First Thessalonians 5 says, “Test everything; hold fast what is good.” Our God and Creator, we thank you for giving us a mind to distinguish what is worth valuing and what is not. We pray that your Spirit will teach us today what we should devote ourselves to in terms of our ultimate concern. We thank you, in Jesus name. Amen.

We continue today the discussion of Pure Empiricism as an approach to reasoning in defense of the faith, and we pick up in the discussion of Norman Geisler who has updated the thinking of J. Oliver Buswell, Jr. Geisler, as a pure empiricist, does not assume that everything, including God, has a cause or that everything has a sufficient reason. Rather, he uses the thomistic principle which claims that every finite, contingent, and changing thing has a cause. If this principle is sound and leads to an infinite, necessary, and unchanging being, then this being will not need a cause. Thus he seeks to show that only Theism is affirmable and undeniable, and hence, only Theism is true. “All the nontheistic worldviews,” he argues, “are sayable, but not meaningfully affirmable. They are utterable, but not justifiable.”

But a major criticism occurs in evaluating the work of Geisler. He has a section entitled “The Principle of Causality is Justifiable,” but does not show that the universality and necessity in this causal principle is justifiable on empirical terms, so all of his arguments depending on this second premise miscarry. Furthermore, Geisler insists that only affirmability can falsify a worldview and undeniability can verify a worldview. Admittedly, however, the specifics of Geisler’s Theism are determined by the criteria of logical consistency, empirical adequacy, and experiential relevance.

Geisler unsuccessfully attempts, then, to use the criteria of unaffirmability and undeniability independent of and prior to these three: logical noncontradiction, factual adequacy, and existential viability. What Geisler does not note is that these
three are already at work in the applications of his principles of unaffirmability and undeniability. The unaffirmability of statements by definition becomes evident because they are logically self-contradictory, and the unaffirmability of statements because of the actuality, must be traced to a knowledge of actuality derived from the adequacy of empirical or existential data. Those that are not a matter of mere definition and those that depend on experience, such as our own existence, require appeal either to empirical or existential evidence.

So in the final analysis, Geisler works with but three standard tests of truth from the beginning in choosing a worldview, even though he says he uses only the two. He determines more than the details of a worldview by the standard three-fold criteria. He determines his worldview by those norms. Geisler’s claims, furthermore, that all worldviews are equally consistent and factual, thus do not stand up. And Geisler’s criticism of a combinationalism are no more damaging to others than they are then to his own apologetic. His analogy of a leaking bucket is not relevant as used and does not apply to an effective integration of these three tests of truth. He suggests that you have three tests, each of which is leaky as a bucket, and so you put the three together and you still have three leaky buckets. But what we are talking about and will talk about further is the integration of the three. If you stay with this analogy, then, the three figurative buckets are integrated so that the one covers the holes of the other. Each is partial in relation to our experience, but the three together cover the entirety of the types of experience we enjoy.

Many other pure empiricists attempt to update the five arguments of Aquinas also. Among the more significant works are those of Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley entitled *The Classical Apologetics* published in 1984. They attempt a reconstruction of natural theology or learning knowledge of God from nature utilizing three universal assumptions—the validity of the laws of noncontradiction and causality and the reliability of sense perception. With these three items of common ground, unexplained on purely empirical principles, they return to the cosmological and teleological arguments for God’s existence.

An Augustinian approach to knowing does not simply assume such principles arbitrarily, but provides an account of their origin. Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley, like many others, think that Romans 1:18 and following teaches the validity of an empirical starting point and an inductive argument for God’s existence.
Others think that Romans 1 teaches the accountability of all God’s creatures in His creation to believing and obeying the Creator, but do not find any particular inductive, deductive, or hypothetical argument form taught in this passage. For a thorough discussion of general revelation and natural theology, see Lewis and Demarest’s *Integrated Theology, Volume 1*, chapter 2.

Another pure empiricist, J. P. Moreland, has written *Scaling the Secular City*, published in 1987. It provides a brilliant attempt at the lost cause of reconstructing arguments from nature to God. And yet another may be found in the work of Terry Miethe and Gary Habermas, *Why Believe? God Exists!*, published by College Press in 1993. The observable data in all these books is very useful, but apologists may utilize the converging lines of evidence in a different form of argument.

