

# Neighborly Apologetics

Dr. Del Tackett's Neighborly Apologetics Webinar Series

## 26-0225wc - *Neighborly Apologetics, Evil & Suffering, Dr. Del Tackett*

This detailed summary by Grok / X, (Transcription by TurboScribe.ai)

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

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

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## Neighborly Apologetics Summary

**Facilitator:** Scott Reynolds

### 26-0225-Summary: 2 - Evil & Suffering (0:04 - 1:03:45)

#### (0:04 - 2:51) Welcome, Opening Prayer, and Introduction to the Topic

The webinar begins with Marc Fey welcoming participants, including Dr. Del Tackett, and noting that people are joining in real time. At the top of the hour, Dr. Tackett is invited to start, and Marc offers a brief opening prayer, thanking God for the opportunity to study His word, asking for blessing on Dr. Tackett's teaching, and praying that listeners would have ears to hear, hearts to obey, and that God would receive great glory. After the "amen," Dr. Tackett thanks Marc.

Dr. Tackett then shares his screen to display slides and expresses gratitude to attendees for making time in their busy schedules. He explains that this session covers the first category in the list of neighborly apologetics topics presented previously: "The Problem of Evil and Suffering." Many participants had requested to begin here, so the series will proceed serially through the categories. Technical adjustments are made to the screen sharing, and Dr. Tackett notes that the topic is extensive—there is no possibility of covering everything in one session. He labels this session "Part 1" and describes it as a thumbnail sketch of the issue and initial thoughts on how to respond.

He shares his conviction that, from a biblical worldview perspective, the Problem of Evil and Suffering is **not truly a problem**. At the same time, he describes it as both the **easiest** and the **most difficult** issue to handle. Intellectually and logically (regarding the nature and reality of evil), it is the easiest to address within a biblical framework. However, emotionally and personally, it is the most difficult because people usually raise this objection after evil or suffering has profoundly impacted their own life or that of someone they love. While the apologetic response is straightforward from Scripture, applying it in real neighborly conversations requires deep prayer, sympathy, and compassion.

## **(2:52 - 10:58) Review of Neighborly Apologetics Framework and the Royal Law**

Dr. Tackett stresses the need to approach neighborly apologetics correctly and previews a short summary (to be repeated briefly before each topic, becoming shorter over time). He reminds participants of the foundational purpose: neighborly apologetics flows from the **royal law** to love your neighbor as yourself. He cites Scripture: Paul says the whole law is fulfilled in loving one's neighbor; Jesus teaches that everything is summed up in loving God and loving neighbor.

He defines true agape love not as mere emotion or personal scripting, but as **steadfast sacrificial zeal that seeks the true good (shalom) of another**. The Greek word **plesion** (neighbor) refers to the one who lives near—someone providentially placed in proximity. Dr. Tackett emphasizes that neighbors are not random; God sovereignly places people near one another (e.g., “Mrs. Smith lives across the street because you live where you live”).

This perspective forms the core vision of the Engagement Project: God has entrusted the **primary work of the kingdom** to ordinary Christian families. The goal is to stir up Christians to see their neighbors as a divine trust, to engage them through deep, prayerful, grace-filled relationships. Families should build trust, act winsomely with the fruit of the Spirit, tear down walls, and carry out kingdom work in their local “Jerusalem.”

Neighborly apologetics arises naturally in these relationships. When neighbors ask about the hope within believers, Christians must be ready to give a reason (**apologia**) with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15, presented as a memory verse). Dr. Tackett urges participants and their families to memorize key Scriptures. He also quotes Colossians 4:5–6: conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity; let speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so you know how to answer each person.

He confesses that much of his earlier Christian life did not follow this pattern—his speech often lacked grace, was agenda-driven, and showed little interest in tailoring responses to individuals. He reflects that he previously viewed godly wisdom primarily as a tool for personal benefit (to feel smart), but Solomon asked for wisdom to bless God's people. Wisdom is sought chiefly so believers can love others properly.

