

## SEVEN: Pursuit of the Perfect Church

### "LAODICEA: LESSONS IN GROWTH" REVELATION 3:14-22

#### 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.*

What is it about wealth that makes it so deceiving? Clearly there's no correlation between financial well-being and spiritual well-being; just ask the rich fool mentioned in Jesus' parable:

*The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 17He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'*

*18"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." 20"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'*

*21"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God. (Lk 12:16-21)*

And yet, we can't seem to shake the notion that

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***Here I am! I stand at the door and knock.***

***-Jesus Christ***

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there is. Wealth makes us think we have everything we need; like it did the Laodiceans. "Like the emperor in Hans Christian Andersen's story, these Christians thought they were clothed in splendor when they were really naked! To be naked meant to be defeated and humiliated (2 Sam. 10:4; Isa. 20:1-4). The Laodiceans could go to the market and purchase fine woolen garments, but that would not meet their real need. They needed the white garments of God's righteousness and grace. According to Revelation 19:8, we should be clothed in 'fine linen, clean and white,' and this symbolizes 'the righteous acts of the saints' (NASB). Salvation means that Christ's righteousness is *imputed* to us, put to our account; but sanctification means that His righteousness is *imparted* to us, made a part of our character and conduct.

There is no divine commendation given to this church. Of course, the Laodiceans were busy commending themselves! They thought they were glorifying God, when in reality they were disgracing His name just as though they had been walking around naked" (Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:580, 81).

It seems they had *imputed* righteousness but not *imparted* righteousness. Theirs was a good for nothing church.

#### For Discussion

One author writes, "Prayerlessness or dry devotional times, so typical of many of our lives in the West, often stem from a lack of sense of need before God. Our material abundance can, if we are  
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unwary, prove a source of spiritual poverty as it did for the Christians of Laodicea. Our indifference to persecution, political oppression, and other forms of suffering pervasive among our spiritual siblings in many regions likewise betrays our contentment with the world as we experience it. As in Laodicea, our prosperity may blind us! Note this comment from Richard Stearns of World Vision, former CEO of Lenox, Inc. (a manufacturer of fine china): "If the book of Revelation were written today, and there was a letter to the church in America, I think it would decry the fact that our materialism and wealth have deafened our ears and blinded our eyes to the cause of the poor" (Craig S. Keener, *The NIV Application Commentary: Revelation*, 165, 66).

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

### Revelation 3:14-22

14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire,

so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. 19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. 21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Journal your reflections on this passage

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

- \* Circle "Amen" in v. 14.
- \* Bracket "the faithful and true witness" in v. 14.
- \* Circle "ruler" in v. 14.
- \* Highlight "cold," "hot," and "lukewarm" in vv. 15, 16.
- \* Box "so" indicating *result* or possibly purpose in vv. 16, 18, 19.
- \* Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 17.
- \* Underline "poor," "blind," and "naked" with one line in v. 17.
- \* Underline "gold," "clothes," and "salve" with two lines in v. 18.
- \* Circle "shameful nakedness" in v. 18.
- \* Bracket "I stand at the door and knock" in v. 20.
- \* Circle "eat" in v. 20.
- \* Box "just as" indicating *comparison* in v. 21.

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## 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. Read the description of Christ in verse 14 and the description of the Laodiceans in verse 15. Then explain the relevance of the Lord's description to the church's condition.
2. "Cold" and "hot" are metaphors (v. 15) once interpreted to mean the Laodiceans were "neither cold nor hot" spiritually. What's the problem with this interpretation?
3. So in what sense were their "deeds" neither cold nor hot?
4. Jesus said, "I am going to vomit you out of my mouth" (the NET Bible). Explain the derivation of the negative connotation of "lukewarm" in verse 16.
5. Explain the *contrast* in verse 17.
6. Material wealth can lead to spiritual poverty. How so?
7. Spiritually impoverished Christians need to obtain "gold," "white clothes," and "salve" from Christ. Explain the meaning of the three metaphors.
8. Explain why you find verse 19 discouraging or encouraging.
9. Put what verse 20 means in your own words.
10. Explain the *comparison* in verse 21.

**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.

Christ is called "the Amen" in the opening of the letter to the church in Laodicea. It's an odd sounding name rooted in a term of "confirmation" found in the Old Testament (see Isa 65:16) that suggests the assurance of all his promises (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20). Likewise, he is called "faithful and true" which is another way of emphasizing the certainty of his promises. What's more, he's God's agent in creation leaving no doubt that he is able to keep his word.