Review with me, then, five major points in the approach of Pure Empiricism and the Inductive Reasoning. First, the logical starting point, it is data of any type observed by the senses. Second, common ground. We have as Christians in common with all non-Christians all the facts or the data given to the five senses in human experience. Third, the criteria of truth. It is the correspondence of our ideas with sense data. Dr. Buswell uses the term integration for this, but I think the standard term correspondence used in the history of philosophy is more accurate. Fourth, the role of reason. It involves mere inductive argument from particulars to universals. The deductive approach assuming premise is a priori is rejected. And fifth, the basis of faith, the most probable cause of the observed data is the existence of God. The empirical approach will not achieve an absolute intellectual certainty, but rather one must be satisfied with the probability of the overwhelming amount of evidence in the direction of one worldview as over against the alternatives.

Let me try to sum up the pure empiricist’s defense of the faith in reference to a person we shall call Jane. The daughter of one of your leading church families has majored in philosophy at college and lost her childhood faith. Jane, let us call her, can no longer honestly confirm belief in a wise personal Creator of holy love disclosed in the historic Jesus and the teachings of Scripture. Like many of her contemporaries, she now flatly denies the truth of the claims you make as her pastor, friend, or counselor for God, Christ, and the Bible.
In Jane’s case, these denials are not a smoke screen for irrational concerns, but genuine philosophical issues for which she thinks Christians do not have good answers. She is willing to listen if you think you can provide some worthy reasons for a basic Christian believe system. Why then should she return to belief in an invisible God who cares about this planet? Ministers using an empirical way of reasoning in defense of the faith would ask her to take another objective look at the cosmos and consider its observed phenomena. She must be aware of her own contingent existence or she would not be there talking with you, and she must be aware of the existence of other persons, of the world’s order, of the uniqueness of personality, and of human moral concerns, and even the fact that there are people who have a concept of God. Since every contingent thing known has a cause, this world most probably has a noncontingent cause which supports it all.

By way of conclusion, then, you would urge her to consider that it’s highly probable that a first cause exists who is intelligent, personal, purposive, and moral. Furthermore, the observed data of archaeology and history show that it is highly probable that the Bible is a reliable source of history, so its references to Jesus are historically accurate. In fact, Jesus lived and made the astounding claims attributed to Himself, and these are backed by an exceptional moral integrity and remarkable miracles. On the basis of these indications, it is concluded that it is most probable He was what He claimed to be—the divine being in human flesh. That being the case, what Jesus taught about the Bible is true and it is not only good history, it is also divine revelation for which all are accountable. The evidence for the truth of Christianity is overwhelming probable to the point of deserving commitment. The evidence is so clear that Jane, like all others, is responsible to worship and serve God. If she continues in unbelief, she is without excuse before the divine Judge.

A second approach to apologetics needs to be explored and it is called Rational Empiricism. In the outline in the study guide, this would be Roman numeral VIII, Rational Empiricism. The major evangelical Christian who used a rational empiricist approach to knowing in the twentieth century was Stuart Hackett. The son of an attorney in Binghamton, New York, which happens to be my hometown also, Stuart was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Cornell University. There he was introduced to philosophy by Edwin A. Burtt who wrote *Types of Religious Philosophy*. Hackett earned his MA at Wheaton College and regards Author Holmes, the head of its philosophy department, another influential mentor.
Hackett earned his Ph.D. in philosophy at Syracuse University while pastoring a church in upstate New York. His advisor for his dissertation on Aurobindo Ghose was an empirical philosopher, Raymond Piper. Aurobindo, a modern leader of the *advaita vedanta* philosophy in modern India considered the illusionism of Shankra a misinterpretation of the Upanishads. He rejected the common Hindu assumption that all that appears to the sense is *maya*.

