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Revelation 3:1-6

*"The Evaluation of Reputation" The Church in Sardis*

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Sardis was a wealthy city, located about 30 miles south of Thyatira. Like several other cities we've studied so far, Sardis is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible outside of the book of Revelation. Like the rest of the Roman Empire, the people were polytheistic and steeped in idolatry. Among other gods, they worshiped Artemis,<sup>1</sup> Cybele<sup>2</sup> and Dionysius.<sup>3</sup> Sardis was a center of carpet and wool industries, and they were known for the garments they made. Sardis was known as "The City of the Cemetery on a Thousand Hills," which refers to the necropolis,<sup>4</sup> which was a large, elaborate graveyard. In fact, the graveyard was so large that it was said that it could be seen from several miles away. Sardis is known today as Sart, Turkey, and has a population of about 5,300.

The Lord compliments the church by saying they have a remnant of righteous people. **(Revelation 3:4)** It's interesting to think about the number of times God has done great things through a righteous remnant; people who've kept themselves pure. These faithful Christians are like Noah and his family, Gideon and his small army, three brave Jewish teenagers in the fiery furnace, a courageous Jewish princess in a foreign land, and the faithful apostles. We need to be regularly reminded about the fact that a few righteous people in God's hands can make all the difference in the world, and we should never underestimate what the Lord can do through our lives.

The Lord has a complaint against the church. They have a *"reputation of being alive but [they] are dead."* **(Revelation 3:1b)** They had a reputation that looked good on

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<sup>1</sup> God of the hunt and fertility.

<sup>2</sup> Mother earth.

<sup>3</sup> God of the grape harvest, wine making, and wine.

<sup>4</sup> From the Greek *necros*, which means death, and *polis*, which means city.

the outside, but the truth is that they are far from what the Lord wanted in their lives. As far as others were concerned, there was an appearance of a vibrant and lively church, but upon further inspection, most of the people in the church were spiritually dead on the inside.

There are churches like this in our day. There always seems to be a lot going on and the people are very busy with program-driven ministry, but the sad fact is that the people are not going deeper in their walk with Christ. We would do well to remember that activity does not equate to vitality. The health and well-being of a church is not defined by how busy it is or how many programs it has going; it's measure in changed lives. Are children, youth and adults getting saved? Are people growing deeper in their walk with Christ? Are lives being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit? Is the love of Christ evident? Do people have a hunger for God's Word? Are people sharing their faith because they have a burden for the lost? These are the internal things, and not the external things, that define a healthy church. Even though we may not be able to observe it, the Lord knows about every church, just as he did with Sardis.

#### A Good Reputation With Others And A Bad Evaluation From God

1. We need to be less concerned about what other people think of us and more concerned about how God sees us.
2. Reputation is who other people think you are.
3. Character is whom you really are when no one is looking.
4. The Pharisees were religious leaders of Jesus' day that people looked up to as devout and God-fearing, but the Lord had a much different opinion of them, because he could see their hearts.
5. **Matthew 23:27-28** - “ *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.* ”
6. Far too many people in this world have the appearance that they have it all together, when the reality is they are falling apart on the inside.

## A Bad Reputation With Others And A Good Evaluation From God

7. The Bible, in [Luke 7:36-50](#), records the account of a woman who was a prostitute who had a bad reputation in town, but when Jesus looked into her heart, he saw her brokenness, forgave her of her sins, and honored her.
8. We need to forget about the constant attention we give to the public image we present and think more about the way God sees us.
9. To have a better understanding of the way the Lord sees us, we should ask questions like, “Who and what is the real me when no one is looking?”

## The Book Of Life

10. Five times in the book of Revelation the term “*the book of life*” is mentioned.
11. This is God’s book that records all the names of those who are going to heaven.
12. Jesus is saying that if you belong to him, he will “*never blot out [your] name from the book of life.*” ([Revelation 3:5](#))
13. Your name starts out on the list, and it only gets blotted out because God has judged that you were able to accept him, but you rejected him, and refused to make him Lord of your life.
14. You keep your name from being removed by trusting Christ as your Lord and Savior.

## Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Revelation 3:1-6](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Spend time talking about the righteous few that the Lord worked through, and who were used mightily by the Lord. (See page one)
  - a. Share your experience about times when you’ve been a part of a “righteous remnant” that the Lord used in a mighty way.

- b. What do you think the Lord wants to do through you that would make all the difference in the world in someone's life, etc.?
4. Read and discuss this quote from Hall of Fame basketball coach, John Wooden: "Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are."
5. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about times in their life when their reputation said one thing, but the facts told quite a different story.
  - a. Read and discuss [Matthew 23:27-28](#).
  - b. Do you think most people believe they can "fool God"?
6. Read and discuss each question from a personal perspective, focusing on the fact that activity does not equate to vitality, and that the health and well-being of a church is not defined by how busy it is or how many programs it has; it's measure in changed lives.
  - a. Are children, youth and adults getting saved?
  - b. Are people growing deeper in their walk with Christ?
  - c. Are lives being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit?
  - d. Is the love of Christ evident? Do people have a hunger for God's Word?
  - e. Are people sharing their faith because they have a burden for the lost?
7. Read and discuss [1 Timothy 3:1-7](#), concerning a good reputation.<sup>5</sup>
  - a. Is it possible to have a good reputation with others and a good evaluation from the Lord?
8. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: search their heart to know whether they are really spiritually alive or whether they are spiritually dead inside; reject the notion that they need to keep up a strong appearance, a proud image and a brave face; come to the Lord in a spirit of brokenness, recognizing that *"a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise"* ([Psalm 51:17](#)); know that the Lord will help them if there is any sense that they are not who they ought to be and not who the Lord wants them to be, and they only have to come to him by faith in humility, and he will do the restoration work; be thankful for the wonderful promise that their name is written in *"the book of life."*

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<sup>5</sup> Note: This portion of Scripture deals with qualifications for overseers and deacons; however, every Christian should demonstrate many of these characteristics, save for the ability *"to teach."*

Note: You may want to lead in prayer for all who need the ministry of the Lord, by using this prayer.

Lord Jesus, I feel dead inside, but you are the author of life. You know my struggles and my weaknesses, and those places inside me that are dead. I confess that I have sinned and I ask you to forgive me. I ask you, Jesus, to take over my life, and be my Lord and Savior. I surrender to you and I ask you to help me live a life that has no more pretense and no more games. Thank you for loving me and dying on the cross for me. I commit my life to you.



Note: Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).