

Neighborly Apologetics

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Absolute Truth & Moral Relativism, Part 2

The Truth is Critical and There Are Sides: Truth & Lies

(Thumbnail Sketch from Del Tackett's Webinar, [September 3, 2024](#))

On September 3, 2024, Del Tackett continued the second category of Neighborly Apologetics: absolute truth and relativism. The prior session had asked Pilate's question and given the neighborly answer—truth is reality, bound up in a Person. This hour pressed the rest of the good confession Jesus made before Pontius Pilate and then turned, under the constraint of time, to moral relativism as most neighbors actually live it. Marc Fey hosted. Tackett taught.

He began where he always begins. Academic apologetics is not the enemy. He loves it. It is not, however, how a household loves Mrs. Smith across the street. God has entrusted the primary work of the kingdom to the common Christian family. Believers are royal priests. The royal law—love your neighbor as yourself—is the way that priesthood is exercised in a neighborhood. Mrs. Smith is unlikely to receive a seminar. She may receive kindness, patience, and, in time, a hard conversation inside a trusted relationship.

Truth Bound in a Person

Last time they had already said what cannot be skipped. Relativism cannot be discussed at any depth until truth itself is clear. Jesus told Pilate He was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. Pilate did not ask a real question. He scoffed. Had he waited, he might have heard, "I am the truth." Jesus had already named Himself the way, the truth, and the life. That is the foundation under this whole category, and under nearly every category still to come. Truth is not a notion or a whim. It is bound up in a Person.

If Jesus is the truth, then I am not the truth. One of the Seven Threats already treated in the series is the rise of **homo Deus**: a culture sinking so far into self that people begin to act as if they were divine. The heart is not the truth. Belief is not the truth. Desire is not the truth. Majority vote is not the truth. The law is not the truth. "It makes sense to me" is not the truth. Sincerity is not the truth.

For neighbors Tackett keeps the definition simple. Truth is reality. The correspondence theory—that truth is that which corresponds perfectly with reality—is fine in a classroom. Jesus does not merely correspond to what is real. He is real. He is the truth. Because God does not change, truth is absolute. Because God is logical, truth is logical and non-contradictory. Because God is a Person, truth is personal. Because God blesses obedience and withholds blessing from rebellion, truth is freeing. The house built on His words stands when the floods of life rise. The house that ignores those words falls, and great is the fall of it.

Everyone on the Side of Truth Listens to Me

There was a line in the good confession they had listed last time and left undeveloped. Jesus said, “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” Tackett called it an incredible statement. The first thing it forces into the open is that there are sides. People take sides about Jesus, about His word, and about real truth. In the present culture those sides are often vicious. The scoffer and the depraved mind—already named among the Seven Threats—do not treat disagreement as a conversation. They become militant and irrational. Tackett said that pattern is increasing in the West, which is itself a reason to talk about it now.

This is not an “I’m okay, you’re okay” world as far as God is concerned. On one side is truth. On the other are falsehoods and lies. First John 4 draws the same line Jesus drew before Pilate: “We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us, but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.” Men do not receive God’s truth well. They distort it, exchange it for a lie, reject it, and suppress it. First John 3 is still more stark: this is how we know the children of God and the children of the devil. The sentence would not survive a modern focus group. Scripture states it from beginning to end.

In The Truth Project Tackett named the conflict the cosmic battle—truth against lie, reality against illusion. When that series was filmed, he said, they did not yet see how far the culture would walk into illusion. The internet, Hollywood, and the metaverse fill the air with it. Artificial intelligence and robotics are being built to make people believe things are real that are not. Distinguishing reality from illusion is getting harder, not easier. That does not erase the sides. It only makes them more urgent.

The Lord’s servant, Paul told Timothy, must gently instruct his opponents, in the hope that God will grant them repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth, so that they come to their senses and escape the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. There are captives in this battle. Believers themselves are not immune. Colossians 2 warns the church not to be taken captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy that depends on human tradition and the elementary principles of this world rather than on Christ. Tackett called that an incredible warning for this day.