Stuart Hackett taught at Denver Seminary, the Louisiana and Wheaton Colleges, and later at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. Hackett’s writings reflect three major periods of his life. In the earliest period, Existentialism and Neo-Orthodoxy were disparaging reason and natural theology in favor of voluntarism. And Hackett wrote, *The Word of God in the Life of Many: Reason and Biblical Authority* in 1956. To analyze the frightening predicament of Christianity that surrenders common ground and urges people to accept a view, the rational objectivity of which has either been obscured or in some cases wholly denied. As a result of his growing conviction that the Christian worldview needs and embodies a thorough going rational apologetic, he then sought to manifest its relevance to the contemporary mind in his work, *The Resurrection of Theism*, in 1957. In it, he sought to demonstrate that the Christian faith embodies objective truth for all rational minds. He knew that no one can be compelled to faith by rational evidence, since we are volitional as well as rational beings, but he hoped to provide the occasion of a reasonable faith and to emphasize the moral culpability of rejecting spiritual truth. He did not imagine that only those who understand Christianity’s rational basis had an efficacious faith, but that a faith without this basis would not be efficacious. He illustrated the point with a person who stands on a skyscraper without understanding the principles of engineering in its structure. One could not stand there safely if sound engineering principles were not exemplified in the building structure. So he set out to write an apologetic defined as “the systematic rational formulation in defense of belief about knowledge, reality, and conduct.”

About twenty years later, after a year of research and life in India, Hackett published *Oriental Philosophy: A Westerners Guide to Eastern Thought* in 1979. Its introduction does not emphasize the objectivity of his thought, but starts, “What follows is the record of an existential journey, the account of one individual’s struggle with the perspectives and problems of oriental philosophy. For this reason, the understanding developed here is as much a refraction
of light through the prism of my own mind as it is a descriptive analysis of the viewpoints considered. "Still, he wrote, “although I fully acknowledge a subjectively relevant slant, I think I also speak as a typical child of the Western world. I, therefore, also hope to call forth a sympathetic vibration from deep within the soul of every other person whose interpretive categories, though essentially human have been struck from the mold of the same tradition.”

But he had not become a voluntarist who holds that an ultimate commitment of will is the decisive basis for the status of one's principles as standards. For, if that were the case, criteria would change from system to system and there would be no neutral ground of independent logic or reason by which to decide between opposing sets of criteria. A thinker can criticize another system only on grounds that imply his own if Voluntarism is correct. But voluntarists argue from scriptural authority as foundational to the reasonableness or otherwise of any religious truth claim whatever. Unfortunately, Hackett includes Augustine with those who he thinks take this voluntarist approach, but as we saw, that is an oversimplification from two or three quotes and does not do justice to Augustine's many references to knowing what one believes about Jesus and the Bible on the basis of adequate evidence.

Hackett's recent work still maintains a rationalistic attitude, holding that there are ultimate principles of criticism which do not depend for their status on voluntary commitment to a particular overall system, but rather reflect the nature of objective reason itself, making intelligent thought possible and serving as the final grounds of all truth claims. Then in 242 pages, he assesses Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Hackett's publication nearly thirty years after his resurrection of Theism is entitled *The Reconstruction of the Christian Revelation Claim: A Philosophical and Critical Apologetic*, 1984. It is more complete in dealing with Christ and Scripture and not mere Theism, and it is stated in a style much more mature. But he says in the preface, “The embryo of it all was there in the earlier book both in thought and on paper. In all honesty,” he writes, “I have little to take back from what I said so long ago as far as substance and content are concerned. However, I certainly would not use the same style again, and I particularly regret the histrionic invective and sarcasm which pervaded that earlier analysis, and which as I see it now, may have turned away many whom I wanted to address.”
We turn then to an exposition of basic elements in his Rational Empiricism as it has stood the test thrown at it in the East and the West. “There is no such thing,” he said, “as philosophy in the abstract, for philosophy is a distinctly human and personal project, even though its truth claims have independent logical status. A person’s philosophy is a core of convictions indispensable to the intelligent direction of one's life. A philosophy is unavoidable, but we can choose whether to have a philosophy haphazardly or after careful self-reflection. Although reality and metaphysics in a sense are prior to knowing because we seek truth about reality, epistemology takes priority over metaphysics in the order of knowing, and it has been the all, but universal assumption of both Eastern and Western thought that all truth claims must run back to certain foundational principles that form the methodological starting points, the presuppositions of all possible thought and knowledge.”

