another one in Jude five. Jude, Jesus' brother, is looking at the Old Testament Christologically, through a Jesus lens, and our best manuscripts say, Jesus, after he had delivered the Israelites from Egypt, destroyed those who do not believe. So, very strong language attributed to Jesus, not just maybe something generic. But Jesus himself is involved in this severe judgment.

So, these are the types of things that I try to point out. I think there's some serious distortion going on when you're saying, oh, that's just a textual God. And what I tried to do in the book is show that where Greg Boyd, for example, says that's not the actual God, that's a textual God, I pick those very specific passages where he says they're very discrepant, there's a gap between them. I show from other scriptures, both Old and New Testament, but especially the New Testament, that the actual God and the textual God are one in the same. They're identical. And so, like I said, a number of texts are just left out of the picture.

So, what I'm trying to do is show that God's wrath is actually an expression of the love of God. God is not, as one theologian said, he is not wrathful in spite of being love, he is wrathful because he is love. That God judges when people are being dehumanized, degraded, treated violently, and so forth. And if God doesn't get angry, there's something wrong with that understanding of God. That is not a God who is good or a God who is concerned about what is happening to human beings. So, anyway, those are some things that I talk about in the book.

**Frank:**

You know, it reminds me of Miroslav Volf, who famously, before there was war in his homeland - I think he may be from Yugoslavia - he said, I can't believe in a God that would judge people. And then after he saw all the terror that came upon his nation, during the Civil War, he said, I can't believe in a God that wouldn't judge sin.

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**Paul:**

Exactly. Yeah. So, he came to that realization. And Jesus Himself, you just think about, he had his own anger when he when he's expressing This in Matthew 18:6, where it says it'd be better for someone who leads one of his disciples astray to have a millstone hung around his neck and drowned in the depths of the sea. So, he is using very severe language. And people say, Well, the New Testament God is not about vengeance or anything like that, but rather, God is one who seeks reconciliation. I say, Yeah, God seeks reconciliation, but for those who refuse, you've got the martyrs in heaven who were saying. How long, O Lord, until you avenge our blood by those who dwell upon the earth. So, you do have that kind of a call for God to promise what he said he would do, render to everyone according to what he has done.

**Frank:**

We're talking to Dr. Paul Copan about his new book, Is God a Vindictive Bully?. We've got a lot more after the break. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network. We're back in two.

Welcome back to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network. If you're low on the FM dial looking for NPR, go no further. You will never hear this on NPR. We are talking to Dr. Paul Copan about his new book, Is God a Vindictive Bully? And Paul, just before the break, we were talking about the kind of these two critics. One set of critics is outside the faith, atheists, and the other is inside, at least they claim to be Christians. Let's just talk for a second about the folks outside. When they judge the God of the Bible as somehow being immoral, and also they're judging that human beings are valuable, and therefore shouldn't be treated this way, by what standard from their worldview are they making such judgments?

**Paul:**

Well, that's the big issue. If you're a true blue naturalist who believes that nature is all the reality that there is, how do you get value from valueless processes? That fits a lot better in a theistic context where God makes human beings in His image, there's a supremely valuable being. So, you have a problem of how do you even account for evil at all, how do you account for goodness at all? Evil is a departure from the way things ought to be, and so, if nature is all the reality that there is, there is no way things ought to be. Things just are what they are. So, I

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think the people who are true committed consistent naturalists, they actually can't even get their argument off the ground, because they're borrowing from another worldview, like theism, which takes for granted atheism. Mainstream naturalism rejects any notion of good and evil, so you're gonna have to kind of jump ship if you're trying to affirm evil, but yet, stay as an atheist. Most mainstream naturalists will reject any sort of notion of good and evil because it doesn't fit within their worldview. If we're just physical molecules in motion, that's all the reality that there is,

**Frank:**

But they are pointing out a problem for our worldview, if in fact, their interpretation of the text is correct. They don't have a standard by which they can judge anything in the Bible as being immoral. But they're going to say, Well, if your God is a God of love, why does he do such things? So, that's a fair question and that's what your book addresses. You mentioned a couple of the people who are considered inside, they claim to be Christians anyway. One is Greg Boyd and another is Peter Enns. Wouldn't Peter Enns be considered more on the progressive Christianity side? And is he someone who would deny the atonement, someone who would say maybe the atonement was divine child abuse? Is that his position or not?

