



GOOD NEWS GUIDE

REMEMBER: **GOD LOVES YOU!**

Brother Roland, PO Box 14, Fayetteville PA 17222

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Double Jeopardy

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In a letter, an inmate asked this question:

“I confess my sins every day, all through the day. I was recently told that if I repent and then do the same sin again, I will be denied heaven in the end — is that right?”

I’m not a theologian or a pastor or a prophet. I do not intend to enter into arguments about what is correct doctrine and what isn’t. I will simply tell you what I think God’s word has to say on the subject. I hope that will help someone.



Okay. This is a big subject, and first we need to understand what a few words mean.

Sin. To sin is to do something that is wrong in God’s sight. Disobeying His commandments is sin, of course. Doing anything that is disrespectful of God. Hurting people. We don’t need to list all the possible sins; we can get by with a very simple definition: any selfish action or inaction that is contrary to His two basic commands, that we love God and love our neighbors, is a sin.

It’s so simple. The opposite of love is selfishness; the opposite of selfishness is love. Selfishness is sin; extending ourselves in love for God and neighbors is the antidote for sin.

Confess. To confess sin is to acknowledge that I did this thing, and that it is a sin—an action or an inaction that is hateful in God’s eyes. Confession does not make excuses or try to deflect blame—confession says I did it, I am guilty. No one else is to blame but me, my own sinful self. And, yes, to beg God’s forgiveness—and then to accept that forgiveness, knowing that He promises to forgive, and even promises to forget the sin entirely.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves ... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)

... as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. (Psalms 103:12)

Repent. To repent means much more than just to feel guilty. To repent is to turn around, to go in a different direction, so that one doesn’t cover the same ground again.

If you say, “I have repented of this particular sin,” you have to ask yourself, “Have I really repented? Have I made up my mind that, with God’s help, I will never do this sin again?” Sometimes we really enjoy a particular sin, and don’t want to give it up. We can confess that sin over and over, and feel guilty about it, but until we change so that we no longer want to do it, we have not repented of it.

It’s true that many sins are addictive, and it’s very hard to get to the place where we want to give them up. Sometimes we need help in order to arrive at repentance. One of the main jobs of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of our sinfulness and help us come to real repentance.

When we offer a prayer of confession, we should always add to it, “Holy Spirit, please help me and give me strength not to do that again.”

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

If we follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance of “all our ways,” we won’t sin. But of course we mess that up and sin again, because we’re weak, or not fully surrendered, or whatever.

Heaven. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was the purchase price for the salvation of every human being—past, present, and future. God’s free gift to every person is the invitation to live forever in God’s presence, which is heaven. Those who accept the gift, have it. Those who reject the gift will end up eternally apart from God, which is hell.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

... God our Savior ... desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:3-4)

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. (Revelation 22:17)

How does one receive the gift of eternal life, and how does one reject it? These are perhaps the two most important questions that can be asked.

One receives the gift, first of all, by wanting it.

Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalms 37:4)

I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight. (Psalms 119:174)

Here's a simple truth: the more time you spend with the Lord, the more you will enjoy being with Him. Spending time in the Word and in prayer will become pure joy.

Please don't misunderstand. I am NOT saying that we earn Heaven by reading the Bible and praying a lot. Salvation is by God's grace, and it cannot in any sense be earned, no matter what we do. But reading the Bible and meditating on it and praying a lot is a way to begin now to enjoy the blessings of Heaven.

If you want a formula, here's a simple one: hold tightly the things of God—the Bible, prayer, Christian fellowship, loving actions—and let go of the things that are not of God—anger, strife, gossip, envy, covetousness, and all the other ways and attitudes of this fallen world.

Okay, now that we have dealt with the meaning of the words, we can address the question: **If I repent and then do the same sin again, will I be denied Heaven?**

My answer is, No.

Consider what Jesus said:

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. (Matthew 18:21-22)

Does that sound like God will forgive a sin once, and then refuse to forgive it again? No way!

Consider what the Apostle Paul said:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ... I have the desire to do what is right, but not the

ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (From Romans 7:15-25):

Did Paul think his repeated sins would not be forgiven? Of course not!

Don't get me wrong. Sinning is not a trivial matter. It's serious, and God takes it seriously. That's why Paul says,

"... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Ephesians 2:12-13)

I once heard a good teaching on Romans 12:1-2), and I have used it many times.

I appeal to you ... brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

The teaching goes like this: picture an altar, and picture yourself climbing onto the altar and lying down as a willing sacrifice to the Lord. And if at some point you find that you have slipped off the altar, climb back up there and lie down again. That is the kind of dedication we owe to our loving God.

One final Scripture passage to seal the deal:

Fear not ... for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32)

So here's my answer. You will have to decide if it works for you.

