26-1028wc Neighborly Apologetics

Dr. Del Tackett's Neighborly Apologetics Webinar Series

26-1028wc - *NA- 4-Faith & Reason, 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

26-1028-*Summary: 4-Faith & Reason* (0:04 - 59:29)

Title: *Is Biblical Christianity a Leap of Faith?,* **Facilitator**: Scott Reynolds

1st Half - (0:04 - 37:09) Order Requires A Cause

(0:04 - 4:28) Welcome, Prayer, and the Neighborly Frame

Del Tackett greets the audience and thanks facilitator Marc Fey. He notes that while the webinar format is practical—especially given slick roads and recent snow in Colorado—he would prefer a classroom setting for interaction on the material. He previews that the evening will be more philosophical than previous sessions, covering philosophy, science, random numbers, DNA, topoisomerases, the cosmic cube, and arrowheads, all in service of the topic of faith and reason.

He reestablishes the foundation of neighborly apologetics. While grateful for the work of academic apologists, the focus is on engaging the neighbor according to the royal law of love. God has entrusted the prime work of the kingdom to the common Christian family, who have a priestly role in their neighborhoods. His prayer is that this understanding will be recovered by the body of Christ in Western culture. Preparation is therefore required not only to love the neighbor and build relationship, but to respond when that neighbor—Mrs. Smith across the street—holds that faith is illogical or has nothing reasonable associated with it.

Common forms of the charge are reviewed: Is Christianity a leap of faith? Is belief in God irrational? Is belief in Jesus as Savior irrational? Some accept Jesus as a historical figure but reject His messiahship, miracles, or role as Savior of the world. Others claim that the age of science and reason has discarded such "fairy tales." These questions appear in the culture, in personal minds, and in the minds of children, so believers must be equipped to walk through them properly.

(4:29 - 8:18) God as the Rational and Logical Foundation

Tackett insists that the discussion must begin with God—His nature and character—because all truth emanates from Him. This supplies the foundation for truth, reason, and logic. Although some believers resist the idea, God is rational and logical. Created in His image, humans possess rational

and logical minds, and God addresses them with rationality and logic. He laid a clear if-then statement before Adam and Eve concerning the tree, and He assembled Israel between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim with an if-then-else structure of blessings for obedience and curses for turning away. Paul's writings are likewise filled with logical statements. God always acts in accordance with His rational nature, with purpose, and therefore never capriciously or randomly.

This stands in contrast to the gods of human invention, which inspire fear precisely because their actions are unpredictable and subject to whim. Even God's judgments follow a rational, logical process grounded in His truth and Word. The discussion therefore begins with God because of a double-edged problem: the world charges that biblical Christian faith is irrational, while some believers insist that logic and rationality have nothing to do with Christianity. The evening's topic addresses the first of these charges—that biblical Christianity, faith in God, and belief in Jesus Christ and the miracles are irrational.

(8:19 - 13:22) William Provine's Charge and the Counter-Claim

Tackett introduces a clip from a debate between William (Will) Provine, a Cornell University professor who held to evolution and the philosophy of naturalism, and Dr. Phillip Johnson. Provine, who has since died, stated that when one dies one is completely dead and will not be surprised; if he himself were aware after death he would be surprised, though he would at least avoid the "grinning creatures from Sunday morning." Summarizing what modern evolutionary biology (essentially Darwin's views) tells us, Provine affirmed there are no gods, no purpose or forces of any kind, no life after death, no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning in life, and no free will. Christian humanism, while warm and kindly in many respects, requires suspending the rational mind—a "really nasty" requirement. Atheistic humanism fits rational minds seeking to understand the world but lacks cultural heritage. It offers intellectual satisfaction (no longer clinging to childhood fairy tales), proximate meaning even without ultimate meaning, relief from the "horribly destructive" idea of free will, and the possibility of robust ethics without ultimate foundations. There is no reward for suffering because one simply lives and dies.