**Paul:**

I don't know if Peter has commented on that, but I know Greg Boyd sees what we call the Christus Victor model, that Christ came to overthrow these powers of sin, and evil, and so forth, and that's the main way to understand what's going on with the death of Jesus. I do think that there is another way of looking at this and I think it's more central to what the Scriptures are saying that there is a penal substitution, that Christ takes the penalty that we deserve, and again, in a forensic or legal way.

So, think of a parent who has a child who drives the car into a tree, or does other damage, well, who's legally responsible to take care of the damage while the parents are the parents are not guilty, but yet they assume that responsibility upon themselves. And so, God in that same way...in fact, the triune God; it's not as though the Father and the Son are pitted against each other and the world is kind of the third party, as it were. No, it is the triune God seeking to bring reconciliation to the lost world. God so loved the world, not God so hated the world. Jesus comes into the world as part of this triune God's plan in order to bring reconciliation. So, he

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takes that punishment upon Himself, that forensic payment endures that for our sakes, that we can be reconciled to God.

And so, Jesus is voluntarily laying down his life. It's not as though this is somehow Jesus is this hapless victim. He says, No one takes my life from me. I lay it down and I take it up again. So, oftentimes, you'll have these sorts of misrepresentations And what's going on with the penal substitution view. And I think there are a lot of correctives that are necessary in addressing those issues.

**Frank:**

So, some of the issues you address in *Is God a Vindictive Bully*. First of all, how wide is the divide between the Old and the New Testaments? And your position is...?

**Paul:**

Yeah, what Greg Boyd, for example, tries to do is create a remarkably wide gap between, say Jesus and Moses. For example, Sermon on the Mount - You have heard it said, but I say to you - Greg Boyd says Jesus is repudiating the law of Moses, rejecting it, saying that it's wrong and that what Jesus is saying is that this is a radical difference. And what Jesus is doing is not dismissing or repudiating the law of Moses, he is actually addressing a misrepresentation of the Law of Moses. Like an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Well, that was supposed to be for a judicial context, but people were using it for taking personal vengeance, or retaliating against others. They sought justification, you know, love your neighbor. Well, who's my neighbor? Well, the person I like, or maybe an Israelite, but you know, forget those people who are outsiders. And Jesus says, Love your enemies, as well. Do good to those who persecute you even.

So, what Greg Boyd is trying to do is create this vast gap between Jesus and Moses. And you see Paul in Romans seven saying that the law of Moses is good, it's spiritual, it's holy. It was good for a time for Israel, part of the Old Covenant. And think of it like a booster rocket. NT Wright uses the example of a booster rocket where the booster rocket is necessary to get the good to get That ultimate rocket into space, but then that booster rocket, when its job is done, it drops off. But it still has a very important mission to accomplish. So, in the same way, the law is preparatory for what is to come for the people of God, as the church, Jews and Gentiles alike. But there was this necessary preparation for it.

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Were the laws of the Old Testament perfect? No, the law assumed that people would sin. Jesus said, God permitted certain things in law because of the hardness of human hearts. It wasn't as though it was immoral, but certain things were permitted because of the hardness of human hearts. And Greg Boyd, interestingly, he's acting as though Moses is the one who has the hardened heart, but it's actually the people of Israel who had the hardened hearts. And so, Moses is permitting certain things because of that. So, it's not Moses that's the problem, it's actually the people. And so, in both Old and New Testaments, you see Moses as being upheld as a prophet who has spoken with God face to face, who knew him intimately, who is faithful in all of God's household. And so, there isn't this repudiation of the Law of Moses by Jesus. In fact, the law is affirmed, although it does give way to a new covenant and that there is a moral carryover that takes place. So, things that pertain to ancient Israel as a nation, don't carry over to the church anymore, because it's not a national entity.