## **(10:59 - 18:04) Wisdom, Discernment, and Differentiated Engagement**

Dr. Tackett re-presents the graph from the previous session (to be shown multiple times) to illustrate the need for wisdom and discernment. Colossians 4 instructs believers to respond differently to each person, so treating everyone the same is unwise. He outlines **two fundamental categories** of people: believers and non-believers.

Among **non-believers**, some are open to God (willing to discuss spiritual matters, may have a general sense of God's existence but not a biblical or Christ-centered faith), while others are firmly closed. These two groups require entirely different approaches.

Among **professing believers**, some hold a strong biblical worldview, while many others possess only a shallow, distorted, or absent biblical worldview. Dr. Tackett observes that the modern church often fails to instill a robust biblical worldview. For neighbors who profess Christ but lack a solid worldview, he recommends guiding them through **The Truth Project** to build that foundation, followed by **The Engagement Project**. For those who already have a strong biblical worldview, he

encourages group study of the Engagement materials—not as self-promotion, but to advance the vision of kingdom work through local relationships.

All engagement must occur in the context of **deep, patient relationships** without a rushed agenda—only the desire to love and build trust. He recalls Rosaria Butterfield’s testimony: she shared 500 meals with Ken and Floy Smith before significant truth-sharing occurred. Ken was wise enough to share truth only as deeply as the relationship could bear, never leading with apologetics but with relationship.

Dr. Tackett cites 2 Timothy 2:24–26: the Lord’s servant must gently instruct opponents, hoping God grants repentance leading to knowledge of the truth and escape from the devil’s trap. God, not the apologist, grants repentance.

Finally, he distinguishes **academic apologetics** (rigorous, historical, logical defenses from thinkers like Augustine onward, which provide the intellectual foundation and truth claims) from **neighborly apologetics**. Academic work is essential and will be drawn upon in this session, but neighborly engagement cannot lead with academic arguments; it must be rooted in relationship.

### **(18:05 - 21:17) Distinction Between Academic and Neighborly Apologetics and List of Topics**

Dr. Tackett concludes the distinction by noting that perhaps a hundred years ago it might have been possible to lead primarily with intellectual arguments, but that approach no longer works in today’s cultural context. Instead, neighborly apologetics must begin with significant, genuine relationships so that people naturally become curious and ask believers for the reason behind their hope. Christians must be prepared to respond thoughtfully when those questions arise, which is the purpose of this webinar series on neighborly apologetics.

He then reviews the list of topics (13 in total) that the series will cover serially, beginning with the current one: evil and suffering. The remaining topics include absolute truth versus relative truth, the notion that there is only one way (exclusivity of Christianity), religious pluralism, faith and reason, free will and sovereignty, God’s existence and His nature (noting that many people struggle with specific aspects of God’s character), the goodness of man, judgment and hell, hypocrisy and past crimes committed in the name of Christianity, the claims of Jesus, the resurrection (which he identifies as probably the single most important apologetic), the existence of miracles, science and evolution, the veracity of the Bible, alleged contradictions in the Bible, and finally the burning issues of the day.

### **(21:17 - 27:16) Three Forms of the Problem of Evil and Suffering**

Dr. Tackett introduces three distinct forms of the problem of evil and suffering that believers should recognize when engaging neighbors, using the recurring example of “Mrs. Smith,” a bitter elderly woman across the street who hates God because her husband suffered and died horribly from cancer despite her prayers for healing.

The **first form** is the classical **logical argument** against God’s existence, formulated as follows: If God is omnipotent and omniscient, He could prevent evil; if He is truly good and benevolent, He would want to prevent evil. Since evil exists, God cannot be both omnipotent/omniscient and good/benevolent—therefore God does not exist (or lacks one or more of these attributes). Dr. Tackett notes that this argument dates back to Epicurus around 300 B.C. and has remained largely

unchanged for over 2,000 years. It is the standard version found in most apologetic literature. He believes it is unlikely that neighbors will present this formal logical version, though if they do, resources will be made available to study academic responses.

The **second form** is the **evidential argument**, which is far more common. It does not claim that evil logically disproves God but argues that the sheer amount and horrific nature of evil in the world, combined with the apparent lack of evidence for a caring God who intervenes to stop it, makes belief in such a God unreasonable or difficult. People observe pervasive suffering—war, disease, death, destruction, hunger, poverty, torture, crime, corruption—and conclude there is little sign of divine intervention or goodness.

