

Neighborly Apologetics

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Absolute Truth & Moral Relativism, Part 1

Absolute Truth in a Militant Age

(Thumbnail Sketch from Del Tackett's Webinar, [August 6, 2024](#))

On August 6, 2024, Del Tackett opened the fourteenth session of his Neighborly Apologetics series with an apology for the bandage-worthy aftermath of nose surgery and with unmistakable enthusiasm for the subject at hand. The resurrection series was finished. The next category was truth. Facilitator Marc Fey hosted; Tackett taught. The advertised title was **Absolute Truth and Relativism**. The working question was older and sharper: What is truth?

Tackett did not treat that question as a seminar abstraction. Neighborly Apologetics, as he has defined it throughout the series, exists because he believes God entrusted the primary work of the kingdom to the common Christian family. That family belongs to the royal priesthood. In the image he likes to use, the neighbor's name is engraved on the jewel of the priestly ephod. Academic apologetics still matters; it supplies the wealth of knowledge required to face hard objections. But the point of this series is what that knowledge looks like when a household, including its children, has to answer Mrs. Smith across the street. The "royal law," the command that sums up the whole law, is the way forward in the present culture, as it was from the beginning.

He paused to locate the evening in a longer map. Thirteen categories, a baker's dozen, will eventually be covered. Evil and suffering came first, because that is the objection neighbors most often raise against God. Tonight was category two: absolute truth and relativism. Still ahead were religious pluralism and the claim that there is only one way; faith and reason; free will and sovereignty; God's existence and nature; the goodness of man, judgment, and hell; hypocrisy and Christian crimes of the past; miracles; science and evolution; the veracity of the Bible; and newer "burning issues" of the present moment. The resurrection of Jesus had just been completed. Truth was the hinge between that work and everything still to come.

Truth Bound to Love

Two themes, Tackett said, run from one end of Scripture to the other: truth and love. They are so entwined that isolating either one distorts both. The following session would take up their conjunction more fully. Even as an introduction, this night insisted that truth must be heard inside love, and love inside truth. John's Gospel describes the Word made flesh as full of grace and truth. Love, in Tackett's definition, is the steadfast, sacrificial zeal that seeks the true good of another. Grace is that same zeal directed toward an enemy. God extended it to people who were His enemies. The law came through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

The Bible's other constant theme is that fallen humanity rejects that truth. Eve rejected God's word

in the garden after Satan convinced her that God was not telling the truth and was oppressing her. Isaiah and Jeremiah lament that truth has stumbled in the streets, vanished from people's lips, and seemed nowhere to be found. Tackett was careful: truth itself cannot perish, because it exists in the nature and character of God. What perishes is truth in the public life of a people.

Not Classical Relativism Anymore

There is nothing new under the sun, and believers are not to panic as though something strange were happening to them. Even so, Tackett argued that the old textbook contrast between absolute truth and relativism no longer describes the whole field. For a long season, relativism meant "my truth, your truth," a live-and-let-live claim that truth was relative to speaker or hearer. That version is still worth answering. It is no longer the dominant mood.

He recalled seven cultural threats discussed in earlier webinars and the ministry's shift from Engagement Project conferences toward training in "our times and the biblical path forward." Two threats matter immediately for any conversation about truth.

The first is the rise of the scoffer and the depraved mind. Proverbs traces a descent from the simple-minded to the fool to the scoffer—the militant fool. Romans 1 traces God's progressive judgment on a people who refuse to honor Him or give thanks: first given over to sexual impurity, then to shameful lusts, then to a depraved mind. Tackett believes the surrounding culture now stands under that third judgment. The Greek **adokimon** means unqualified. The mind can no longer grasp spiritual truth with any reliability. Common sense thins out. Cause and effect come unstuck. People suffer the consequences of their own choices and cannot see the connection. Fallen humanity keeps exchanging the truth of God for a lie, as Israel did when, after miracle upon miracle, it fashioned golden calves the moment Moses went up the mountain.

The scoffer makes the exchange violent. Scripture says the scoffer sets the city aflame. He no longer says, "I'm okay and you're okay." He says, "I'm okay and you're not," and he will force others to believe and affirm his claim. Relativism has acquired a militancy that is relatively new in American public life.

The second threat is what Tackett calls **homo deus**. The individual sinks so far into self-obsession that he begins to act as if he were God. Few people would say the words. Many live as though their own hearts spoke divine things. On a recent flight a young woman beside him took something like a hundred selfies, reviewed them, adjusted, and took more. He was not pointing only at her. A culture of selfies is a culture prepared to treat the inner proclamation as a decree that others must bow to. That stance collides with the Christian claim that truth comes from God's nature, not from the human heart.

What Truth Is Not

Before offering a positive account, Tackett drew a ring of negations. He is not the truth. No human being can declare what is true or false in an absolute sense, or determine good and evil. In the garden Satan promised Eve she would be like God. Tackett takes the Hebrew **yadah** to mean not merely knowing good and evil but determining them. Fallen people then call good whatever promotes the self and evil whatever does not.