**Frank:**

A couple of the key things you just said, I want to amplify for our audience, Paul, because you point this out too, in *Is God a Moral Monster*. First is the fact that the Old Testament law from Exodus through Deuteronomy is part of the Old Covenant. It's obsolete. So, how does that apply to us today?

**Paul:**

Yeah, what I try to point out, and I go into a lot more detail in this vindictive bully book. What I tried to emphasize is that even various passages in the Law of Moses are appropriated, say, by Paul, and by James...

**Frank:**

Later, yes.

**Paul:**

So, they are actually taking texts, not just the 10 commandments, but actually other themes that relate to say, sexuality, or James talking about paying your laborers at the end of the day, that you had to do these things, that these were duties. And again, these are drawn from the law of Moses. So, there is a moral carryover that is there. It kind of gets summarized by love, which is specific in how, you know, not stealing, not committing adultery, and so forth. So, you

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do have that moral carryover and that's what I'm trying to emphasize. It's not as though it's all obsolete in terms of its moral imperatives, or moral demands, or moral understanding. But rather, the covenant that is made with the Israelites is no longer binding on the people of God, which includes things like circumcision, and holy days, and sacrifices, and certain foods to abstain from, and so forth. Those things are set aside, but they're actually fulfilled in what Jesus came to accomplish, that all these things end up pointing to him, so he is the one who is the fulfillment of these things.

And as we look at the New Testament, Jesus's teaching, what the apostles have to say, many things are absorbed by Jesus and the apostles in their teaching as they look back on the Old Testament and the prophets of the law as well. And so, there are certain things that carry over from the from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

**Frank:**

Where they're repeated in the New Testament, they are binding on Christians, but where they're not, such as you mentioned, and it's explicitly overturned by Jesus - the dietary laws and Paul with circumcision - that no longer applies. I think a lot of times people think that everything in the Bible should be somehow legislated or imposed, either in the country or on even Christians in church, and that's not the case. And you point that out. The second thing that I think is a big aha moment for people that you mentioned in there is that the Old Testament law was not the ideal universal law for all time in every respect. Because you point out in Matthew 19, where Jesus says that Moses...

**Paul:**

...permitted certain laws, i.e., divorce because of the hardness of human hearts.

**Frank:**

Right. So, the question is, because a lot of people will look at laws in the Old Testament and say - and we could talk about slavery. We've talked about on this program before - it's a different kind of slavery than what we think about here in America. But, you know, why doesn't God somewhere in the Bible completely repudiate slavery in a way that it would be crystal clear that this is wrong? And you seem to be pointing out, correct me if I'm wrong here, that God

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sometimes works in an incremental way to bring people along incrementally, because if he tries to go completely, he's gonna get complete rebellion. Is that fair to say?

**Paul:**

Yeah, exactly. You know, God works with where human beings are. In fact, I add a lot of material on the worldview differences between Israel's law and the law collections of the surrounding nations. And I show how the worldview differences really resonate in terms of, for example, how you treat foreigners who come into your land. How do you treat people who are poor, you know, in interest loans and so forth? How do you take care of them? You look at the dignity; do some people have greater dignity than others? Well, when you look at the laws around the nation of Israel, rather than Israel itself, you see remarkable worldview differences, hierarchies, discrepancies, people not really showing concern for the poor, or the foreigner, and so forth.

But throughout the law, you see repeated to look out for the marginalized. Why? Because you were foreigners, you were strangers in the land of Egypt, you were slaves in the land of Egypt, and so forth. So, he's reminding them, look back to your history, remember that you were discriminated against, you were marginalized. Don't do that in your own land. So, that's something that you see that's a remarkable difference. And so, where God is stepping in, he's giving this elevated worldview for Israel, which is a remarkable contrast to the nations around. But still, he's meeting them partway. They still have a ways to go as they move toward the New Covenant.