To illustrate this evidential form, Dr. Tackett quotes comedian George Carlin's well-known routine: "War, disease, death, destruction, hunger, filth, poverty, torture, crime, corruption, and the ice capades. Something is definitely wrong here... If this is the best that God can do, I'm not impressed. Resumes like this do not belong on the resume of a supreme being." Carlin's comedic commentary captures the evidential objection: the world's pervasive horror suggests either God is not powerful enough, not good enough, or not present at all.

The **third form**—the **personal argument**—is identified as the most prevalent and important one believers will encounter. It arises from deep, personal tragedy: direct or indirect experience of evil and suffering that leads to anger, bitterness, and rejection of God. Using the Mrs. Smith example again, she might say, "Where was God when my husband was dying? He could have stopped it. I asked Him to, but He didn't. Therefore I hate Him, I'm angry at Him, I've rejected Him, I'm through with God." Many people Dr. Tackett has read about or personally engaged have walked away from faith precisely because of this personal encounter with evil and suffering. This form is emotional and relational rather than purely intellectual.

### **(27:18 - 37:48) Preparation for Engagement and Three Fundamental Biblical Truth Claims**

Dr. Tackett shifts to practical preparation for neighborly engagement. While the series focuses on how to interact with someone like Mrs. Smith, believers (and their families) must first have a solid personal foundation on the issue. When a family begins building a relationship and realizes the neighbor is struggling with the problem of evil, they should intentionally prepare themselves by understanding how a biblical worldview addresses the question. Without a clear grasp of God's own answer, it is impossible to help others effectively. He notes that no one can comfort or guide Mrs. Smith well if they themselves lack clarity on the biblical perspective.

He apologizes that the treatment tonight will be only a thumbnail sketch—viewers will likely think of additional points—but he presents three fundamental truth claims from God's Word that he believes are sufficient to answer the problem of evil and suffering intellectually for believers. These truths do not necessarily remove emotional pain or instantly heal someone like Mrs. Smith, but they provide God's revealed framework for understanding the issue.

The **first truth claim** is that **we live in a fallen world and man has a fallen nature**. All evil and suffering trace back to the fall of creation and humanity. Dr. Tackett cites examples of **natural evil** (catastrophic events such as the massive tsunami that struck Japan years earlier and the recent 7.8 earthquake in Turkey and Syria that killed thousands, as well as aging, infirmity, and conditions like severe dementia) and **moral evil** (unspeakable cruelty inflicted by humans on others, such as a recent horrific crime in Memphis). Both forms are ubiquitous.

He explains that when humanity fell, the entire creation was subjected to frustration, bondage to decay, and groaning (Romans 8). Creation itself awaits liberation, and believers groan inwardly even when not directly affected, due to the pervasive brokenness. This fallen condition explains why the world pulls toward death and destruction, why natural disasters occur, why bodies decay, and why humans commit profound moral evil.

The **second truth claim** concerns **who God is**—His true character and nature. The problem of evil often drives people to distort their view of God, imagining Him as evil, oppressive, or uncaring. Dr. Tackett begins to connect this to the Garden of Eden, noting that nothing is new under the sun: even there, the serpent implied that God was not good, that He was withholding something beneficial from Eve and oppressing her by restricting the fruit of the tree.

### **(37:49 - 47:07) God's Unchanging Character and the Hope of Restoration**

Dr. Tackett continues emphasizing the second fundamental truth claim: the reality of **who God is**. He explains that evil, the evil one, the fallen world, and humanity's fallen nature constantly attempt to distort and twist people's understanding of God's character, pulling them toward viewing Him as oppressive or not good—as the serpent implied in Eden by suggesting God was withholding good things and restricting freedom. Believers must therefore rest firmly on the biblical truth of God's attributes, especially those relevant to the problem of evil and suffering.