Tackett highlights three of Provine's propositions for use throughout the evening: there are no gods, there are no purposive forces, there is no ultimate foundation for ethics (only a proximate one), and there is no free will. The operating premise is that naturalism and materialism are rational while supernaturalism and Christianity are irrational. Tackett's counter is that the biblical Christian worldview is not only rational but more logical than naturalism and materialism.

(13:23 - 21:16) Naturalism Wedded to the Current Scientific Paradigm

In the contemporary world, the philosophy of naturalism and science have become wedded; Provine's address illustrates the point. Naturalism supplies the fundamental basis for his scientific approach to life and the world. This was not always the case, so Tackett turns briefly to the history of science and the current paradigm, referencing Thomas Kuhn's 1962 book **The Structure of Scientific Revolutions**. Kuhn argued that the history of science is a succession of paradigms that arise, rule, and eventually fall. While a paradigm reigns, thinking outside its box is forbidden; those who do so are treated as radicals. Over time reality breaks through, the paradigm collapses, and another rises with the same restrictive characteristics until it too falls. The implication that the current paradigm will likewise fall outraged many scientists who regarded their framework as absolutely correct and dismissed contrary questions.

What distinguishes the present paradigm is that it has wedded itself to the philosophy of naturalism. Conclusions reached inside the paradigm must always point to a natural cause; nothing outside the box is permitted. Earlier paradigms were not so constrained. Johannes Kepler, working in a different paradigm, held that the chief aim of all investigations of the external world should be to discover the rational order and harmony imposed by God. He was free to invoke a cause outside the purely natural. Today naturalism and the scientific paradigm are united; nothing may point beyond the box. Those familiar with the Truth Project will recall the "cosmic cube": naturalism asserts that the realm of matter and energy is closed and that there is "nothing, nothing" (in Francis Schaeffer's phrase) outside it. Science is thereby redefined so that every conclusion must point to a natural cause. Scientists who argue for intelligent design are declared to have defied true science and are shunned, canceled, shamed, ignored, or labeled unscientific. Tackett recalls interviewing, on the television program **Cross-Examine**, a scientist denied tenure after co-authoring a book on intelligent design—precisely the dynamic Kuhn described.

Consequently, speaking of God, of Christ as Savior, of miracles, of soul and mind, of life after death, or of free will is viewed as irrational. The issue is therefore whether the biblical Christian worldview is truly irrational, or whether the charge of irrationality is sometimes used to dismiss that worldview without rational examination. With Mr. Jones across the street, Tackett advises against an immediate challenge. Once a deep relationship exists—analogous to being able to tell a close friend that his breath stinks and having him thank you, something impossible in an elevator—it may become possible to suggest that the repeated dismissal of biblical Christianity as fairy tales is a way of avoiding any rational look at it.

(21:17 - 28:19) Rational Thinking and Observation 1: Order Exists

Tackett now turns to rational and logical thinking. God is logical, created a logical universe that follows a rational pattern, and gave human beings minds capable of responding to His logic. The invitation "Come, let us reason together" (Isaiah 1) confirms that such reasoning is possible. He will proceed through three observations, several conclusions, and the logical considerations that follow. The first observation, offered for use in conversation with the young man next door, Mrs. Smith, or Mr. Jones, is that order exists. Everywhere one looks there is exquisite, intricate order—in deep space, in the planetary system, and within the cell (its parts and its operations). While waiting for an ENT physician, Tackett studied a wall diagram of the inner ear; the physician agreed that it is the most complex and exquisite system in the human body. From the atom to DNA and chemical molecules, everything displays such order. Even modern science acknowledges the observation. Carl Sagan, in his series **Cosmos**, noted that "cosmos" is the Greek word for the order of the universe and is, in a way, the opposite of chaos—an interesting remark from a man who opened the series by declaring that the cosmos is all that is, ever was, or ever will be, and who believed random forces produced everything.

