

SEVEN: Pursuit of the Perfect Church

"THYATIRA: LESSONS IN PURITY"

REVELATION 2:18-29

This Week's Core Competency

Church – I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish his purposes on earth today. Ephesians 4:15, 16 *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

Christ's disciples live in the world but do not belong to the world. Jesus made this perfectly clear in his words to the eleven on the night he was betrayed. He told them, "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world" (Jn 15:19)—and so it doesn't. He warned them, "In this world you will have trouble" (16:33). And yet, he did not ask the Father to remove them from their hostile environment. Instead, he prayed, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (17:15). Christ prayed that they might insulate themselves from the world through their obedience to his Father's word. Insulation not isolation was the goal.

Insulation not isolation is what the exiles sought in a culture that threatened their faith. You

In the world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

-Jesus

remember their story. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah renamed Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego by their captors were expected to eat food and drink wine provided by the king. They, however, resolved not to violate the dietary laws given by Moses and thereby defile themselves, so they negotiated with the king's official. "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see" (Da 1:12, 13). In the end, they looked healthier and better nourished than the others who ate the royal food. Their compromise worked.

Later, King Nebuchadnezzar set up an image and commanded his people to worship it. His herald proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kind of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace" (3:4-6). The king's order left no room for compromise, which left Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in custody for refusing to comply with it. As determined as before, they told the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not

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serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (3:16-18). In the end, they were delivered *in* the furnace rather than *from* it.

Sometimes the world gives God's people room to compromise; sometimes it doesn't. What's difficult is discerning where to draw a line in the sand between the two extremes.

Situation for Discussion

Jim operates a printing press, a big four-color one, not as big as the newspaper ones that feed off huge rolls of paper, but a big one nonetheless. The company he works for has struggled through a slow economy, but for the time being he still has a job. In his line of work he sees all kinds of images because his company prints all kinds of stuff. But more and more in recent weeks he's been seeing what he would call R-rated images—not pornographic ones but pretty close, certainly not ones he would want his middle-school son ogling. He ignores most of them—kind of. But he can't do his job with his eyes closed, and some of them stick in his mind. He's joked with his supervisor about printing "dirty pictures," and the guy more of less said the company has been taking jobs it didn't before to keep the doors open and assured him as things improved he'd see fewer "dirty pictures." But in the meantime, it is what it is; get over it.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Revelation 2:18-29

18"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. 20Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 22So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. 23I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts

and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. 24Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): 25Only hold on to what you have until I come. 26To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations-

27'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery'-

just as I have received authority from my Father. 28I will also give him the morning star. 29He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Highlight "the Son of God" in v. 18.
- * Box "like" indicating *comparison* in v. 18.
- * Underline "love" and "service" in v. 19 with one line.
- * Underline "faith" and "perseverance" in v. 19 with two lines.
- * Box "nevertheless" indicating *contrast* in v. 20.
- * Circle "woman Jezebel" in v. 20.
- * In the margin next to v. 20 write, "Cf., vv. 6, 14, 15.
- * Box "so" indicating *result* in v. 22.
- * Circle "children" in v. 23.
- * Draw an arrow from "searches" in v. 23 to "eyes" in v. 18.
- * Circle "deep secrets" in v. 24.
- * Highlight v. 26 in a different color.
- * Box "just as" indicating *comparison* in v. 27.
- * Circle "the morning star" in v. 28.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Christ is called the "Son of God" in verse 18. What makes that title apropos to the situation in Thyatira?
2. Explain the comparisons—the sense of the similes—in verse 18 (cf., v. 23).
3. "Love and faith," "service and perseverance," note any relationships between the two pairs.
4. Was the situation more critical in Pergamum (v. 14) or Thyatira (v. 20)? Explain.
5. Give your opinion of the spiritual condition of "Jezebel" and her followers.
6. What do you think the teaching of Jezebel (v. 20), Balaam (v. 14), and the Nicolaitans (vv. 6, 15) had in common?
7. What should Christians infer from Christ's judgment on Jezebel and her followers?
8. Put what verse 25 means in your own words.
9. Explain the *comparison* in verse 27.
10. **Discussion:** How will believers exercise the authority given to them by Christ?