**Frank:**

By the way, I think we see this right here in America now with regard to abortion. We see that people have gotten used to having the so-called right to an abortion and now they're all almost making it seem like we can't be without this right. We're going to celebrate this right. We're going to pay for people to come to our states and have abortions. We have to bring them along, it seems, incrementally. And we'll talk more about this right after the break. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. We're discussing new book from Paul Copan, Is God a Vindictive Bully?. Get it. We're back in two.

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Is God a vindictive bully? That's the topic of today's show. Welcome to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. My guest is the great Dr. Paul Copan, who teaches down at Palm Beach Atlantic University. He's written several seminal books on topics like this, including Is God a Moral Monster and the brand new one, Is God a Vindictive Bully?.

You know, just before the break. Paul, we were talking a little bit about incrementalism and I think that your insight on that is very helpful, because so many Christians are concerned when they read the Old Testament, why doesn't God go all the way in certain areas? Why doesn't he just give us this supreme ideal law in every respect? Is incrementalism something that appears to be a divine tactic here to bring us along?

**Paul:**

Yeah. Well, I think that there are ways in which you do see this kind of incrementalism. Of course, we do see at the very beginning of creation that God's ideal is set forth when it comes to the fundamental equality of all people. So, you know, no slavery, no sexism, no hierarchies, etc.. You also see marriage in Genesis 2 that one man, one woman, as one flesh for one lifetime, that this is the ideal that God sets forth. These are creational ordinances, things that are to be this way, anchored in the way God has designed things. So, yeah.

But when there are deviations, when people like in the ancient Near East fall away from those ideals, then to utterly overhaul and to do everything in a radically new way, it just would not help people. They might feel perhaps, like, how could we ever move forward? We can't attain to that sort of a standard. I mean, they do recognize basic standards, people have a conscience, and so forth, and they know that they should resist doing certain things like Amos 1-2 says, ripping open pregnant women to expand your borders, or breaking treaties, or engaging in treachery, and so forth. Those are things that even pagan nations around Israel should have known better and shouldn't have done and violated their conscience.

But even in the New Testament, we see examples of the weaker and the stronger brother, that there is an ideal, namely recognizing that Christians have liberty when it comes to, in this case, eating meat that had been offered to idols, but are now in the marketplace. Some people had a conscience about it, so Paul says, Don't go against your conscience, but know that there's nothing wrong with actually doing so. So, it's a way of educating people to doing it in an

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incremental sort of way, where you can build up to that through greater understanding, understanding your freedom in Christ. That's just a small example of a kind of incrementalism.

And so, even in the spiritual disciplines, there's a certain incrementalism in terms of improving or refining our character by God's grace. And that is through say, spiritual disciplines, it's a way of engaging our own bodies, abstaining or engaging, fasting, praying, and so forth, that we engage in certain things, so that that will eventually become second nature to us. So, we engage in those disciplines and it's like learning an instrument or learning a language. It takes time, it's kind of tough, it's not always easy, it may even seem like drudgery at certain times, but the goal is to develop that second sense where you could speak a language in a fluid way, or you can play an instrument in a very smooth way. In the same way, in the Christian life, not that there aren't obstacles, but we can also train ourselves and cultivate a certain way of operating by the grace of God that our character continues to be transformed into the image of Christ. So, there's a certain incrementalism even there.

**Frank:**

Now, in the in the book, *Is God a Vindictive Bully*, you cover so many topic that we don't even have time to mention them all. But one is this idea of an imprecatory Psalm. There are many imprecatory Psalms. I just want to read one you have here in the book. This is from chapter 17, page 122 of *Is God a Vindictive Bully*. This is Psalm 137. "Remember, oh Lord against the sons of Edom, the day of Jerusalem, who said, rase it, rase it, to its very foundation. O daughter of Babylon, you devastated one, how bless it will be the one who repays you with the recompense with which you have repaid us. How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones [your little babies] against the rock." How do we reconcile this with a loving God?

