

26-0923wc Neighborly Apologetics

Dr. Del Tackett's Neighborly Apologetics Webinar Series

26-0923wc - NA- 2-Truth & Relativism, Part 2, Dr. Del Tackett

Del's site: deltackett.com, [Neighborly Apologetics Series Video link](#),

Class Resources: [NA-links](#), Our website: wschurchofchrist.org/education.php

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Neighborly Apologetics Summary

26-0923-Summary: 2 - Truth & Relativism, Part 2 (0:04 - 49:35)

Title: *Those on the Side of Truth Listen to Jesus*, **Facilitator:** Scott Reynolds

1st Half - (0:04 - 1:52) Welcome, the Royal Law, and Why Neighborly Apologetics

Dr. Del Tackett opens by calling it a privilege to be with those who have joined and thanks them for taking time out of busy lives. The session continues the treatment of absolute truth and relativism begun in the previous webinar. Before returning to the topic itself, he again sets the frame for why this series is **neighborly** apologetics rather than what he calls academic apologetics. He does not dismiss the academic approach; he loves it and considers it valuable. He insists, however, that fulfilling the royal law—loving one's neighbor as the Lord has commanded—requires a different posture. God has entrusted the primary work of the kingdom to the common Christian family. Believers are royal priests, and that priesthood is to be lived out in neighborhoods according to the royal law.

The practical question, therefore, is how to engage Mrs. Smith across the street. The odds are that she will not receive an academic approach well. Knowledge of that kind is still good for the believer to possess, but the approach to Mrs. Smith must be one of love, kindness, and consideration.

(1:53 - 3:22) Review: What Truth Is, and Jesus before Pilate

Tackett recalls that the prior session began with an introduction to the question "What is truth?" He says that step is critical. Relativism and the deep cultural situation cannot be discussed well until believers first remind themselves what truth really is. That review led to the scene of Jesus before Pilate, the moment Paul later calls the good confession. Jesus declared that He was born and came into the world to testify to the truth—a deep and stark statement about how critical truth is.

Pilate's response was not a genuine question. He was not waiting for an answer; he asked scoffingly, "What is truth?" Had he waited, Tackett says, he might have heard Jesus reply, "I am the truth." Jesus had already identified Himself as the way, the truth, and the life. That declaration is the foundation for this entire subject and for virtually everything else the series will treat: Jesus declared that He **is** the truth. Truth is therefore bound up in a Person, not in a notion or a whim.

(3:23 - 4:46) What Truth Is Not

If Jesus is the truth, then “I am not the truth.” Tackett reviews a threat already treated in the Seven Threats webinars: the rise of **homo Deus**. Culture is descending into deeper selfishness until people believe not only that everything is about them, but that they themselves are somehow divine. They act as if they were God. Yet the speaker is not the truth.

Truth is not what the heart says—one of the great pathologies of the present culture. It is not merely what a person believes. It is not what a person wants to be true; passions and desires often function as a rationalization for getting one’s own way. Truth is not a democracy. It is not whatever the majority thinks. It is not whatever the law says. It is not “what makes sense”; thinking something makes sense does not make it true. Sincerity and meaning well do not make a claim true either.

(4:47 - 7:08) What Truth Is: Reality, Absolute, Personal, and Freeing

What matters for this night, Tackett says, is the simple definition already given: truth is reality. Academically he accepts the correspondence theory—that truth is that which corresponds perfectly with reality—but for neighborly apologetics the working line is simpler: truth is what is real. Jesus does not merely correspond to what is real; He **is** real. He is the truth.

Truth is absolute because God does not change. He is the unchanging, eternal Creator. He is logical and rational, so truth is logical and rational and not contradictory. Truth is bound up in a Person—Jesus Christ, God Himself. Truth is also free. Scripture repeatedly shows that going against God’s truth does not go well, while following Him and His truth generally brings blessing. Jesus used the image of a house: the one who hears His words and does them builds on the rock, and the winds, storms, and floods of life do not bring that house down. The one who does not do those words sees the house fall, and great is the collapse.

(7:09 - 10:31) “Everyone on the Side of Truth Listens to Me”

There is another part of the good confession before Pontius Pilate that the previous session listed but did not develop. Jesus said, “Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” Tackett calls it an incredible statement. The first thing to notice is that there **are** sides. People take sides about Jesus, about His word, and about real truth. In the present hour that conflict is often vicious. One of the Seven Threats is the rise of the scoffer and the judgment of the depraved mind. People become militant and irrational. Tackett says that pattern is increasing in Western culture, which is itself a reason to treat the subject now.

Jesus is not describing 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. Tackett pauses over how consistent and non-contradictory Scripture is. The same divide appears in 1 John 4: “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.” Everyone on the side of truth listens to Christ; everyone not on that side does not.