Truth is not what the heart says. "Follow your heart" is the ambient liturgy of the age, appearing on billboards, in popular psychology, and in the idea that the highest human task is to discover the self

and compel others to affirm it—an intensification of Maslow’s self-actualization. Scripture treats “follow your heart” as judgment, not advice. Psalm 81 records God giving people over to stubborn hearts to follow their own counsels. In Numbers, tassels were given so Israel would remember the commandments and **not** follow their own heart and eyes, which they were inclined to “whore after.” Jeremiah describes an evil people who refuse God’s words and stubbornly follow their own heart. Proverbs 18 says a fool has no delight in understanding but in expressing his own heart. The culture is full of people who want their hearts heard and ratified. Tackett applied the point to the contemporary declaration “I am a woman”: the speaker treats the sentence as a divine proclamation and treats dissent as blasphemy. The older slogan “it’s true for me” has hardened into “I am the truth.” “Be true to yourself” is a corollary.

Truth is not whatever a person believes. Tackett often heard students say, of some hard biblical claim about God’s nature, “I just don’t believe God would be that way,” as if sincere belief could veto Scripture. Belief may coincide with truth. It does not create it. Related to this is the grip of conspiracy theories, which can reorganize a whole life around fear. Isaiah 8 warns against calling conspiracy everything the people call conspiracy, and against fearing what they fear. The Lord of hosts is to be feared instead.

Truth is not what a person wants it to be. Desire is a gifted rationalizer. Confronted with God’s word, people invent a more convenient “truth” that lets them keep their preferred script. Truth is not a democracy. A majority vote can elect an official; it cannot make a claim true. “Everybody knows that” and “no one believes that anymore” are appeals to crowd size, not to reality. Social construction does not generate truth.

Truth is not what the law says. Might does not make right. Tackett recalled Samuel Rutherford’s **Lex, Rex**: the law is king; the king is not the law. A Supreme Court ruling creates a rule citizens generally must obey unless obedience would require them to violate God. It does not create truth. Many treated an earlier abortion decision as de facto moral reality; when the Court later said the Constitution did not contain such a right, outrage followed because “it was the law of the land.” Believers cannot live that way.

Truth is not merely “what makes sense,” though genuine truth will make sense because God is a rational being. A depraved mind, a self-obsessed mind, or a selfish season can find God’s truth implausible. “It just seems to me” is not an authority. Finally, truth is not sincerity. In an earlier webinar Tackett had named “malevolent compassion” as the leading ethic of the moment: if an act feels compassionate, it is assumed to be good. Compassion unbridled by truth can be evil. Good intentions do not make a claim true.

What Truth Is

When he turned to a positive definition, Tackett again distinguished academic and neighborly speech. Academic apologetics often says truth **corresponds** with reality: a proposition matches what is the case. He understands the formula and still prefers, with neighbors, to say that truth **is** reality. True things are what is real. God is ultimate reality; His nature is ultimate reality. The pastoral task is to help people tell what is really real from fantasy, rationalization, wish, and beliefs adopted to avoid shunning. His reservation about “correspondence” language is Christological: Jesus does not merely correspond to what is real. He is what is real.

Truth is absolute because God is true and His truth holds for everyone, everywhere, at all times. It

is not relative to will, whim, or social fashion. It proceeds from an unchanging nature. Absoluteness, however, is not the same as simplicity. God's truth is applied in ways that depend on persons and circumstances. Paul can say that eating meat sacrificed to idols is not wrong in itself, and also that it becomes wrong if it causes a believer with a weak conscience to stumble. The fuller statement of the truth includes the condition. The truth must sometimes be expanded until the whole relevant situation is in view.

Truth is logical because God is a rational being who made rational minds and who speaks in logical forms. At the entry into the land He stationed tribes on Ebal and Gerizim and delivered an if-then covenant: blessing for obedience, curse for disobedience. Paul's letters run on the same clean logic. "Come, let us reason together" is a divine invitation. A culture given over to a depraved mind loses that capacity. The first work, Tackett said, is prayer that God would open and heal minds, and that deep relationship would eventually make rational questions possible again.

Truth is solid—a rock, not a cork—on which a person can stand mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. It does not change because God does not change. Truth is non-contradictory. True claims do not collide with other true claims. That is one of the beauties of truth and the same principle that exposes a lie in a trial: enough consistent truth unmasks the falsehood. The group would return to non-contradiction in the next session.

Truth is personal. Jesus said, "I am the truth." Neighborly apologetics hopes, in time, to help people see that truth is not produced by social construction or by human power, but comes from an unchanging Person, the Creator. That is what steadies a household in a storm.