**Paul:**

Well, there are a few things to keep in mind. One, there are four different interpretations of how to understand who these children are. Some scholars see these children... Remember the daughter of Babylon is not a mother, the daughter of Babylon is the nation, the regal power. And so, who are the children? Well, it could be the royal line. And so, this nation that has been oppressing, saying, God bring an end to that royal, oppressive line that continues to oppress generation after generation. Or it could be the military that engages in oppression, that these children are soldiers who are actually carrying out the work of the mother, Babylon, and

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engaging in atrocities and so forth. Or it could simply be hyperbolic. It could just simply be an exaggeration. Or it could be saying, God, do to them what they have done to us. Basically, God's rendering to every person, every nation, according to his deeds. So, if they've done that to some, Lord, may it be done to them. May they see the kind of degradation, the kind of harm that they have brought to others.

So again, there could be an array of understandings of this particular text. But keep in mind, too, that some people say, Well, should we ever use these Psalms? There's some severe [unintelligible] of people. The Psalmist praying, God smash the teeth of the wicked and to bring them down, and so forth. Well, keep in mind that the Psalmists are appealing to certain things like; one, the covenant that God made with Israel, through Abraham, that I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. And if people are going to mistreat the people of God, mistreat the righteous Psalmists, and so forth, they're saying, Lord, do what you've promised to do. You said if they people don't repent and turn to you, then Lord, render to them according to their deeds. Do what you said you would do.

So, there's this covenant relationship. There's also this recognition that God has to do what justice requires, that he can't let justice sit idle, but he is going to bring people what they have done to others. So, there's that law of recompense for them. So, there are those factors. When we get to the New Testament stuff, people say, Well, you have to love your enemies and so forth. Well, yes, we ought to love our enemies. In fact, the psalmist, in Psalm 139, he aligns himself with God and he says, I hate those who hate you. Hate means simply aligning yourself with one person and not another. And so, the psalmist is aligning himself with God, like Jacob loved Esau. It's not as though it's an antipathy, but rather, God is making a covenant with Israel, and so aligning himself with them.

Jesus, in fact, used that language of love and hate. If anyone does not hate his father or mother - and again, the parallel passage says, If anyone loves his father and mother more than me, he cannot be my disciple. And so, there's that comparative language that's being used. But the psalmist says, after he's saying these sorts of harsh things against those who oppose God and His purposes, he says, Search me and know my heart, try me know my thoughts, see if there's any wicked way in me. So, basically, I think the mindset is, and we see this carryover in the New

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Testament, the psalmist is saying, Lord, work in their heart or stop their heart, but examine my heart. And so, it's not as though it's kind of a retaliation, it's left in the hands of God.

And the New Testament picks up on this, where there are certain imprecatory psalms that are taken over in the New Testament. Again, it's diminished. So, yes, bless and don't curse and so on, but it's not as though the language of cursing or woe disappears entirely from the New Testament. So, when we see the language of woe and imprecation, think of Judas after he betrayed Jesus and hangs himself. They're looking for replacement and Peter quotes two imprecatory Psalms. Let another take his office, let his home be made desolate. Imprecatory Psalms. Paul, in fact, uses imprecatory psalms in the book of Romans, about blinding their eyes and breaking their backs or twisting their backs, and so forth. And again, that language is being used so when people act in ways that resist the purposes of God, then judgment is called for. You know, God stop those who are engaging in dehumanizing actions. Bring an end to their harmful activities, and so forth.

It's like the martyrs in the book of Revelation. They say, How long, oh Lord, until you avenge our blood that has been shed by those who dwell upon the earth. So, there's this call, God do what you said you would. Again, there's a desire for repentance, a desire for reconciliation, but when people refuse and continue to harm, then it's appropriate to pray for God to bring judgment. That's not the first impulse, not the first desire, but rather God bring reconciliation, may they repent, work in their hearts.

**Frank:**

Yeah, I think the consternation that people have with this is it appears that this particular psalmist is praying that the babies of these people will be murdered, basically. That's probably the real issue here. And you're saying it could be hyperbole? It could be just an expression of emotion. Yeah. Because my babies were killed in That way. And I want to see justice done.

**Paul:**

Yeah.