Men do not react well to the truth of God. Acts 20 speaks of distorting the truth. Romans 1 speaks of exchanging the truth of God for a lie and of suppressing the truth. Romans 2 speaks of rejecting the truth and following evil. First John 3 draws the line still more sharply: this is how we know who the

children of God are and who the children of the devil are. Tackett admits the statement would not fly well in contemporary culture, yet Scripture states it plainly from beginning to end. There are sides.

(10:32 - 13:31) The Cosmic Battle, Illusions, and Captives

In The Truth Project this conflict was called the cosmic battle—the battle between truth and lie, between reality and illusion. Tackett remarks that when that series was made, little did they understand how far the culture would move toward illusions. The culture is now filled with them. The internet, Hollywood, and the metaverse fill people with illusions. AI and robotics are being crafted to make people think things are real when they are not. It is becoming harder to tell reality from illusion. Again he returns to the line: this is how we know the children of God and the children of the devil. There are sides.

Second Timothy 2 exhorts that the Lord's servant must gently instruct his opponents—an admonition Tackett applies directly to engaging neighbors. Colossians speaks of speech always with grace, in the hope that God will grant repentance. That is why they had been praying at noon Eastern for repentance. He invites hearers to join on Tuesdays for five minutes of entreating the Lord that He might grant repentance, leading people 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.

In this cosmic battle there are captives. Believers themselves are not free from the threat of being taken captive. Colossians 2 warns the church at Colossae: see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy—philosophy that depends not on Christ but on human tradition and the elementary principles of this world. Tackett calls that an incredible warning for the present day. The world is filled with such philosophy.

(13:32 - 16:32) John 8, the Father of Lies, and the Two Sets of Claims

One of the most difficult statements of Jesus is in John 8: “Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.” Here again are sides. “If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.” Jesus continues: “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

Tackett turns to an image of the battle. He dislikes drawing a box around God and tries to run the line off the left of the slide to suggest that God is not contained: He is eternal and omnipresent. For teaching purposes, however, God stands on one side and Satan on the other. Satan is the father of lies; lying is his native language. Both God and Satan present truth claims to people in the world. God has graciously given many **true** truth claims, not only in special revelation—His Word—but in general revelation, the created realm. Romans 1 says men are without excuse because God has made it plain through what He has made. Satan floods the world with false truth claims, his lies. Those caught between will believe either the false claims or the true ones. Jesus' other image is the two roads: the broad path leads to death and destruction; the narrow path leads to life.

(16:33 - 18:49) God's Unchanging Claims versus Satan's Relative Claims

God has many attributes. Tackett notes that he has not written on them for a long time and hopes to resume, in a few months, an alphabetical series on the attributes of God. For this night the relevant attribute is that God is absolute and unchanging. The truth claims He gives are therefore absolute. He does not speak a claim today and change His mind tomorrow. People change their minds, sometimes for nefarious reasons; God does not. His nature and character do not change. Truth proceeds from that nature, so the truth does not change and does not contradict itself. God cannot deny Himself; He cannot contradict Himself. That is how a trial works: enough truth is gathered so that contradictions stand out and a false claim is exposed. God's claims match true reality and are logical and rational.

Satan's false claims follow who he is. They are relative, not absolute. They can be one thing today and another tomorrow. They constantly change. They contradict themselves. They are irrational. They do not match reality. They are based on worldly passions and worldly things, which Tackett says the session will examine next.

(18:50 - 21:07) Relativism Stated and Shown to Be Self-Refuting

Constrained by time, Tackett turns from absolute truth to relativism and offers the neighborly apologetics position. Relativism, basically, is the claim that there are no absolutes. He hopes hearers will already be learning to spot contradictions in the world's false claims. Contradiction is a characteristic of lies.

If Mrs. Smith says there are just no absolutes, and if a real relationship has been built, one might answer, "Mrs. Smith, that's interesting. When you say there are no absolutes, are you absolutely sure of that?" The statement "there are no absolutes" is itself an absolute truth claim. Believers should look for such self-refuting moments. Later sessions will treat more ways to recognize inconsistencies in the world's lies. The purpose is not to lord it over Mrs. Smith or make her feel like a dummy, but to help her see that her thoughts may need to be re-evaluated.

(21:08 - 25:09) Moral Relativism, Shared Moral Sense, and the Heart

From this point the focus is not relativism in general but **moral** relativism. Pure, across-the-board relativism appears sometimes, but Tackett estimates that 99.9 percent of the time the relativism one meets concerns ethics and moral values, and it shows up in speech, manners, thoughts, and actions. Moral relativism says there are no absolutes in moral situations—or, more precisely, that there is no absolute **source** for moral values. That claim, too, is itself an absolute statement.

