



Lesson Guide

Lesson 8 - *Unio Mystica*: Am I Alone?

Introduction

Lesson 8 takes us to the southeast sector of the Truth compass for a tour of the *social sphere* that Dr. Tackett characterizes as the heart and soul of Christianity: the *Mystical Union* (Latin, *Unio Mystica*) between God and man. Here, in the most intimate and profoundly mysterious sphere of the “Intimate Three” (family, church, and the God-man relationship), we have the privilege of pondering exactly what it is that Christ has purchased for us at the price of His precious blood shed on the cross for our sins: not simply salvation from hell, but an invitation into the Godhead itself, where we may experience the incomprehensible wonder of oneness with the Creator of the universe.

Themes

In our discussion of the family, we saw that the apostle Paul likens the bond between Christ and the church to the oneness shared between husband and wife (Ephesians 5:31-32). This oneness, he concludes, is a “profound *mystery*” –a concept that is difficult to fully grasp. On this tour, we proceed to examine an even deeper and *more* mysterious aspect of this bond: namely, that it is experienced *not only* within marriage and the corporate context of the body of Christ, *but also* on an intimate, personal level by the individual believer. This, says Dr. Tackett, is the greatest of all the wonders we will contemplate during the course of our study: that the God of the universe has come to make His dwelling both *with* us and *in* us.

Dr. Tackett marshals an impressive array of scriptural passages and biblical images to illustrate both facets of this glorious truth. On the *corporate* side, he draws our attention to Jesus’ discourse on the vine and the branches and the importance of “abiding” in Him (John 15:5); the high priestly prayer of John 17, in which Christ speaks again and again of the oneness shared between the Father, the Son, and the body of believers (“I in them and You in Me”); the several passages in which Paul emphasizes the importance of unity in the church and the mutual edification of the various members of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 2:19-22, 4:11-16; Galatians 3:28-29); and the many “one another” commandments with which Jesus and the apostles set forth their vision for our common life as Christians, including John 13:34-35, Romans 12:10, Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 3:16, and 1 Peter 1:22. On the *personal, individual* side, he cites Jesus’ statement to Nicodemus about being “born again” (John 3:7); His promise of the indwelling Spirit (John 14:16-17); Paul’s declaration that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17); and the apostle’s astounding claim that “Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). In connection with this discussion, Dr. Tackett points out that we must be careful not to “blur the spheres” by applying the unique and particular social laws of one realm to another realm – for example, by assuming that we can meet our need for Christian fellowship by worshiping God individually, or that we can enter into the wonder of the *Unio Mystica* simply by attending services at the local church.

As in all of the social spheres, there is potential here for the emergence of dysfunctions and pathologies as the effects of the *Cosmic Battle* make themselves felt at the very core of man's relationship with God. Interestingly enough, marital imagery arises again in this connection: the Lord warns His people many times in Scripture against the danger of "prostituting" themselves or "going a-whoring" after other gods and idols (see Numbers 15:38-39). Just as spouses are to seek fulfillment of the *sexual* drive exclusively within the bonds of the marriage covenant, so we as believers are to confine our quest for *significance* to the covenant relationship with the Creator. For it is this powerful human hunger for significance, says Dr. Tackett, when directed outside of God's covenant relationships, that constitutes the single most formidable barrier to intimacy, communion, and oneness. All too often, we forsake the Lord and cut ourselves off from others in attempt to puff up our own sense of self-importance.

Points to Watch For

Especially important to the overall message of this lesson is the idea that *oneness with God* represents the heart of the Christian Gospel; in other words, that Christianity is not primarily a moral, philosophical, or religious system, but rather a deep, intimate, and living *relationship* with a *personal* Creator. This, to return to a point made in Lesson 4, is the essence of "eternal life" – i.e., *knowing God* just as intimately as Adam knew Eve. It is important to help students come to the place where they can not only begin to *understand* this concept rationally – something we can never fully achieve – but also *feel* the wonder of it in a profoundly affecting way. *This* is the point at which the *transformational* aspect of this tour will come home to participants most tellingly. Some students may also need to wrestle with the implications of Dr. Tackett's warning about the danger of "blurring the spheres."

Discussion Questions (Pick 3 or 4 for your discussion time.)

(Make these questions your own. That is, don't just "read" them, but become familiar with them so that they don't appear as simply an item to get through. Go through them yourself before your group meets and ponder them.)

1) Opening Question: (this may be the only question you need to ask).