He highlights key attributes: God is **righteous** and **holy**, which provides the only objective basis for recognizing and defining evil—without a holy, righteous standard, the concept of evil loses meaning. God is **just** and will ultimately bring perfect justice; no evil will go unaccounted for. The psalmists often cried out when it seemed the wicked prospered, yet Scripture assures that God will execute justice. For those in Christ, believers rejoice that the justice deserved for their own sin was borne by Christ on the cross. God is also **merciful, compassionate, loving, and good**—and He is good **always**. He is **immutable** (unchanging); He does not act capriciously, such as sending disasters or diseases out of mood swings or accumulated grievances.

These attributes reveal God's compassion and love shown supremely through Christ. Dr. Tackett inserts a sobering passage from Job 42:1–6 to remind believers of their proper posture: when confronting evil and suffering, it is easy to accuse or blame God as though humans know better or are in control. Job, after questioning God, acknowledges God's sovereignty ("I know that you can do anything, but no plan of yours can be thwarted"), confesses speaking of things too wonderful to understand, and repents in dust and ashes. This humbles believers, reminding them that God is who He says He is, humans are not smarter than Him, and their plans are not superior to His.

The **third fundamental truth claim** is the **hope** that lies before believers: God will, in His proper time, **restore all things**, bringing an end to evil and suffering forever, and in that final restoration He will execute perfect justice. Dr. Tackett connects this to Christ's work (to be discussed further) and quotes Romans 5:1–5: having been justified by faith, believers have peace with God through Christ, access to grace, and rejoice in the hope of God's glory. They even rejoice in sufferings because suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint because God's love is poured into hearts through the Holy Spirit. This hope sustains believers amid trials, knowing all things fit within God's good plan and will ultimately be resolved.

## (47:08 - 58:39) Biblical Answers to Core Questions & the Dilemma for Non-Theistic Worldviews

Dr. Tackett summarizes that the biblical worldview provides a solid, straightforward basis for answering the problem of evil and suffering—intellectually “easy” for believers, even if emotionally painful. He apologizes for the simplicity, noting this is a thumbnail sketch tailored for family discussions and neighborly apologetics rather than academic rigor. He frames the issue around three fundamental questions raised by evil and suffering: **What is evil? Where does evil come from? What is the solution for evil and suffering?**

From a biblical perspective, the answers are clear and simple: - **What is evil?** Evil is anything contrary to God’s design and order. Even seemingly minor acts (like eating forbidden fruit) unleash massive evil when they violate God’s will. In today’s culture, true evil is often minimized or redefined, yet Scripture labels many culturally accepted behaviors as evil, and they produce suffering. - **Where does evil come from?** Evil results from rebelling against God’s design and order—originally from Adam and Eve’s sin, which brought suffering and death into the world. - **What is the solution?** The solution rests in Christ’s atonement (which addresses sin and its consequences), God’s ultimate justice, and the promised restoration of all things, eliminating evil and suffering forever.

These answers become even clearer when contrasted with the severe dilemma faced by non-biblical or non-theistic worldviews. Dr. Tackett reiterates that the problem of evil is **not** a problem for the biblical worldview but is profoundly difficult for those who reject God or Scripture.

In a purely **naturalistic worldview** (as held by evolutionary biologist Dr. William Provine, quoted from The Truth Project), there is no ultimate foundation for ethics. If the world is only material processes explained by evolution, with no God or supernatural realm (the “Cosmic Cube” with nothing outside it), then all actions are merely natural cause-and-effect: humans are material machines responding to stimuli. Nothing can be truly “unnatural,” so no action can be labeled morally good or evil—everything must be **amoral**.

If evolution is true, progress comes from the stronger destroying the weaker, suggesting that eliminating the weak is actually beneficial for species advancement. Defining evil becomes nearly impossible; any moral judgment is merely pragmatic or subjective (e.g., killing babies might be “good” if it enables self-actualization or resource allocation, or “bad” if babies later provide support in old age). There is no absolute moral standard—only shifting pragmatic opinions.