The first conclusion follows: if there is order, there must be an ordering cause or force, because random forces do not produce order. Tackett recalls graduate work in artificial intelligence at Kansas State University, when the "holy grail" of computer science was a true random-number generator. Existing generators eventually repeated and thereby revealed a pattern, ceasing to be random. By definition, if random forces begin to produce order they are no longer random. The universe is filled with exquisite, intricate order; randomness is not found. It is therefore rational, not irrational, to conclude that an ordering cause or force is required.

(28:20 - 37:09) Illustrations of Order and the Rational Character of the Conclusion

Tackett wishes the session were a classroom so that interaction could accompany the pictures he now shows. Years earlier a friend walked him over property where arrowheads lay on the ground; the order displayed in the artifacts caused him to stop and infer an ordering cause—the Native American craftsman who shaped them. Sites of manufacture often yield broken pieces. It is not irrational to see such order and conclude an ordering force. The same inference arises before the pyramids of Egypt: despite exterior erosion, the precisely cut and fitted stones inside make it impossible to attribute them to random forces. Stonehenge likewise draws worldwide attention and study precisely because of the mystery of its ordering cause; if random processes were assumed to produce order, the monument would be unremarkable. In the Colorado woods, elk rubs on aspen trees are readily distinguished from human-carved initials and dates; no one attributes the latter to random forces. Around 2011 a Coast Guard pilot spotted an SOS written in the sand on a remote stretch of the Na Pali Coast. The pilot did not marvel at random forces of water and rock; he recognized an ordering cause behind the letters. Two women, one injured, were rescued from a beach reachable only by a long hike or by water. All of these everyday recognitions of order and of an ordering cause constitute a rational thought process, not a leap of faith. Disagreement is possible, but the charge of irrationality cannot be sustained at this point.

Science itself employs the same reasoning. The SETI program (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) uses large dish arrays to look for order amid cosmic noise; detection of order rather than random noise would be taken as evidence of an intelligent source—an ordering cause. The universe is expanding at an accelerating rate that cannot be explained by known physics; rather than call the acceleration random, science posits dark energy (or a dark force) acting upon it. Spiral galaxies, according to the timescales of the current paradigm, should long ago have lost their spiral form as matter was flung outward, yet they retain it; the explanation offered is dark matter that holds the form together, not random forces. Thus the observation and conclusion remain a rational process. Science itself proceeds in the same manner. One who sees vast, exquisite order and concludes an ordering force reasons logically; one who sees the same order and attributes it entirely to random forces may reasonably be judged to be thinking irrationally.

2nd Half - (37:10 - 59:29) The Character Of That Cause And The Historical Claim

(37:10 - 38:38) Observation 1A: The Ordering Force Must Be Transcendent

Tackett moves to what he calls Observation 1A, a continuation of the first observation. When the universe is examined, order exists cosmically everywhere—even in deep space. Therefore the ordering cause or force that produces this order cannot be merely local; it must be transcendent, because it has brought about order throughout the entire cosmos and in everything observed. This remains a logical thought process: there must be a transcendent ordering cause or force, hereafter referred to simply as a transcendent ordering force. Even if someone hesitates to use the word "transcendent," nothing irrational or illogical has been asserted. Order is produced by an ordering force, order fills the entire cosmos, and therefore that force must be transcendent. Disagreement is possible, but the charge of irrational thinking cannot be sustained at this point.

(38:39 - 43:49) Observation 2: Systems, Relationships, and a Relational Transcendent Ordering Force