**Frank:**

But is it justice then to kill their babies? That's the issue.

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**Paul:**

And one of the things that I also point out is that there are some, in a sense, cries of the heart that come from the psalmist, where they are speaking not in their cooler moments, but rather out of white hot rage. And so, they may be simply expressing their deep emotion after they have been brutalized. And so, it's not as though they're necessarily holding this to be literally true. Like, when the Psalmist says, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? It's not as though he's literally holding that to be true, because later on in the Psalm, God is very much active and God is not going to abandon the one who cries out to him, and so forth.

And also, you see that in these Psalms that there are other places, you know, God you have abandoned your covenant, and why are you doing these things. And, of course, when you step back and you say, Well, actually, that's not the case, God hasn't abandoned covenant, and so forth. God is going to be faithful; He keeps his promise. But yet, that is what the psalmist is feeling. So, there are certain places where the psalmist might just speak from his heart, kind of speak bluntly to God, but it's not as though that's theologically accurate, and so, we leave room for that as well. Pastors and a lot of scholars say this is one of those places where it's not, strictly speaking, it's not theologically accurate or morally precise, but rather, it's just the expression that comes from the hearts of anguish.

**Frank:**

I've heard it said this way too, Paul, that most of the Bible is God talking to us. The Psalms are largely us talking to God. Have you heard that characterization. Do you agree with that?

**Paul:**

Yeah. Of course, it's a corporate sort of thing. It doesn't have the individual psalmist crying out to God, but it is meant for the corporate worship in Israel, and of course, has been the prayer book of the church over the centuries. So, you do see sort of this is a norm for the church as well, that these are the sorts of things that we, through the lens of Christ, understand. Blessing is to be preferred over cursing. But again, it's not as though cursing somehow disappears. There still remains judgment, and severity, and woe for those who resist the purposes of God and dehumanize others.

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**Frank:**

There are many other issues that the book covers. Obviously, we can't cover them all. The book, *Is God a Vindictive Bully*, is almost 300 pages. We've got another segment. We may talk about violence in the Old Testament, we may talk about misogyny. We'll get to it so don't go anywhere. We're back in just two minutes. See you then.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome back to *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*. If you're listening to this prior to the end of the year, I want to remind you that some generous donors have given us \$100,000 in matching gifts, so any money that you give, any donations you made to CrossExamined prior to the end of 2022, will be matched up to \$100,000. So, you'll double your impact. And as you know, 100% of your donations go to ministry and 0% to buildings. When we go on a college campus, we don't charge students a dime, because you are the ones that are fueling our efforts. And of course, we livestream those events so they reach 1000s more than who are actually in the room. So, thank you for your support this year.

We're talking to my friend, Dr. Paul Copan, about his book *Is God a Vindictive Bully?*. Now, Paul, a number of years ago when I read *Is God a Moral Monster...* And by the way, friends, Paul and I have done several shows on this book in the past. If you don't have our app, you need to get the CrossExamined app (two words in the App store, Cross Examined). You can go back years and years in the archives and look for Dr. Paul Copan. And we've talked about slavery, we've talked about genocide, we've talked about a number of questions about the Old Testament, women in the Old Testament. We can't cover it all here in this broadcast, so you can go back and listen to some of those other shows.

But Paul, in that book, *Is God a Moral Monster*, you pointed out that much of the language in the Old Testament, when it came to warfare, was ancient Near East hyperbole. You've expanded upon that in *Is God a Vindictive Bully?*. What is new about that in the new book?

**Paul:**

Well, one of the emphases that I bring out is that that term "utterly destroy", which people latch on to, doesn't always mean even destruction. It could just mean setting someone apart from ordinary use, like a priest, or a servant, or an animal, or a field even. These are haram. Or, a parallel word is that these are sanctified, so death isn't involved here. Or it could simply mean

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nothing more than exile. That a people are exiled, like in the book of Deuteronomy, it uses that language of exile to talk about Israel. God says in Jeremiah 25, that he is going to "utterly destroy" Judah and leave the cities in everlasting desolation - actually, it's just 70 years. So, there's a little bit of exaggeration there. But also, the people of Judah remain largely intact. Their infrastructure is destroyed, economics, politics, the kingship, the social structure, have been ruined, but the people are still largely in place.