Dr. Tackett extends this to contemporary Western civilization, where evil is increasingly defined by **homo deus** (man as god): the autonomous individual claims divine authority to proclaim what is good, true, right, or evil. Disagreeing with such proclamations (e.g., self-declared gender identity) is treated as blasphemy. Combined with the rejection of God from public life, “might makes right” prevails—whether through majority votes, Supreme Court rulings, elected officials, or judicial declarations. For example, if a court declares abortion permissible, it becomes “right” by the power of the institution; later shifts in legal authority merely relocate who defines right and wrong.

In these non-theistic frameworks, evil cannot originate from human rebellion against a divine order (since no such order exists), nor from man as an evolved beast responding only to natural stimuli. Man cannot truly be evil—his actions are natural and thus amoral or basically good. No one can consistently live according to pure naturalism, yet that is the logical position it demands.

## **(58:40 - 1:01:10) The Dilemma for Non-Biblical Worldviews on Evil, Its Source, and Its Solution**

Attempts to resolve the problem of evil within humanistic frameworks, such as those of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, deny that individual man is the source of evil. Instead, they locate evil in social institutions, laying the groundwork for the current cultural emphasis in 2023 on systemic evil rather than personal sin.

This shift avoids confronting personal sin because acknowledging it points to a personal, holy, righteous God, absolute truth, and an objective moral foundation—ideas modern culture rejects. Dr. Tackett points to the recent horrific events in Memphis as an example: rather than acknowledging the deep personal sin within the perpetrators, public discourse (across news, media, magazines) consistently frames such acts as institutional or systemic failures, never personal moral failing. He predicts this trend will intensify, with the crosshairs of blame turning toward those who hold biblical views on human sexuality, sin, and morality. Biblical positions will increasingly be labeled as part of the “systemic problem” causing evil in society.

Regarding solutions to evil and suffering, non-biblical worldviews also falter. Maslow proposed that evil arises when people are prevented from realizing their true inner self; the solution is self-actualization and getting in touch with one’s authentic nature. Denying self (as Scripture commands—“deny yourself,” take up your cross) is therefore viewed as evil. This foundation underpins much of contemporary Western culture, where “follow your heart” and self-expression are seen as the path to overcoming evil. Since evil is attributed to social institutions, solutions focus on institutional reform, replacement, or overthrow—never personal repentance or transformation. Increasingly, the “solution” involves canceling, silencing, or marginalizing those who uphold traditional biblical ethics, viewing them as obstacles to progress.

## **(1:01:11 - 1:03:45) Closing Scripture, Practical Application, Announcements, and Prayer**

Dr. Tackett affirms that the biblical worldview provides a solid, coherent basis for answering the problem of evil and suffering. He closes with Ephesians 6:12–13: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.” This reminds believers that the true battle is spiritual—not against neighbors like Mrs. Smith—but against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Engagement must therefore be bathed in diligent prayer, both individually and as families, asking God for opportunities to show sympathy, empathy, and build genuine relationships. Through patient questioning and listening, God may open hearts and eyes, as He did with Rosaria Butterfield, prompting questions that non-biblical worldviews cannot answer. This relational, prayerful approach is how believers can turn the world upside down through ordinary interactions with those around them.

Dr. Tackett concludes his teaching, noting they have reached the end of the hour. Marc Fey thanks him for the “awesome truth to consider” and provides closing announcements: a link to the session recording and Dr. Tackett’s slides will be sent out; links to The Engagement Project, online training, and related information will also be shared for those interested.

Marc invites participants to remain online briefly to share personal stories or details in the chat about situations involving evil and suffering in their own lives. Some have already posted; Dr. Tackett may reference one or two as examples in the next session. Even if not addressed directly,

the team will pray over every shared situation, recognizing that evil and suffering are deeply personal and that everyone has related stories. They count it a privilege to pray with and for attendees.

Dr. Tackett closes the webinar in prayer, thanking God for hearing the cries of suffering (referencing blood crying from the ground) and acknowledging His goodness, kindness, and mercy despite human pain. He trusts God will one day end all suffering. He prays specifically for neighbors hit hard by evil and suffering, whose thinking has been distorted and who have rejected or walked away from God. He asks that through believers' prayers, love, and relationships, God would grant opportunities to speak truth and share the hope found in Christ, all for God's glory. He concludes in Jesus' name, "Amen."