Observation 2 notes that the order seen in the universe consists of systems, not non-systems. Everything is bound up in systems. Life is distinguished from non-life, the personal from the non-personal, and relationships and communications are present. The order is far more exquisite than a mere repeating sequence such as 0 through 9. Systems and their pieces and parts come together with relationships between them—even systems of systems. The human body is filled with systems of systems that communicate with one another, so relationship is built into the order observed. The blood-clotting cascade, discussed earlier in the Truth Project, illustrates the point: its systems and factors are exquisite, and failure of even one small factor produces a bleeder. Topoisomerases function as remarkable machines within the cell; they receive a communication of what the cell needs to produce, locate the precise code in the DNA strand, open and clip that strand so the instructions can be read by other machines, and thereby maintain a relationship with the rest of the cell involving roles and processes. Animals likewise communicate with one another. The logical conclusion is that this transcendent ordering force must itself be relational and communicative, for the relational aspect of that force has produced order filled with relationships. Again the thought process is rational. Mrs. Smith may not agree, yet she cannot maintain that the conclusion is irrational. If order exists everywhere and all of it is based upon relationships whose systems depend upon deep interrelations, it is not illogical to say that the force producing those relationships must itself be relational. Tackett illustrates with a friend who produces exquisite marionettes and stages shows in which the marionettes speak to one another. The voice and background are supplied by the maker; it is not irrational to conclude that the marionettes communicate and relate because the one who made them is relational and communicates. Combining the conclusions, a logical examination of the universe points to a relational transcendent ordering force. Nothing illogical or irrational has been claimed; one may not believe it, but the charge of irrationality or illogicality cannot be made.

(43:50 - 49:01) Reasonings: Expectation of Communication, the Bible, and a Personal Being

Several reasonings follow. If there is a relational transcendent ordering force, it is reasonable and not illogical to expect that force to want to relate to us, to communicate with us, and to get that communication right. As the path continues, some will begin to back off because they sense the direction, yet nothing illogical or irrational has been said. One may decline to follow the path, but

the path itself cannot be charged with illogicality. A transcendent ordering force that is deeply relational because it produces all these relationships must be relational, and one might therefore expect it to want to relate to us. This expectation is precisely the basis of the SETI program: modern science proceeds on the logical premise that if an intelligent force exists out there, it would want to communicate with us and would want that communication to be receivable. Mrs. Smith may hesitate at the next step, yet SETI itself takes that step. The most extensive and expansive claim that this relational transcendent ordering force has indeed communicated with us is that the communication is found in the Bible. Even if someone is not "good with the Bible," the present discussion concerns only the rational process: if such a being wants to talk to us—as SETI's entire operation assumes an intelligent source would—there already exists a very extensive claim that the force has done so and has communicated in the Bible. Given that logical possibility, it is logical and reasonable to examine the communication. This remains a rational thought process; disagreement is possible, but irrationality cannot be charged. Examining that communication logically brings one to understand that the force is a personal being. Just as a SETI signal saying "we are two-headed beings in Alpha Centauri" would yield further information, so the communication many believe comes from the relational transcendent ordering force declares who He is: a personal being who created the universe, has communicated His identity, and wants a relationship with man. Nothing irrational or illogical attaches to the process. Continuing the examination, the communication also tells of an extraordinary sacrifice made so that the relationship could become a reality. Uncomfortable territory is entered, yet the point throughout is that no leap of faith has been taken, no charge of irrationality or abandonment of logic can be sustained; a logical process has been followed.

(49:02 - 50:22) Observation 3: The Empty Tomb

Observation 3 takes a large step. The most compelling evidence that bridges the gap between the logical recognition that a relational transcendent ordering force might exist and the claim that it is true is the reality of the empty tomb. This is offered in the hope that, once a relationship with the neighbor has been built in which these matters can be discussed openly, and once it is clear that the neighbor has absorbed the notion that Christianity is irrational or based on fairy tales, the neighbor can be shown that a logical process leads here. Belief is not required, but illogicality cannot be charged. The conclusion drawn from the observation is that Jesus is who He says He is; He wants a relationship with us; He came, died, and rose again to make that possible. That is the power of the empty tomb. The subject has already been treated in the neighborly apologetics sessions on the life of Christ and the resurrection; it is the prime ethic of biblical Christianity. Again, nothing in the process is illogical.