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Finding a good church isn't easy. If you've ever moved to a new community and had to look for a new church home, you know how difficult it is. cursory examinations and evaluations of churches and their ministries can be misleading. Imposing buildings may house dead congregations while more modest ones may be home to vibrant assemblies. Rich churches in our sight may turn out to be poor in God's while the ones that look poor to us may turn out to be rich in his eyes. Only the head of the church, Jesus Christ, knows for sure the condition of his churches because he sees what may not be readily apparent to us. In seven messages to seven churches in Asia Minor, the Lord gives us a glimpse into what makes a church truly rich or truly poor. These letters while written to individual congregations at the end of the first century were intended to benefit all the churches. What's more they were intended to benefit the individuals that made up those churches and us too.

If you're a Christian looking for a job and thinking about moving to Thyatira at the end of the first century to find one, I've got good news and bad news for you. The good news is you're likely to find a job there. It's a center of trade and commerce with a growing economy. Whether a merchant or a worker, you'll probably have no trouble earning a living in Thyatira. The city is a "union" town with all the trades represented: tanners, potters, bakers, wool and linen workers, dyers of cloth and sellers of cloth, not to mention smiths and metalworkers. The bad news is Thyatira is not known for its beauty like Smyrna and Pergamum, and if you get a job there you'll be expected to join a trade guild. No problem if you're not Christian, big problem if you are! "If Ephesians Christians were tempted by rigidity and lovelessness, Smyranean Christians by persecution, and Pergamum's Christians by persecution and prophets of compromise, economic pressures were inviting compromise on the part of Thyatira's Christians" (Craig S. Keener, *The NIV Application Commentary: Revelation*, 132).

There's more good news, the church there has a lot going for it. According to Christ, who sees his church's strengths and its weaknesses, and who stands ready to reward the one and judge the other, Thyatira's believers are loving and faithful. They manifest their love in service to others and their faithfulness in perseverance. There's more bad news,

too, they tolerate a false prophetess, that woman Jezebel, who makes the situation there worse than in Pergamum. The church in Pergamum *has* members who hold to the teaching of Balaam; the church in Thyatira *tolerates* the self-proclaimed sibyl who propagates it. Doubtless she's a woman, but doubtful she's named Jezebel. Whatever her real name, she's a Jezebel because "Jezebel was King Ahab's Phoenician wife who along with her puppet husband promoted Baal worship and sorcery in the northern kingdom (1Ki 16:31-34; 21:25-26; 2Ki 9:22). And while immorality is not mentioned in connection with her, Baal worship was characteristically licentious, so the association is close. Claiming to be a prophetess, this Thyatiran Jezebel was probably a prominent woman within the church who, like her OT counterpart, influenced its members to forsake their loyalty to God by promoting involvement in the religious feasts and immorality associated with membership in trade guilds (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT, 103). In a nutshell, their compromise with pagan culture went way too far.

Christ knew it and warned that he would put an end to it if the guilty parties didn't repent of their "Jezebelian" ways. He had given the prophetess, herself, a chance to repent, but she had refused. Hence, her punishment was inevitable. Those who were her followers faced intense illness; those who were her proteges, her children, faced fatal illness. That is, if they didn't repent of Satan's so-called deep secrets. Jezebel no doubt claimed her teaching was from God; when, in fact, quite the opposite was true. What's more, Christ was ready to make an example of the Thyatiran church so that all seven churches might know that the one with blazing eyes and burnished feet knows what's in the hearts and minds of his people and that he rewards them accordingly. Salvation is by grace, but rewards are by works. Consequently, those who do not hold to her teaching should take notice and hold on to the integrity of their faith because Christ promises to share his authority with overcomers. One day they will share in his victory and in his rule over the nations and so gain the one who is the morning star (see 22:16).