Deeper still, most people retain some sense of ethical moral values. If Mrs. Smith says there is no absolute standard for moral ethics, one might ask whether there is anything she would consider wrong not only in America but also in Iran. Tackett says one would be surprised: she will usually say yes. She does believe some things are wrong today and tomorrow, here and across the ocean. Helping people think that through matters, because most have not thought it through. They have been taught otherwise.

The fallen nature of man wants to accept moral relativism. Tackett says this may be the most important point of the night: the issue is not merely academic. It is hard. People want to believe moral relativism because they want to do what they want to do. Moral relativism often lets them do

that, and they will fight for it. That is why a deep relationship is required. These conversations cannot happen in an elevator. They happen over time, inside a trusted relationship. In reality, most of the issues under this topic come back to the heart.

2nd Half

(25:10 - 28:33) Where Moral Relativism Says Right and Wrong Come From

Tackett turns to the claims moral relativism makes about the source of its “truth claims,” set over against the biblical Christian perspective of absolutism—absolute truth and absolute moral values. Moral relativism claims that what I believe determines what is right and what is wrong. Mrs. Smith, or a student, will say, “I just believe that.” Tackett has heard it a thousand times. The implication is that because I believe it, it must be true. Almost no one challenges that claim in a loving, gentle way inside a trusted relationship. The challenge, when it comes, is often combative, and Scripture does not call believers to that posture.

Closely related is the claim “my heart tells me.” Tackett calls this the plague of the culture. The descent into selfishness and self-centeredness has reached the point where people act as if they were God, and the heart is treated as the thing that determines good and evil. He returns to the garden. Satan’s promise to Eve was that she would be like God, knowing good and evil. The word **knowing** is **yada**, which in this context he takes to mean **determining** what is right and wrong. The determination would come from Eve herself. That lie is as strong now as then, and it is aimed at the individual: your heart will decide. Culture is then expected to bow to that “divine” statement. If a young person says they are a cat, schools are expected to provide litter boxes. Tackett calls it foolish to treat the human heart as divine. It is not.

(28:34 - 32:13) Emotion, Abortion, and Why This Is a Heart Issue

When people defend moral relativism and become highly emotional, Tackett’s working assumption is that argument alone will not move them. There is a heart issue. They are arguing the position because they want it to be true. He takes abortion as a specific case, saying he has tried to treat it with gentleness and respect and has still met extreme emotion. Academic arguments have value and often lead the discussion about the reality of human life, but they are not the whole field. A common justification is rape. He does not dismiss the trauma of what happened to the woman, but he says the conversation cannot stay only there. He offers a thought experiment: a neonatal surgeon who says she is the product of rape, that her mother wanted to abort her and could not find anyone to do it, and then asks, “Do you think I should be dead? Do you think I should have been killed in the womb?” These are very difficult things to say. Emotion rises quickly. The cue, inside a trusted relationship, is to back away to a point, pray again, and wait for God to open another moment when the person is willing to talk.

Moral relativism sits in two words, but the depth of the subject runs into the nitty-gritty of the culture. Believers need to be ready. Families should pray diligently for Mrs. Smith—that God would soften her heart, open her eyes and ears, give an opportunity in the trusted relationship to answer well, and grant her an audience for what is said.

(32:14 - 35:28) Majority, the Court, What Works, and Lenin

Another Western claim is that the majority determines right and wrong. It appears as “everybody knows that” or “everybody thinks this is true.” The appeal is that if most people think a certain way, it must be true. In a trusted, gentle, respectful conversation that can be tested. Tackett uses Germany: if the majority felt Jews should be incinerated, did that make it right? He points to the present rise of antisemitism and public riots and asks what would follow if, in a matter of years, a majority here fell into the same hatred. Would that make it right to hate Jews or to harm them? The illustrations are easy to state; the issues remain hard and must be handled inside relationship, with gentleness and grace. Colossians 4: speech always with grace.

It is not what the law says. For a long time people treated a Supreme Court ruling as what makes a thing right, and the culture assumed it and moved on. That is not true. One can ask: if the Court ruled X or Y, would you believe that made it true? “What works” is no better basis—“it seems to be working” does not settle right and wrong. Happiness as the measure will come up again under love and compassion. Lenin declared that whatever furthers communism is moral and whatever hinders it is immoral. Once a person walks off an absolute foundation, Tackett says, they are on sinking sand, and it does not take long to sink into vile notions.

(35:29 - 39:56) Tolerance, Progressive Ethics, and the Neighbor’s Soul

The list is not exhaustive. It is meant to start thinking that can then be applied to Mrs. Smith, to Jane and Susie, to the dysfunctional family next door, as questions arise inside a growing, trusted relationship.

