

How Are You Today? A New Way to Answer

Every day people ask us how we're doing. Sometimes we answer honestly and say: "Horrible!" Mostly we give the fast reply, "Fine." or "Not bad." If it's Monday, we say, "As well as can be expected." If it's Friday, "Great!" we respond, "It's pay day!" But, when asked how we're doing, we all follow the unspoken assumption that people don't *really* want to know. The quick, courteous responses are expected. We're all too busy for genuine concern.

But there *is* a way we can turn this common question into a thought-provoking opportunity to share our faith. The next time someone asks how you're doing, answer saying, "Better than I deserve." Be prepared for a few surprised looks! Some will respond with a question: "What do you mean by that?" Others might try to encourage you by saying, "Come on, you can't be that bad." This is your opportunity to affirm the scripture that says that God has not "dealt with us as our sins deserved" (Psalm 103:10).

Let's look more closely at this. According to the New Testament: "all have sinned" and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Since scripture teaches that God's required judgment for sinners is death, then all sinners (that is all humans without exception or distinction) deserve to die.

Sinners who are alive, (like the one writing this column and those reading it), all enjoy undeserved extensions of life. We deserve to die as the just punishment for our sins, yet we live—only because of the gratuitous mercy of God. Yes, we are all doing better than we deserve.

Of course, if you don't consider yourself a sinner, you'll disagree. But the person who denies his own sin is self-deceived. He has pulled the wool over his own eyes. He has duped himself. The Russian Novelist (who stared evil in the face in the Gulag), was closer to the truth when he wrote, "If only there were evil people somewhere, insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart."

If we're honest, we should admit to being shocked at times by our capacity for thinking or doing evil. Jesus said, "...out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly (Mark 7:21-22).

Each day we are guilty of sins of commission (doing things that do not please God) and sins of omission (failing to do what pleases God). Our failure to obey the two great commandments of God is sufficient evidence of our sin. What are those commands? "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:38-39).

In his highly acclaimed book about sin, Cornelius Plantinga Jr. suggested, "The heart of sin is the persistent refusal to tolerate a sense of sin, to take responsibility for one's sin, to live with the sorrowful knowledge of it and to pursue the painful way of repentance" (*Not The Way It's Supposed To Be*).

Personally, I am convicted of my sin when I consider that the main expression of sin is selfishness. "Since scripture teaches that the essence of godliness is love to God, we seem to require as the essence of sin the love of self. That selfishness is the essence of sin is evident also from the fact that all forms of sin can be traced to selfishness as their source. Thus man's natural appetites, his sensuality, selfish ambitions and selfish affections are rooted in his selfishness. Even an idolatrous affection for others may be due to the feeling that they are in some sense a part of ourselves, and so regard for them be only an indirect love of self. When selfishness is considered as an undue preference of our interests, we have in selfishness the essence of all sin" (H. Theissen).

The point is simple: Because we're all sinful, God would be completely just if he condemned every person to the punishment of death. Only undeserved favor from God could rescue us from His judgment - and this is the grace He offers to all who turn to the Savior. Scripture says, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners" (I Timothy 1:15). When will we realize how much we need a Savior. Those who find the vocabulary of salvation distasteful have an unrealistic view of the human predicament.

So, "How are you doing?" To answer, "Better than I deserve" would be a significant change for most people. We tend to think that we deserve to be treated better than we're being treated. This change of perspective, however, could free us from the resentment, bitterness and despair that threaten to destroy our lives. At the end of each day, we should thank God that he has not dealt with us as our sins deserve.