Such a foundationalism, however, does not settle numerous other epistemological questions, and on these Hackett is not a pure rationalist who holds that no genuine knowledge is derivable from one's limited experience, but a priori or brought to fragmentary experiences. Neither is Hackett a pure empiricist who holds that all genuinely informative knowledge is grounded in sensory experience or that knowledge is basically a posteriori. Hackett develops a rational empiricism, combining the best of both views as he sees it, accepting inherent interpretative categories in the mind which are both a priori and synthetic; that is, telling us something about the real world and the experiential origin of the content known. The basic categories make intelligible thought possible. These include the law of noncontradiction and the law of causality. These laws can only be challenged on grounds that imply their validity.

The modern philosopher Immanuel Kant had been stabbed awake by the fact that Hume’s Pure Empiricism led to a total skepticism, struggling with how to account for universal and necessary principles that make life meaningful. Kant concluded that some basic concepts and relationships are inherent in the mind and brought to our experience. By way of illustration, the human mind is like a spaghetti machine. An amorphous mass of dough is poured into it, but it comes out in nice, thin or thick strands that you can twist around your fork and savor at length. Or the machine may turn the blob of pasta out in the shape of macaroni or shells or most anything, but the result is attributed to both the dough and the machine. The unformed disorganized dough
is poured into the machine and is organized into the product desired.

To get away from food analogies since it may be near lunchtime, computerized information is the product of both the computer’s hardware and the software you use. You can fill the computer with all the sense data in the world, but if it is not programmed with say Word Perfect software, you will not be able to make sense of it. A computer with all its capability is blind without the software to give its data order, relationship, irretrievability, and usefulness. Similarly, you can have the best software package in the world, but if you have not entered it into the computer, you will not be able to process words accordingly. “For knowledge to be processed, we need more than the data of the pure empiricist,” Hackett insists, “we need the innate programming of the mind to relate the data quantitatively, qualitatively, temporally, and relationally.”

The universal and necessary logical principle of noncontradiction makes possible relating ideas meaningfully and makes possible understandable communication. The universal principle of causality makes possible judgments about significant relationships of facts, and universal and necessary principles of morality make possible decent relationships among persons. Because of these innate categories we not only passively receive sense data, but we actively make judgments. We make judgments that this statement is true or false. That that conduct is good or bad, better or worse. That this idea is reasonable or unreasonable. These principles, then, are like the motor on a car. They are not optional equipment. They are original equipment that comes with every person born into the world.

Knowledge, then, according to both Kant and Hackett, equals concepts plus percepts. The mind’s concepts without sense perceptions are empty and percepts without concepts are blind. Let me repeat that key to understanding Immanuel Kant and Stuart Hackett—concepts without percepts are empty; percepts without concepts are blind. Computerized information requires both the hardware and the software. The categories of the software that give order and meaning to buzzing, blooming masses of data are essential to understanding that bombardment daily.

Why hold that there are innate categories of thought and principles of reasoning? Well, in the case of the laws of noncontradiction and causality, Hackett argues, “They can be challenged only on grounds that imply their validity. You cannot argue against them
without assuming them. You can only argue against them in an arbitrary fashion. Whenever one asks for a justification of a factual truth claim, one asks,” he says, “for a causal explanation.” No further justification of that principle can be reasonably required since that principle itself is a part of the basis for any justification. These principles are necessary for explanatory adequacy in any realm of discourse, not just religious language. They seem to be ultimate categories of all thought and communication, all being and truth about it. Since they are ultimate starting points and foundations for all possible thought, they cannot be vindicated by any prior premises.

We cannot avoid subjectivity and meaninglessness if we reject these foundational principles. Try to develop a worldview and a life without them and in the end, the alternatives inevitably run their own arguments back to these foundations. Trying to dispose of them is like trying to throw away an old boomerang. So Hackett inevitably comes back to the raw confidence that the foundations of truth and knowledge for all of us are immediately accessible in the structure of our own conceptualizing and, therefore, at least at close to us as the air we breathe. They enable us to self-consciously move toward the difficult goal of objective reasonableness.

Kant had maintained that he could not know that the categories were applicable to things in themselves—the German phrase *dinge in sich*. Why has the notion of the inapplicability of concepts to the ultimate been so prevalent? Well, it’s partly because of Kant’s influence, partly because the absoluteness of the ultimate makes it foreboding psychologically. We do not want to have to bow before the divine Judge. The psychological motivations may be very complex. Furthermore, when a person is intensely involved in the awareness of some object of any sort, one is not generally self-reflective about the structure of awareness through which the object is apprehended. One is all the while absorbed in the object itself. Indeed, such self-reflective analysis may be detrimental to the fullness and integrity of the experience itself. In this way it becomes easy to identify nonawareness of conceptual structure with its supposed absence. And if authentic religious experience is regarded as perhaps the most intense and absorbing of all distinctly human experiences, then the sort of confusion involved in arguing afterward from the lack of awareness of conceptual categories to their assumed absence is just what one might expect.