The Message of the Passage

Don't listen to those who preach compromise for prosperity's sake; instead, hold on to the integrity of your faith for the sake of Christ and his kingdom.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Give Yourself Some Good Advice Based on the Message of this Passage.**
- **Pick a verse or verses from the passage to memorize or think about this week.**
- **Relate the message of this passage to any of the following:**
 - o **Belonging**
 - o **Becoming**
 - o *going Beyond*
- **Journal your thoughts on the passage.**
- **Home Group Discussion** (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group)
 - * Home Group Discussion (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group).

Some merchants in Thyatira, who were persuaded by "Jezebel" that God wanted them to be salt and light in their society, apparently dismissed any concerns they might have had regarding participating in guilds and in associations dedicated to pagan deities. To do otherwise amounted to economic suicide. Every generation of Christians has to decide how much compromise is too much compromise. Describe the last time you were tempted to compromise your Christian integrity for economic gain and what you did about it.

“Thyatira: Lessons in Purity”
(Use the space below for Sunday's message notes)

notes **N** **STUDY** – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 12 **Thyatira** "The Longest and most difficult of the seven letters is addressed to the least known, least important and least remarkable of the cities" (Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 106). "At the time of writing, Thyatira was still relatively unknown but on the way to the prosperity it attained in the second and third centuries. The city was especially known for its large number of trade guilds. Most cities in the Greco-Roman world centered on the guilds, but in Thyatira they were especially prominent (most often mentioned in inscriptions were the shoemakers, the makers and sellers of dyed cloth, and the bronze smiths). Hemer (1986:107-8) believes this was so because throughout its history the trades provided an auxiliary function for the military in Thyatira, a garrison town. Each craftsperson (merchants, tanners, potters, bakers, wool and linen workers, sellers of cloth, various metalworkers, etc.) was part of a 'guild,' and thought they were not obligatory, few workers failed to belong, for the guilds were centers of social life as well as commerce. In fact, both physically and sociologically, the guilds were at the heart of civic life. Towns tended to be laid out in squares, and each guild controlled its portion of 'squares.' Lydia, a 'seller of purple' and possibly a patron of the church at Philippi (Acts 16:12-15), was from Thyatira, which was well known for its dyes. The religious life of Thyatira was also influenced by the guilds. Each guild had its own patron god or goddess, and the frequent feasts of the guilds were religious in character. The pressure on Christians to participate in the idolatrous life of the people was probably linked to the guilds. For their feasts were the heart of the social (and commercial) life of the city. To refuse to participate meant the loss of both goodwill and business" (Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT, 153-54).

v. 18 **son of God** The term "stands in strong contrast to the local cultic worship of Apollo Tyrinnos, which was merged with that of the emperor (identified as Apollo incarnate) so that both were acclaimed as sons of Zeus. Thus it is not the emperor or the guardian deity of Thyatira, but the resurrected Christ, who is the true son of God" (Mounce, 101-102).

v. 18 **like** The two similes in this verse "eyes like blazing fire" and "feet like burnished bronze" (1:14, 15; cf., Da 10:6) suggest the penetrating insight of Christ, the judge, and his strength to execute judgment. "This allusion to 1:14 designates Christ as the one whose eyes flash with anger and who is prepared to tread under his feet the enemies of the Christian church" (George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 50).

v. 19 **service** The Greek word (*diakonian*) refers to charitable service and ministry to others. "The *diakoneo* ('serve') word group differs from the *douleuo* ('serve') word group in that the former connotes 'service' on behalf of someone while the latter speaks of 'service' under or subordinate to someone (the 'lord' or 'master')" (Osborne, 154, 55).

v. 20 **Jezebel** Likely a woman but unlikely named "Jezebel," this false teacher spouted the error of the Nicolaitans (cf., vv. 6, 15) and corrupted the church like Jezebel corrupted Israel (see 1Ki 16:31-34; 21:25-26; 2Ki 9:22). The immorality mentioned in connection with her-2 Kings 9:22 (lit., 'harlotries' [NASB]; 'whorings' [ESV])—probably refers figuratively to idolatry rather than immorality.