John 8 is harder still. “Because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.” Belonging to God and hearing God go together. “You belong to your father, the devil... When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” Tackett put a diagram on the screen and apologized for drawing any box around God. God is not contained. For teaching, God stands on one side and Satan on the other. Both present claims. God gives true truth claims in special revelation—His Word—and in general revelation, the created order. Romans 1 says men are without excuse because God has made it plain through what He has made. Satan floods the field with lies. People believe one set or the other. The broad road leads to death. The narrow road leads to life.

God’s claims follow God’s nature. He is absolute and unchanging. He does not speak a truth today and recant it tomorrow. Truth proceeds from His character. He cannot deny Himself, so His claims do not contradict one another. They match reality. They are logical. That is also how a trial works: enough truth is gathered that contradictions stand out and a false claim is exposed. Satan’s claims follow Satan. They are relative. They shift. They contradict themselves. They are irrational. They do not match reality. They ride worldly passions.

Relativism That Refutes Itself

Constrained by the hour, Tackett turned from that foundation to relativism as a neighbor actually speaks it. Relativism, at bottom, says there are no absolutes. The sentence is already an absolute claim. If Mrs. Smith says there are no absolutes, and if enough trust exists to bear a question, one might ask whether she is absolutely sure of that. The aim is not to make her feel small. The aim is to help her notice that the world's lies often eat themselves, and that her thoughts may need to be thought again.

Almost never is the relativism one meets a clean, across-the-board denial of all facts. Tackett estimated that 99.9 percent of the time it is **moral** relativism: no absolute source for moral values. That claim, too, is an absolute. And most people, pressed gently, still know that some things are wrong whether it's here or in any other country, today and tomorrow. They have been taught otherwise. The fallen nature wants the teaching, because moral relativism lets a person do what he wants to do, and he will fight for the permission. That, Tackett said, may have been the most important sentence of the night. This is not an elevator subject. It is a heart subject. It requires a relationship deep enough to survive the fight.

“I Just Believe That,” and the Divine Heart

Moral relativism names its sources. The first is belief itself. “I just believe that”—Tackett has heard it from students a thousand times—treats sincerity as a creator of truth. Scripture does not call the church to answer that combatively. It calls the church to answer it inside trust.

The second source is the heart. Tackett called it the plague of the culture. Selfishness has ripened until the heart is treated as the faculty that determines good and evil. In the garden the promise was that Eve would be like God, knowing good and evil. Tackett takes **yada** here as determining, not merely perceiving. The same lie now tells the individual that his heart will decide, and that the culture must bow to the decision. If a young person says he is a cat, the school is expected to provide a litter box. The heart of a fallen person is not divine.

When the defense of a relativistic position turns hot with emotion, Tackett assumes you are no longer in an argument you can win with better footnotes. The person wants the claim to be true. Abortion was his hard case. Academic arguments about the reality of human life matter. They often lead the discussion. They do not dissolve the heat. A common appeal is rape. He does not dismiss what happened to the woman. He asks whether the conversation can stay only there. Imagine a neonatal surgeon who says she is the product of rape, that her mother wanted the abortion and could not obtain it, and then asks whether she should have been put to death in the womb. Emotion rises. Inside a trusted relationship the wise move is often to step back, pray, and wait for God to open another door. Families should be praying for Mrs. Smith already—that God would soften her heart, open her eyes and ears, and give her an audience for the truth when the moment comes.

Majority, Court, Utility, and the Long Fall

Western culture adds other sources. The majority is one. “Everybody knows that” treats consensus as a verdict. Tackett asks the German question: if a majority favored incinerating Jews, did that make it right? He asks the present question: if rising antisemitism became majority hatred here, would that make harm righteous? Easy illustrations. Hard conversations. Colossians 4 still governs the tone: speech always with grace.

The law is another false source. A Supreme Court ruling can be treated as what makes a thing right. It does not. “It seems to be working” does not settle right and wrong either. Happiness as a measure will surface again under the heading of compassion. Lenin at least said the quiet part: whatever furthers communism is moral; whatever hinders it is immoral. Leave an absolute foundation, Tackett said, and you are on sinking sand. Vile notions are not far.