Then, of course, those who do reflect on their experience find that certain class concepts do not apply to the religious object.
It cannot have the same sort of material status of a rock or be confined to a limited space. It cannot be essentially evil in an ethical sense. Since some categories do not apply, it is easily understood why none may be thought to apply to the object of one’s ultimate concern. And there seems to be something demeaning about using similar concepts for plants, worms, and the Supreme Being, but does that place us about God? Hackett finds this line of supposition baffling. For him, the rational knowability of an object of awareness enhances rather than diminishes its value. In any case, there is no reason why the religious object cannot be known precisely as superior in being and attributes to the finite mind. The categories are structures through which we think rather than as a rule, the object about which we think. Judgments regarding truth claims require more than sense data; they require these categories when we stop and think about it.

The inherent categories and principles in the human mind, then, are called logical starting points for all thought. They serve also as common ground for all and so Christians can remind people of them or help them become aware of them if they are not aware of them initially. Hackett regards these principles of rational coherence and experiential relevance as foundational to all knowledge. There are as many of them as there are types of logical judgments, since, for example, judgments are either affirmative or negative, there would be corresponding categories of reality and negation. Also judgments are made and so categories must be there for existence, substance, causation, possibility, or necessity, logical noncontradiction, and ethical reciprocity.

So in his starting point and common ground, Hackett has rational noncontradiction and the law of cause and effect and all the date of experience. His criteria of truth claims for philosophers and members of religions must be coherent; that is, they must fit a self-consistent application of the principles of the mind and the relevant empirical givens. A proposition is true if it correlates systematically with the data in question and the whole body of previously established propositions.

What then is the role of reason in Hackett’s Rational Empiricism? Reason, as categorically structured, is responsible to distinguish reality from unreality in nature, history, and metaphysics. Reason must determine the nature of the ultimate reality one values and whether revelation from God in Jesus and Scripture is possible, then whether it is probable, and finally whether it is actual.
And what is the basis of faith in Hackett’s approach? Hackett no longer claims a logical demonstration of his worldview as he did in his earlier works, but rather speaks of a rational plausibility. His argument is not one of absolute mathematical demonstration. It rather has the force all but overwhelming reasonableness and probability. Theism, then, emerges as a highly plausible and pervasively probable explanation of evidence and existence, even though it is not absolutely demonstrated.

Hackett in his earlier work had not been able to complete a three volume set that he had anticipated. In his *Resurrection of Theism* he had given his case for Theism, and then I supplemented the chapter on Rational Empiricism with the case for the Bible’s truth from Floyd Hamilton. Hamilton was a Presbyterian missionary to the Far East who emphasized that revelation is not only possible, but also highly probable and is, in fact, a reality. He established his claim for the truth of biblical revelation in contrast to claims in other religions. Those sacred writings in Hinduism and other groups may be accounted for, he said “by purely natural causes.” These religions were spread by force, political power, ritual, compromise, appeal to man’s lower nature, or the separation of morality from religion. Christianity was not spread by the above factors, but prescribed moral regeneration, maintained the offense of the cross, and the threat of persecution and even death. Some natural causes may have contributed, like the Roman roads and universal language; however, such a mighty effect requires a mighty cause.

Then he lists a number of evidences for the truth of Christianity’s revelation claim. The literary phenomena of the Bible—its universal appeal, its ethics, its unity, its biblical history, the accuracy of its geography and political terminology, the preservation of an accurate text, the failure of destructive higher criticism to wipe it out over 200 years, the answers available for alleged discrepancies— and supremely, Christ’s resurrection. Fulfilled prophecy also proves the Bible to be the Word of God, and finally Christian experience confirms it. Think of how the enemy of Christianity saw on the road to Damascus to persecute Christians was transformed into a radiant believer and a courageous missionary, establishing churches around the First Century world.