Truth is freeing. Jesus said the truth will set you free. Satan inverted the claim in the garden: defy God's word and you will be free, like God, determining good and evil, escaping an oppressor who will not let you self-actualize or follow your heart. The reality is the reverse. People often discover they are in bondage to the lies they have believed and to the lies of the world around them. The same truth produces contentment under trial, even under pursuit, punishment, or the prospect of death. Practically, it also frees a person from the labor of maintaining a house of lies. Tackett remembered a sign whose wording he could not quote exactly: truth is wonderful because you do not have to remember anything. A lie requires more lies.

Why It Matters

Scripture treats truth as critical. Tackett read Jeremiah as a case study. The prophet is told to search Jerusalem's streets for one person who does justice and seeks truth, so that the city might be pardoned. None is found. This is the nation that would not obey or accept discipline. Truth has perished from their lips. They bend the tongue like a bow. Falsehood has grown strong. They proceed from evil to evil and do not know the Lord. Everyone deceives his neighbor. They have taught their tongues to speak lies and weary themselves committing iniquity. Babylon was coming. The temple would fall. People would be carried off. The cause, in Jeremiah's preaching, was not merely geopolitics. It was the abandonment of God's truth for the heart's own way.

Tackett closed the teaching with the end of the Sermon on the Mount. The crowds were astonished because Jesus taught with authority. Everyone who hears His words and acts on them is like a wise man who built on rock: rain, flood, and wind slam the house, and it stands. Everyone who hears and does not act builds on sand. The same storm comes. The collapse is great. That contrast, Tackett said, should produce sorrow in neighborly work. Christians will meet people whose houses are

already on sand, suffering their own foolishness or the foolishness of others. A falling house takes families with it. Alcoholism and a drunk driver who kills are only two examples of how one collapse spreads.

From Genesis forward, Scripture never treats truth as optional. Yet the same Scriptures wrap truth in grace. Even while Jeremiah announced destruction, God still offered return. That offer, Tackett said, still applies to the speaker, to the listeners, and to their neighbors. Jesus' call is to deny oneself and follow Him. Tackett's reading of the two gates is homely and sharp: the wide gate that leads to destruction has written on it "it's all about me"; the narrow gate that leads to life has written on it "it's all about Him." Self-denial is inseparable from refusing to let private "truth" outrank God's word. Fallen desire always wants exactly that reversal.

After the Lecture

The purpose of the introduction, Tackett said, was preparation. Next time the group would press non-contradiction and related questions further, so that when a relationship with a neighbor deepens and Mrs. Smith turns out to believe that truth begins in her heart, a Christian family can answer with both truth and grace, and help her see the foolishness of that claim.

Marc Fey thanked him, promised a recording link and a PDF of the slides, pointed participants to earlier sessions in the series, and invited questions by email. Tackett closed in prayer, thanking the Father for His word, His truth, and Jesus Christ, who came to testify to the truth and whose death and resurrection proclaim that He is the way, the truth, the life, and the resurrection. He asked that God would open hearts, open minds, and heal depraved minds, so that neighbors might learn that following the heart leads not to good but to disaster—and that any needed healing would draw people closer to God, for His glory.

The session was an introduction, not a last word. Its burden was already clear. In a culture that treats the self as oracle and dissent as blasphemy, Christians are not called first to win a seminar. They are called to know what is real, to refuse the heart as a god, and to carry both truth and grace across the street.

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Absolute Truth and Moral Relativism, Part 1

What Is Truth?

(Thumbnail Sketch from Del Tackett's Webinar, [August 6, 2024](#))

In Neighborly Apologetics webinar 14 (August 6, 2024), Del Tackett introduced absolute truth and relativism for ordinary Christian families, not seminar rooms. Facilitator Marc Fey hosted. After finishing the resurrection series, Tackett turned to a question Pilate asked with a scoff: “What is truth?”

The series exists because God entrusted kingdom work to the common Christian family—a royal priesthood with the neighbor's name on the priestly ephod. Academic apologetics supplies knowledge. Neighborly apologetics asks how a household answers Mrs. Smith across the street. Two themes run through Scripture: truth and love. They cannot be separated. Jesus is full of grace and truth. Fallen people reject that truth, from Eve in the garden to prophets who lamented that truth had stumbled in the streets.

Classical relativism—“my truth, your truth”—is still real. Tackett argued the mood has hardened. He named a scoffer's militancy and a “depraved mind” (Romans 1) that cannot connect cause and effect, plus **homo deus**: the self acting as if the heart were divine. “Follow your heart,” majority opinion, court rulings, sincerity, and unbridled compassion do not make a claim true.

For neighbors, Tackett prefers a simple line: truth is reality. God is ultimate reality. Truth is absolute because God does not change, yet its application can be complex—as when meat offered to idols is lawful unless it causes a weak brother to stumble. Truth is logical, solid, non-contradictory, personal (“I am the truth”), and freeing. Lies enslave; truth does not require a house of cover stories.

Jeremiah shows how costly the loss of truth becomes. Jesus' close to the Sermon on the Mount is sharper still: the house on the rock stands; the house on sand collapses. Grace still calls people to deny themselves, return, and build on Him.

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