The Laodicean letter proves once more that looks can be deceiving—especially when it comes to spiritual things. *The church in Laodicea looked at its wealth and thought it needed nothing* (v. 17). Citizens of Laodicea were wealthy, hence it comes as no surprise that members of the church were too. The city's banking services, garment industry, and medical school all contributed to the prosperity of its populace. Let's just say it was more New York-like than Scranton-like. One author writes, "Already in the first century BC it had possessed individual citizens of remarkable wealth. There was Hiero, who bequeathed to the city more than 2000 talents and embellished it with many public works . . . But the most remarkable instances of the power of individual wealth are found [later] in the members of the Zenonid family, which became the greatest in Asia Minor. The elevation of Polemo to the kingship must have seemed a success story *par excellence*. Some of the family behaved with regal

ostentation as private citizens of Laodicea while their relative received thrones at Roman hands" (Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, 192). And finally, just before the writing of the book of Revelation following the great earthquake in A.D. 60-61, a great triple gate and towers were erected in the city, the gift of one very wealthy individual.

*Jesus looked at its deeds and thought it was good for nothing.* It was "neither hot nor cold" (v. 15). The imagery goes back to the city's water, which was piped in from Hierapolis, a town known for its hot springs six miles away. Because the mineral laden water had too little time to cool in the aqueducts that fed the city, it arrived "lukewarm." And while hot water is useful for medicinal purposes and cold water is useful for drinking, Laodicea's lukewarm, mineral laden water was good for nothing. In fact, it acted like an emetic, which explains why Jesus said, "I am about to vomit you out of my mouth!" And then summoned them to acquire what they needed from him: gold representing faith refined by fiery trials (cf., 1Pe 1:6, 7), white clothes—festal garments in contrast to the black wool clothes of the region—signifying righteousness, and eye-salve used to treat physical myopia here the figurative remedy for the church's spiritual blindness. Following his harsh rebuke, the Lord went on to offer them words of encouragement. Lest they misunderstand his tone and motivation, he made his love for them clear. Indeed, not only did he not reject them, he wanted to have dinner with them—a familiar image for intimacy in antiquity. If they would only repent in earnest and invite him to their table, he would fellowship with them again. To conclude, he promised overcomers a share in his future rule. Just as he overcame and sat down with his Father on his throne, so would they sit down with him on his throne.

"The Laodicean church is unfortunately a perfect parallel for some of the greatest problems in the church at the start of the twenty-first century, especially in the West and parts of the Far East. Affluence has made us 'lukewarm,' for we have become self-satisfied and interpret our trappings of 'success' (big churches, beautiful buildings, huge budgets) as God's blessings. We too easily forget that God wants our hearts not just our numbers" (Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT, 215, 16).

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## *The Message of the Passage*

*Rich materially but poor spiritually—go to Christ for what you need,  
then accept his invitation to fellowship with him  
now and share in his rule later.*

### 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:
  - Belonging
  - Becoming
  - going Beyond
- Journal your thoughts on the passage.

- **Home Group Discussion** (for those involved in the deeper connections of a home group)  
If "hot" things are healing and "cold" things are refreshing, and "lukewarm" things are useless, list three things your group or your church does that you think fit into each category.

**“Laodicea: Lessons in Growth”**  
(Use the space below for Sunday’s message notes)

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

v. 14 **Laodicea** I.e., one of the "tri-cities" of the Lycus valley. "In the New Testament three of the cities of the Lycus valley are mentioned. Laodicea, Hierapolis and Colossae. In Col. 4:13 Laodicea and Hierapolis are mentioned together as possessing churches in the letter addressed to the third city . . . During Paul's stay in Ephesus we may presume that Epaphras took the gospel to the Lycus valley, primarily to Laodicea (Col. 1. 6, 7) (Hemer, 181). "Laodicea was situated at the convergence of three important roads. Its situation contributes to its becoming a prominent center of banking and industry. Its wealth is illustrated by the fact that when it, together with other cities in Asia, suffered severe damage from an earthquake in A.D. 60-61, it was able to finance its own rebuilding and did not need like other cities [in fact refused, see Hemer, 193], substantial subsidies from the imperial treasury. The city was famous for a beautiful black woolen cloth used to make clothing and carpet. Laodicea was also the seat of a flourishing medical school which was particularly noted for its ear ointment and for 'Phrygian powder' which was used in the manufacture of eye-salve" (George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 64).

v. 14 **Amen** "Amen is a Hebrew word expressing the idea of verity. Isa. 65:16 speaks of 'the God of Amen,' and the Septuagint translated it 'the true God' (RSV: 'the God of truth'). The idea involved in the expression is not that God is the true God in contrast to false gods, but that God is the faithful one, the reliable and trustworthy one, who can be trusted to keep his covenant with his people. The word applied to Christ guarantees the truthfulness and reliability of his words" (Ladd, 64, 65).