(50:23 - 53:29) Bottom Line: A Rational Path to the Personal, Communicative God and the Contrast with Naturalism

Time is short, so Tackett summarizes the bottom line. Nothing in the path differs from the logical process science uses when it concludes that something unseen and unmeasurable exists and names it dark matter or dark force. The logical path is the same. Looking at the entire universe, one logically and rationally concludes that God exists, that He is personal, and that He has communicated with us. People may not believe it, yet it cannot be charged as irrational or illogical. It is rational, not irrational, to believe in a transcendent ordering force who is personal and communicative, who has communicated in written form in the Bible, who has kept that communication inerrant, and who has revealed Himself to man in it. Further, that communication

declared that He came to earth as a man, performed many signs, and would sacrifice Himself for us, the proof being His resurrection validated by the empty tomb. One can logically and rationally conclude that this rational transcendent ordering force reveals Himself to be holy, true, love, and grace, and that He was willing to die and sacrifice Himself for His people, with whom He desires a personal relationship, doing so in the historically corroborated events of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, validated by the empty tomb. This differs from what SETI would find. If SETI's hopes were realized, the communication would come from an alien describing its galaxy, identity, and origin. Here the communication is that this God came to earth, lived and walked in the historical reality of this world, died and rose again, and the evidence is present and validated by the empty tomb. It is not merely a communication; the evidence is here. The biblical Christian worldview is therefore not based upon a blind leap of faith. God has given a logical, rational mind to discern the many ways He has proven who He is. It may be that the real irrationality lies in the claims that order comes from non-order, life comes from non-life, information comes from noise, that there is no mind, no free will, no ultimate foundation for ethics, and no ultimate purpose or meaning for life. That kind of thinking might itself be charged with irrationality.

(53:30 - 56:40) Scriptural Confirmation and the Necessity of Prayer

Two passages are examined. Hebrews 11 declares that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen; by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. Romans 1 states that what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them; His invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made, so they are without excuse. Creation itself, through the rational mind, leaves everyone without excuse because it is plain to them. The world says seeing is believing, yet Scripture indicates that seeing is not believing, for people see the same things and do not believe. The issue is not irrationality but unwillingness to believe what is seen. Although the neighbor can be shown that the Christian worldview is neither irrational nor illogical, faith does not come merely by rational logic. Many saw the works of Jesus—Lazarus raised, the man born blind healed, the empty tomb—yet true faith and belief come only from God. Therefore neighborly apologetics must be preceded, accompanied, and followed by prayer that God would open the eyes of the blind and soften hard hearts. Believers can help others understand logically that biblical Christianity is not a leap of faith or based on irrational fairy tales; there is a logical process, because God is logical and rational, has shown Himself in many ways the rational mind can perceive and understand, and invites, "Come, let us reason together, though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." Time has run out, sparing a discussion of the academic snobbery Christian students often encounter when charged with bringing fairy tales into the university.

(56:41 - 59:29) Closing References, Next Topic, and Prayer

Tackett leaves several references that will appear on the distributed slides: **Reasonable Faith** by William Craig, **Faith and Reason** by Ron Nash, **The Story of Reality** by Koukl, and **Worldviews in Conflict** by Ron Nash. The next webinar will move "from the frying pan to the fire" to address free will and sovereignty. He turns the session back to Marc Fey. Fey thanks everyone for joining, notes that the live stream has been recorded, and promises a link to the recording along with Dr. Tackett's slides in PDF format; the same page will also list the other recordings in the series, and he will send a single link to that page. He asks Dr. Tackett to close in prayer. Tackett thanks the

audience again, acknowledges that the material can be tough and dry, yet it is pursued because of love for the neighbor and the scriptural call to be ready to give a defense for the hope that is within. He prays that the Father would oversee what has been said, sifting it so that only what is right, true, and good comes through; that He would comfort any who are stumbling or suffering; that the content would benefit the hearers; and that He would stir all to follow the command to love the neighbor and to be prepared to give an answer for the reason for the hope that is in them—all for His glory, in Jesus' name. The session ends with good nights and blessings.