Tolerance is a loaded claim. Someone says that telling a person they are wrong is intolerant. In relationship one might ask whether it is acceptable to be intolerant toward those who are intolerant. The discussion opens at once. Tolerance is not treated as an absolute when people who stand on a moral-absolute, biblical foundation are themselves not tolerated. Intolerance toward a biblical worldview is increasing. Tackett says one can think of several things that, if spoken at work, at school, or in Congress as “this is wrong,” would show how quickly the culture is not tolerant at all—how viciously intolerant it can be. Tolerance functions as a moral high ground until it meets what it does not like. Then it is a smokescreen.

Progressive ethics appears especially in an election year: “We’ve come a long way. We’re not going back.” The sentence implies that the progressive evolution of right and wrong is always right. It is not. Tackett would welcome a longer discussion of what happens when a culture walks away from an absolute foundation, from the Word of God, from His truth. The progression of moral standards is then not onward and upward. It spirals downward. Those who hold a biblical worldview can see that movement now. The point for neighborly apologetics is a human soul across the street who can be caught in it. Jesus said the broad path leads to death and destruction. Love for Mr. Smith should compel fervent prayer first. God grants repentance. The believer does not. Argument does not. Lead with prayer, ask God to build the trusted relationship, and pray, as Peter describes, that they begin to ask questions their world cannot answer.

(39:57 - 42:30) Malevolent Compassion as the Prime Ethic

A third theme, treated in earlier webinars, Tackett raises again because he believes it has become the prime ethic of the culture: malevolent compassion. The culture calls it compassion. He calls it

malevolent because it drives people to embrace and affirm what is actually destructive. Loving compassion often requires hard things. He illustrates with their daughter, who would not eat anything green. Some would have called it hateful to keep her in the high chair until she ate a green pea or green bean. She now loves green beans. They knew what was good for her. Malevolent compassion fails to do what is right and affirms what is wrong.

He has spoken of this in other settings. It now drives virtually every public policy. Political and election rhetoric repeats it constantly. Believers need to recognize it. Again, this is not an academic issue; it is the woof of the culture. The hope is that when God opens a door with a neighbor, these things can be discussed with gentleness, respect, kindness, and love.

(42:31 - 46:13) The Internet Mob, Consolidated Power, and Proverbs 14:12

The last force he names is the unseen force of the times: the internet mob. He returns to J.K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter books, in the writer's hall of fame, at the top of books sold and earnings, loved for years—until she made a statement contrary to the current transgender ethical position and immediately became an outcast. That did not happen by a courtroom loss or a king's whim. It happened through a force, primarily the internet, that raises a mob against anyone who will not toe the line of current approved thought. It is not actually majority thought. It acts as if it were. Moral relativism is no longer only what an individual believes or what someone else says. An unseen force can rise. It is often driven by the sphere of labor. A friend had all of his Chase accounts closed after stating something grounded in an absolute moral value. Chase said they did not want a hater as a client.

New forces have arisen. In the Seven Threats series Tackett treated the consolidation of massive earthly power. When that power is disconnected from a moral absolute foundation, it determines right and wrong by its own desires and wants and by the other substitutes already named.

He quotes, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." The passage is critical because the culture has sold itself wholeheartedly to the idea that if it seems right to a man, that is the way to go. There are consequences. The culture is running pell-mell in that direction. It cannot have a good end.

(46:14 - 47:20) The Royal Law Charge and Next Month's Topic

That is why Tackett encourages and admonishes the body of Christ, with every fiber of his being, to follow the royal law, to do what the Lord asks, and to begin praying for neighbors—to fulfill the priestly role in the neighborhood, to bring those names before the throne of God, and to ask God for a deeper relationship in which these things can be discussed while praying that God would heal mind and heart and soften the heart.

That closes the section on absolute truth and moral relativism. The next topic is also dicey: the only-one-way issue and religious plurality. That will wait for the following session. He turns the hour back to Marc.

(47:21 - 49:35) Closing Logistics and Prayer

Marc Fey thanks Dr. Tackett. As announced at the top of the hour, a recording will go out as soon as they can turn it around, probably early the next morning, together with Tackett's slides and any

other links Marc has noted. He encourages registration for the next month's livestream so that those who cannot attend live still receive the link by email the following day. He thanks those present and asks Tackett to close in prayer.

Tackett thanks them again. He and Marc pray that God would use these humble actions to do amazing things not only in the hearers but in what happens to their neighbors as they fulfill the royal law. He thanks the Father for the opportunity, asks God to bless what was said, to wash away anything said in error or anything confusing, to bless His truth, and to call them to be a people of truth who love their neighbors as they have been commanded—building relationships, praying diligently, bringing neighbors before the throne, that God would open eyes and ears so they may hear, see, and understand. All for His glory. **Soli Deo Gloria**, in Jesus' name. Amen. God bless you all.

Marc closes: thanks, everyone; see you next month, if not before.