v. 14 **faithful and** The first title, "Amen," is defined further by this one, "faithful and true witness." "All three terms are in deliberate contrast with the lukewarm Laodiceans, who were neither faithful nor true to Christ and whose witness was virtually nonexistent" (Osborne, 204).

v. 14 **ruler** Various translations, "the originator of God's creation" (the NET Bible); cf., "the beginning of God's creation" (ESV). "Arche means not only preeminence or ruler but also 'source' or 'origin,' and that is a likely connotation here. Aune (1997:256) also notes temporal priority over creation (John 1:2-3), 'he was in the beginning with God'. Jesus is the beginning and source of 'God's creation' (205).

v. 15 **neither cold** "The metaphor stems from Laodicea's water supply. Six miles to the north lay Hierapolis, famed for its hot springs. Ten miles to the east lay Colosse, known for its cold, pure drinking water. As Hemer (1986:187-91) points out, Hierapolis's streams were so well known for their healing qualities that the city became a major health center, while the cold, life-giving water of Colosse, the only place in the region it was available, may account for its original settlement. Laodicea had no water supply of its own. It was founded at the junction of trade routes not for its natural but for its commercial and military advantages. When it piped in its water from the hot springs of Denizli (see introduction to this letter), the water did not have enough time to cool in the aqueducts but arrived 'lukewarm' (chilarios). Even today, people in the area place the water in jars to cool" (Osborne, 205). In a nutshell, the hot waters of Hierapolis were medicinal, the cold waters of Colossae pure and life-giving.

v. 17 **rich** Unlike in Smyrna where Christians had little but were rich (2:9), in Laodicea the Christians had much but were poor. "It is frequently noted that Laodicea prided itself on three things: financial wealth, an extensive textile industry, and a popular eye-salve which was exported around the world. It is hard not to see here and in the following verse a direct allusion to Laodicea's banking establishments, medical school, and textile industry" (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT, 126).

v. 18 **buy from me** Christ summons the church to obtain gold representing faith refined by fiery trials (cf., 1Pe 1:6, 7), white clothes-festal garments in contrast to the black wool clothes of the region-signifying righteousness, and eye-salve used to treat physical myopia here the figurative remedy for the church's spiritual blindness (see Hemer, 196-201).

v. 20 **stand , , , knock** "This verse has all too often been misunderstood as an evangelistic call (linked with Holman Hunt's famous picture, 'The Light of the World') to the unsaved to become Christians. However, that does not fit the context. Rather, it is a call to a weak church to repent (as in 3:19). At the same time, it is a challenge to every individual (see additional notes) in that church (indeed, in every church; see 3:22) to open themselves up to Christ and invite him into their lives. Finally, it is a promise that if they will do so, Christ will 'enter' into deep fellowship with them" (Osborne, 212).

v. 20 **eat** Cf., "share a meal with him" (the NET Bible), "share a meal together as friends" (NLT). "A shared meal in the ancient Jewish world had far more significance than it has today. It was a symbol of affection, of confidence, of intimacy" (Ladd, 68).

v. 21 **sit with me** "In Matt. 19:28 (par. Luke 22:29, 30); 1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12a, as well as in Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; and 20:4, the victorious saints also share in the throne of glory and judgment. The 'throne' of the saints will begin with the defeat of the forces of evil at Armageddon (2:26-27=7:14; 19:14), continue in the millennial reign (20:4), and be completed in eternity (3:21)" (215).

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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.

How many inches have you grown since last Christmas? How many new vocabulary words have you learned since school started? How many friends have you met since summer ended? It's good to continually be growing in lots of ways. Read Acts 10 to learn about Peter growing in his understanding of God. God wants his people to grow in their understanding of him. God's people grow in God!



**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 \_\_\_\_\_ will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Jesus Christ. Eph 4:15

**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** – "So then stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed along to you . . ." 2Th 2:15

**Discuss it!**

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

- \*What was the main difference between Cornelius and Peter?
- \*Why was Peter hesitant to eat the animals in his dream?
- \*Why was it against the law for Peter to associate with Cornelius?
- \*What was the important thing Cornelius realized from his conversation with Cornelius?

**Live it!**

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

This is the last week of learning about the perfect church. The best church is not made of people trying to be perfect, but rather people wanting to be used by God to do his work. Think back to the different ways God used your family over the last six weeks. Thank him for allowing your family to be a part of his church.



**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](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).