A. Ask your guests to list what they saw on the tour. Here are some of the key items: Social systems; the divine imprint; unio mystica; divine intimacy with man; the mystical union within the Trinity, between husband and wife, between Christ and the church; between God and man; intimacy, union, oneness; the wonder of God dwelling within me; unique and particular social laws; blurring of social spheres; the oneness of the body of Christ; the one-another commands; tassels and phylacteries; "everything they do is done for men to see"; the hunger for significance; Saul's jealousy of David; Jesus teaching from Matthew 6 about giving alms, praying or fasting to be seen by men versus being seen by God; buyer's remorse; hungering for God.

B. Ask your guests to point out the ones that were particularly interesting or striking to them and why.

C. Ask if this particular area struck anyone else as well.

D. Ask if there were other items that they saw that stood out to them. (You may want to read back through the list if your need to.)

- 2) **How would you define Christianity? What definition does Dr. Tackett propose during the course of this lesson? Why does he see this definition as being of central importance to our understanding of the Gospel and our overall grasp of truth?**

(Dr. Tackett defines Christianity specifically in terms of the *Mystical Union*. Through faith in Christ, he says, we are not simply “saved” or “delivered from hell,” but actually introduced into the inner sanctum of the Godhead itself and united in a personal, intimate, and relational way with our Creator. This is what it means to “know God” and thus possess “eternal life.”)

- 3) **What do we mean when we speak of our union with God as a *mystery*? Why is it so important to affirm and embrace the *mysterious* aspects of this reality rather than trying to reduce it to a simple statement of fact?**

(The incredible essence of the Christian message is *Immanuel* – God *with* us and *in* us. The thought that the infinite Creator of all things has come to dwell not only in the church as His body, but also in *you* and *me* individually – not just a “piece” of Him, but His complete and entire *infinite self* – is a mind-boggling concept that inspires joy, fear, and wonder, and which should have the effect of driving us to worship and adoration, with an ever increasing hunger to enjoy that intimacy with Him. To be content with a simple, clinical affirmation of this truth is to walk away from the most incredible wonder that God has ever granted. The relational aspect of our faith cannot be replaced with a set of cold philosophical and religious propositions.)

- 4) **Contemplate, for a moment, the *reality* of God dwelling within us. How deeply do we believe this to be real? Does our life and thinking characterize this profound reality?**

(If we are honest, most of us will confess that we think of God as more “external” than actually dwelling within; more “out there” than “in here”. That is why our thoughts and actions are sometimes carried out as if nobody sees or knows.)

- 5) **Cite some examples of ways in which we can “blur the spheres” and thus miss out on the fullness of what God intends us to experience in the realm of our social relationships. Can you think of personal instances in which you have unwittingly fallen prey to this tendency?**

(Review the examples provided in the lesson: a man says “I can’t work for a female employer” [confusing *labor* and *church*]; another asserts, “I don’t need church, I can worship God on my own” [confusing the *Unio Mystica* with the church as the body of Christ]. Encourage participants to engage in an honest examination of their own hearts and lives in this respect.)

- 6) **What insight into the heart of man can we glean from King Saul’s reaction to the women’s celebration of David’s victory over Goliath? From the Pharisees and their “long tassels” and “wide phylacteries”? How can this insight help us fight the pathologies that confront us in *all* of the various social spheres?**

(Saul was angered by the women’s song – “Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands” – because it threatened his sense of personal *significance*. The jealousy he felt toward David as a result actually became the occasion of his falling under demonic influence. Similarly, the hypocritical Pharisees lengthened their tassels solely “to be seen of men” – in other words, all their so-called “religious” behavior was aimed at a single goal: to build up their own sense of self-significance as contrasted with the significance of others. These are just two examples, says Dr. Tackett, of the many ways in which our human hunger for significance drives us away from God, cuts us off from other people, and makes us incapable of entering into intimate relationships. If we can bridle this impulse and direct it back to its true source of satisfaction – the sense of fulfillment we can find in a close and “secret” relationship with our Father in heaven – we will have struck a major blow against all types of social pathology.)

- 7) **How should this discussion of the *Unio Mystica* impact our attitude toward that relationship and the price that was paid to make it available to us?**

(Wonder, love, and praise are the only appropriate reactions to the miracle of intimacy with God that has been offered to us in Christ. When we begin to grasp what it means to rest in Him and find all our needs for fulfillment and significance satisfied in His love, we will be filled with an ever deeper appreciation for the precious wounds of Jesus and a deep hunger to walk closer with Him and experience more of His truth and love.)

- 8) **How do we enter into a deep and intimate relationship with the infinite-personal God?**

(Through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus, who was “wounded for our transgressions” [Isaiah 53:5]. **Note to the host:** if you think your group is ready for this, have someone share their testimony of when they came to Christ. **Also note**, this could be the time when someone in your group may realize that they are not really a Christian. Be ready to lead them in that step, either privately or in the group if they openly confess their need.)