A parallel that I use, taken from John and Harvey Walton, is that of Nazi Germany. The goal, fundamentally, of Israel's going into Canaan was not to destroy as many Canaanites as possible, but rather, it was to destroy those objects of worship, those idols, those altars, and so forth, that people would gravitate to and that kept the identity of the Canaanites alive and well. And so, what God was concerned about was destroying the identity of Canaanite religion and morality, so that it would not be a pernicious influence on the people of Israel. So, the Canaanites are not the problem. It's their practices.

And John and Harvey Walton, in their book on the Israelite conquest, talk about how in Nazi Germany after the Allies won, they destroyed all the monuments, the flags, the hierarchy, they put to death those who were leading the Nazi machinery. But after it was all done, you had the German people largely...

**Frank:**

The people were still there.

**Paul:**

...the identity was removed but the people were still in place. What God was most concerned about was those things that would lead the Israelites astray. And so, he says, for example, in Deuteronomy 7, which uses a lot of hyperbolic and intensified language from previous texts in Exodus or Numbers. But it says in Deuteronomy 7, drive them out, utterly destroy. And then it says, and don't intermarry with them, don't make covenants with them. Well, if you've utterly destroyed them, well, what are you doing intermarrying with them?

**Frank:**

You couldn't. They're gone.

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**Paul:**

Exactly, yeah. So, again, you have this kind of like ancient Near Eastern trash talk. You'd have sweeping language man, woman, young, and old, leaving no survivor. It's like saying, in sports language, we totally destroyed those guys. We totally annihilated those guys.

**Frank:**

This is not just you're saying in the Old Testament. These are in other writings from the ancient Near East?

**Paul:**

Yes. Exactly. There are a lot of parallels. The Pharaoh, or the king of Egypt, that he left no survivors, he alone was there, he turned everyone to ash. And we know from historical evidence that this is greatly exaggerated. What's interesting about the Bible, though, is it not only mentions this language of how we're to translate "utterly destroyed", "removed the identity" or just basically win a victory. That's really what it means. If you have a victory, in a sense, you can use that language, "we totally destroyed them". So again, we can talk about that. But at least in the biblical text, you see, on the one hand, that language of "utterly destroyed", or "having a victory", and having a mention of lots of survivors.

So, you'll see it sometimes in the same chapter, same verse even, or a few chapters later at the end of the book. And that's why you read in Judges, for example, after Joshua, you read repeatedly, they could not drive them out, they could not drive them out, they could not drive them out. So, you can have the language of man, woman, young and old without actually having any elderly people, any women, any children there.

In fact, I'll give you one example of how this plays out in Numbers 21. We have the two Amorite kings who are defeated in battle when the Israelites want to pass through peacefully. And so, they rise up and fight against them. But we read of the king, it says the king, his sons, And his army fought against the Israelites And the Israelites defeated them. Fast forward to Deuteronomy 2-3. Deuteronomy intensifies the language. It uses that hyperbole; it uses this rhetoric. And so, it recounts that battle, but it says, Man, woman, young, and old. But they weren't at the original battle site. There weren't any women or children there. It was just the

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king, his sons, and the army. So, it uses that language. Again, it's part of one of the rhetorical devices that's used.

Another one that's used is, you could have like when it comes to the Amalekites, you see the illustrated First Samuel, where a common way of referring to this victory in battle is you have a localized battle in the ancient Near East, you fight at a certain city, and then you talk about universal conquest...And the king goes on to fight in this vast territory. Again, obviously exaggeration. We see that with Saul. He fights against the Amalekites of the Citadel - and keep in mind the Kenites are there. The Kenites are friendly with the Israelites and Saul says, Actually, we don't have an issue with you. You go and we'll fight against the Amalekites. So, they're fighting against the city, 1 Samuel 15:5, and so obviously, there are not gonna be women and children there who are going to be the Citadel where there's this pitch battle. But Saul wins the victory. It says, Saul, "utterly destroyed" them, he defeated them. And so, the narrator tells us that. And then it says that Saul fought against them from Arabia, to Egypt, a vast territory. Fast forward to the end of the book. David fights against the Amalekites in chapters 27 and 30.