Tolerance is offered as high ground. Telling someone they are wrong is called intolerant. A fair question, asked in relationship, is whether it is then permissible to be intolerant toward the intolerant. People who stand on a biblical moral absolute are, in fact, not tolerated. Say “this is wrong” at work, at school, or in Congress, and the culture’s tolerance shows its teeth. It is a smokescreen until it meets what it hates. Then it can be vicious.

Progressive ethics speaks the language of election years: we have come a long way; we are not going back. The sentence assumes that the evolution of moral standards is always upward. Tackett denied it. Walk away from the Word of God and the path is not onward and upward. It spirals down. Those who hold a biblical worldview can already see the spiral. Across the street lives a soul who can be caught in it. The broad path still leads to death. Love for Mr. Smith therefore begins with fervent prayer. God grants repentance. The neighbor cannot be argued into it.

Malevolent Compassion and the Mob

The prime ethic of the hour, Tackett said, is what he calls malevolent compassion. The culture calls it compassion. He calls it malevolent because it affirms what destroys. Real compassion does hard things. Their daughter would not eat anything green. Some would have called it hateful to keep her in the high chair until she ate a pea or a bean. She now loves green beans. They knew what was good for her. Malevolent compassion will not do that. It fails to do what is right and blesses what is wrong. Tackett hears it in nearly every public policy and in the rhetoric of campaigns. Believers should recognize it before they answer it, and then answer it with gentleness, respect, kindness, and love when God opens the door.

Last of the forces is the unseen one: the internet mob. J.K. Rowling sat near the top of books sold and of public affection until she said something contrary to the current transgender ethic and became an outcast overnight. No court lost the case. No king issued a whim. A mob, largely online, rose against anyone who would not toe the approved line. It is not actually majority thought. It acts as if it were. A friend of Tackett’s had every Chase account closed after stating an absolute moral conviction. The bank did not want a “hater” as a client. The Seven Threats series had already named the consolidation of massive earthly power. Disconnect that power from a moral absolute and it will define right and wrong by its own wants.

“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” The culture has sold itself to the first half of the proverb and is running toward the second. It cannot end well.

The Priest in the Neighborhood

That is why Tackett pressed the body of Christ, with what he called every fiber of his being, to keep the royal law. Pray for neighbors by name. Bring them before the throne. Ask God for a deeper relationship in which these things can be spoken while He heals mind and heart. That closed the section on absolute truth and moral relativism. Next month’s subject would be no softer: only one way, and religious pluralism.

Marc promised the recording and the slides for the next morning and asked Tackett to pray. Tackett asked the Father to bless what was true, to wash away error and confusion, to make them a people of truth who love their neighbors, and to open eyes and ears—all for His glory. **Soli Deo Gloria.** Amen.

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In the fifteenth Neighborly Apologetics webinar, Del Tackett finished the foundation laid on August 6 and turned from “what is truth?” to the fact that there are sides: truth & lies—and that most neighbors meet that fact as moral relativism.

He kept the series frame. Academic apologetics is valuable. It is not how a household loves Mrs. Smith. Kingdom work belongs to the common Christian family, royal priests under the royal law. Truth is reality, bound up in Jesus, who told Pilate He came to testify to the truth and who said, “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” That sentence splits the field. First John names the spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. Men distort, exchange, reject, and suppress God’s truth. Satan is the father of lies. God gives unchanging claims in Scripture and in creation; Satan floods the world with shifting, self-contradicting ones. The broad road still leads to death.

Relativism says there are no absolutes—an absolute claim. Almost always the form one meets is moral: no fixed source for right and wrong. People still know some things are wrong whether here or in any other country. They want the permission anyway. “I just believe that” and “my heart tells me” treat the self as God—the old garden lie that **yada** means determining good and evil. Emotion around abortion and similar issues is often a want, not an argument. Step back, pray, wait.

Majority vote, court rulings, “what works,” tolerance, “we’ve come a long way,” and what Tackett calls malevolent compassion—affirming what destroys—cannot bear the weight of moral law. Neither can the internet mob that made an outcast of J.K. Rowling and closed a friend’s bank accounts. “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

The answer is not an elevator speech. Pray for the neighbor by name. Ask God for a trusted relationship and for repentance only He can grant. Speak with grace when the door opens. Next: only one way, and religious pluralism.

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