Go on with God. Keep confessing and repenting when you sin, and keep desiring and trying to do better, to make your whole life a pleasing sacrifice to His goodness and holiness. You will not miss Heaven. It's God's job to get you there, and He is very good at it, if you will let Him do it His way.

I thank this reader for a very good question. I hope and pray this will be helpful to those who might have wondered about it.

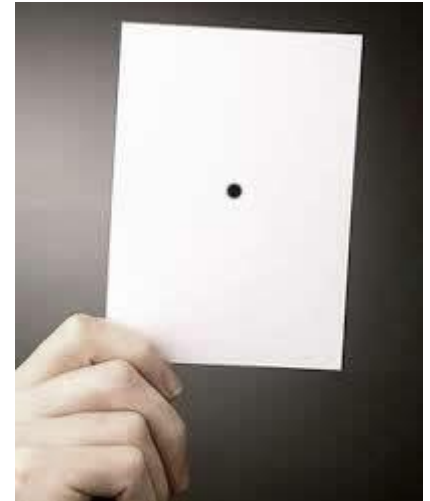
May our loving God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — be with us and bless us all!

Brother Roland

The Black Dot

Author Unknown

One day a professor entered the classroom and asked his students to prepare for a surprise test. They waited anxiously at their desks for the test to begin. The professor handed out the question paper, with the text facing down as usual. After he had handed them all out, he asked his students to turn the page over and begin. To everyone's surprise, there were no questions—just a black dot in the center of the page. Seeing the expression on everyone's face, the professor told them, "I want you to write what you see there."



The students, confused, got started on the inexplicable task.

At the end of the test, the professor took all the answer papers and started reading each one of them aloud in front of all the students. All of them, without exception, described the black dot, trying to explain its position in the middle of the sheet, and so on.

After all of the papers had been read and the classroom was silent, the professor explained, "I am not going to grade on you this, I just wanted to give you something to think about. Notice that nobody wrote about the white part of the paper. Everyone focused on the black dot.

"The same thing happens in our lives. We have a white paper to observe and enjoy, but we always focus on the dark spots. Our life is a gift given to us by God, with love and care, and we always have reasons to celebrate—nature renewing itself every day, our friends around us, the job that provides our livelihood, the miracles we see every day.

"However, we insist on focusing only on the dark spots—the health issues that bother us, the lack of money, the complicated relationship with a family member, the disappointment with a friend, and so on. The dark spots are very small compared to everything else we have in our lives, but they are the things that capture our attention.

"Take your eyes away from the black spots in your life. Enjoy each one of your blessings, each moment that life gives you.

"Be happy and live your life positively!"

WANT AN EXTRA COPY TO SHARE?

Every month I send an extra copy of the "Good News Guide" to a few inmates and some others. If you would like to receive two copies so you can share one (or both), just write and let me know. Your willingness to share with others will spread the Good News of the Gospel a little farther, which will bless us both and, I'm sure, please God.



Questions? If you have a question about Bible truth or the Christian life, I'll be glad to share my thoughts with you, and maybe with the other readers of the "Good News Guide." Write to me.

Moving? If you're being released, or moving to another facility, please send me your new address. Inmates, don't forget to include your SID number. I would like to keep sending you the "Good News Guide" for as long as you'd like to receive it.

Here is my address: **Brother Roland, P.O. Box 14, Fayetteville PA 17222**

We All Have Sinned and Fall Short ...

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.... My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 1:8-9, 2:1-2 ESV)

Puzzle:

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Words:

*** The Father:**

IS HOLY AND RIGHTEOUS
IS LOVING AND GOOD
CREATED EVERYTHING
GAVE US LIFE
HATED OUR SIN
WANTED TO RESCUE US
HAD A MASTER PLAN
PROVIDED A SAVIOR
SENT HIS SON

*** Jesus:**

DIED FOR OUR SINS
LAY IN THE TOMB
ROSE FROM THE DEAD

ASCENDED TO HEAVEN
SITS BY THE FATHER
RULES OVER ALL THINGS
INTERCEDES FOR US
SENDS THE HOLY SPIRIT

*** The Holy Spirit:**

GUIDES AND COMFORTS US
HELPS US OBEY GOD
GIVES POWER TO WITNESS
GIVES SPIRITUAL GIFTS
BRINGS FORTH FRUIT
CHANGES EACH PERSON
TO BECOME LIKE JESUS

*** Our Part:**

CONFESS OUR SINS
REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED
RECEIVE SALVATION
ASK, SEEK, KNOCK
RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT
SEEK SPIRITUAL GIFTS
LOVE EVERY NEIGHBOR
WITNESS FOR JESUS
WALK IN THE SPIRIT
TRUST AND OBEY
BECOME LIKE JESUS
PRAISE AND THANK HIM
REMAIN FAITHFUL
HALLELUJAH!