v. 20 **teaching** "Jezebel probably 'taught' that there was nothing wrong with a Christian taking part in the guild feasts and celebrations, for it was merely civil. Since idols were nothing, Christians would not destroy their faith by participating" (157). So why was she wrong? Apparently because attending by itself amounted to idolatry. "There were numerous societies for a vast variety of purposes, the condition of membership in which was professedly and explicitly the willingness to engage in the worship of a pagan deity, because the society met in the worship of that deity, the name of the society was often a religious name, and the place of meeting was dedicated to the deity, and thus was constituted a temple for his worship" (W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 346).

v. 27 **rule** An allusion to Ps 2:9, "You shall break them with a rod of iron" (NJB). The Gk. verb *poimanei* can mean literally, "tend a flock," "shepherd," or figuratively, "rule" even "destroy." "The OT promised that the saints would participate in ruling over the messianic kingdom (Ps. 149:5-9; Isa. 60:14; Dan. 7:14, 18, 27). Jesus taught that the meek would inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5) and later that his disciples would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes (Matt. 19:28 par. Luke 22:30). Paul promised that believers will reign with him (2 Tim. 2:12) and judge the earth, even the angels (1 Cor. 6:2-3). In the Apocalypse the saints' sharing in his final victor and rule is a frequent theme (1:6; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4, 6)" (Osborne, 166). "The meaning of this word [*poimanei*] in this context cannot be in doubt, for it is further defined by the phrase that follows. The effective establishment of the Kingdom of God cannot be accomplished apart from the destruction of all hostile and recalcitrant powers. The new age cannot be inaugurated without the displacement of the old, fallen, sinful age with its rebellious hosts" (Ladd, 54; cf. Osborne, 166-67).

v. 28 **morning star** Speculation abounds with regard to the meaning: possibly an allusion to Nu 24:17, i.e., messiah himself, or to the planet Venus as a symbol of Roman sovereignty and might (Osborne, 167, 68).

Connect the **FAMILY**. During this series, Bible stories appropriate for children will be used that complement the adult teaching.

Experience it!

Experience scripture through the activity-based learning exercise. Dinner is a perfect time to engage the family.

Of all the Ten Commandments most people know the one that says, "Thou shall not lie." Read Acts 5:1-11. When they sold their property it was Ananias and Sapphira's choice to use the money any way they wanted. They chose to ignore God's commands and lie about how much money they were giving. God's people listen to God's commands.



Pray it!

Pray God's will for your child by praying scriptures. Insert your child's name in the blanks as you pray.

Father, I pray _____
love will abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that he will be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ. Php 1:9-10

Post it!

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the memory verse throughout the house. Lead your children to interact with them as they memorize.

Church – I believe God uses the people in the church to do His work.

Memory verse – "You . . . are members of God's household built on the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone." Eph 2:19, 20

Discuss it!

Discover biblical truth by discussing the scripture. Reflective questions are great with older kids.

- *What did Ananias do that was so bad?
- *Why was Sapphira considered guilty also?
- *What did Peter mean when he said, "You have not lied to God but to men?"
- *Why did fear seize the entire church after Ananias and Sapphira died?

Live it!

Live out the Core Competency and build deeper relationships by doing this activity.

This is the last week to fill your family's baby bottle with coins to give to the Arlington Pregnancy Center. Many families at Pantego Bible Church have working on the project for several weeks. Imagine the excitement on Sunday when all the bottles and all the coins are brought together! God will use the people in the church to do his work.



Challenge

Kids preschool through sixth grade receive Kid Pix Tokens for each discipleship activity completed.

Family completes **Experience It** _____ Child memorizes kid-friendly **Core Competency** _____

Family participates in **Live It** _____ Child memorizes **Memory Verse** _____

Kids can earn extra tokens on Sunday morning by:

Bringing a friend to **The Kid Connection** _____ Completing **KIDZ Bulletin** _____

Child's name _____ Parent's signature _____

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Keith Smith (B.A. in Speech Communication, Texas Tech University and M.A. in Religious Education, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is the Family and Children's Pastor at Pantego Bible Church. Keith is a featured communicator for Song of Solomon for Students and speaks at children/student camps across the country. He has developed a number of relational parenting seminars designed to motivate parents to empower their parenting by emotionally connecting with their kids. Keith lives with his wife, Denise, and their two children, Jordan and Alex.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.