**Frank:**

They're still there.

**Paul:**

They're still there. Four hundred flee on camels.

**Frank:**

Even though they were "utterly destroyed".

**Paul:**

Yeah. And you have that same device that's used. He fights a pitch battle in a certain location, and then he fights against them from Arabia to Egypt. You know, you've got this vast territory. So, that's another common device that is used in the ancient Near East. Again, highly exaggerated. And we see layer upon layer of how that exaggeration is played out in the literature of Israel.

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**Frank:**

So, Paul, are you saying the words in Hebrew that they translate, utterly destroy, those words could be translated differently? Are you saying utterly destroy is a hyperbolic way of saying we just won the battle?

**Paul:**

Well, there are questions about it. Like I said, sometimes that language of, I will utterly destroy them, John and Harvey Walton say it simply means in some context to remove the identity of people like the Canaanites.

**Frank:**

Oh, utterly destroyed their identity, but they're still alive.

**Paul:**

Yeah, so they're still alive. So, you can utterly destroy someone and what the goal is, is to destroy their artifacts, their altars And shrines. Or it could simply mean they had victory, they defeated them. And it's kind of murky. All we can say is that they won and not a whole lot more in terms of how many survivors there were, and so forth. But we often do read about survivors, especially in the scriptures, they do mention specifically that there were plenty of survivors. In fact, Canaanites, even to the time of Solomon. So, there are tons of Canaanites still around. The goal is to remove those artifacts.

In Judges 2, the angel of the Lord confronts the Israelites and says, not that you haven't destroyed the Canaanites, but you have not destroyed their idols, their shrines, their Asherah poles, and so forth. That's really what the problem is. That is what the snare is. And so, you have to remove those identity markers, just like within Nazi Germany, remove those things that are pernicious influence that keep people identifying with this religion and its practices.

**Frank:**

Paul, here's a passage, I want to say it's First Samuel 15, where it seems to say that God is going to punish people today for sins that this group of people committed against Israel many years ago. What is that passage?

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**Paul:**

Yeah, from Deuteronomy. Remember, remember, remember Amalek. Yeah. So, keep in mind that, as one Old Testament scholar, David Lamb says, When you think of the Amalekites think Nazis...

**Frank:**

Ok. All right.

**Paul:**

...in terms of the fact that they are hell bent on destroying the Israelites, removing them from the scene. From the very beginning they came over in the Red Sea, Exodus 17, and they fight against the Amalekites and defeat them. But, over and over again, you see the Amalekites trying to bring harm. And the problem is not that they couldn't find redemption, but generation after generation after generation they continue to bring harm to the Israelites. So yes, it was remembering what they had done. But even King Agag, in First Samuel 15, in that generation, this king has been treating the others brutally. And so, he's killed and Samuel says, Your mother is going to be childless, just as you have made many childless. So, it's like the sin continues generation after generation.

**Frank:**

Okay. Well, Paul, we're about out of time. I wish you knew more about this topic [laughing] but tell us tell our listeners where they can learn more about you. I know you have your own website. There's a lot of articles up there that people can avail themselves of. Where's that?

**Paul:**

Yeah, it's PaulCopan.com. And I have articles and so forth. You can look online too. I've got various video discussions, podcasts, and so forth And my books are at Amazon.com, so you can check them out there.

**Frank:**

Great. Get the new book, Is God a Vindictive Bully?. Thanks so much for being on Paul. There's so much more in this book than we could even start to discuss, so if this is an issue for you, please get it. Also remember, SES has a new scholarship, and if you go to SES.edu/Frank, you

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can get half off your tuition. It's already low tuition. Anyway, check it out there and we'll see you here next week. God bless.

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