**Everlasting Punishment**

HELEN K. BROCK

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The semiannual recurrence of this subject in our Lesson-Sermons never fails to bring to the writer a deep sense of gratitude for deliverance from false belief in regard to it. The doctrine of everlasting punishment as a means for frightening sinners into repentance has been tenaciously adhered to by the various schools of so-called orthodox theology for generations. In the writer's experience, although there was an endeavor to explain the subject patiently and painstakingly by both pastor and Sunday school teacher, their explanation served only to form a mental picture of a God who was simply a magnified human being, sitting on a wonderful throne somewhere a long way off, who could not be seen because of the dazzling brightness emanating from His person, and whose sole business seemed to consist of condemning sinners on the one hand and exalting saints on the other.

As the years passed by, bringing deeper habits of thought, it was soon plain that this could not be a true understanding of God, because it did not agree with the statements of the Bible that God is Love, the Father of all, just and true and merciful. Yet the Bible statements seemed conflicting, and perusal of them brought question after question, which grew more and more confusing. If God created all, and man was born to sin and to be punished, then God must have created sinners and known that they would sin; and what sort of love was it that would first make it possible for its creation to sin and then provide punishment for it? Furthermore, there seemed to be no definite rule for knowing when one was being good enough to escape condemnation; for did not the Savior say in answer to one who addressed him as "Good Master" when he came to him inquiring what he should do to have eternal life, "There is none good but one, that is, God"?

At length the decision was made that it was not worth while to worry about it. Nobody seemed to know anything that could throw any more light on the subject, although information was frequently volunteered that there were a great many things which God did not wish us to understand, that it was a sort of blasphemy to even desire to search them out, and that therefore we should be resigned and simply do the best we could, taking whatever came; so even the reading of the Bible was dropped.

When the study of Christian Science was begun, however, with the reading of the textbook "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" by Mrs. Eddy, what a difference in the concept of God! Little by little, the old questions were answered. Here was no putting them off as too deep to be understood. On the contrary, there was the assurance that man in the image and likeness of God reflects all the intelligence there is, because being created in His image and likeness, man must of necessity reflect the qualities of his Maker. All those puzzling condemnations had not been placed upon man but upon his counterfeit,—that which sets itself up to be man but is not. All the doubt and confusion and dismay were because of the belief that flesh and blood comprise man!

A fresh incentive to study the Bible in the light which Christian Science sheds upon it was gained, with an earnest desire to know more and more of this blessed truth, and every day brought a sense of gaining ground and of better understanding. In Cruden's Concordance the terms "everlasting" and "eternal" are considered to be practically synonymous, but only when used in connection with the qualities of God are they construed to mean true eternity. Otherwise the meaning is "for a very long time, or as long as time." Mrs. Eddy tells us (Science and Health, [p. 311](https://concordexpress.christianscience.com/?query=All+sin+is+of+the+flesh.+It+cannot+be+spiritual.+Sin+exists+here+or+hereafter+only+so+long+as+the+illusion+of+mind+in+matter+remains.+It+is+a+sense+of+sin%2C+and+not+a+sinful+soul%2C+which+is+lost.+Evil+is+destroyed+by+the+sense+of+good.&book=tfccs.main.sh)), "All sin is of the flesh. It cannot be spiritual. Sin exists here or hereafter only so long as the illusion of mind in matter remains. It is a sense of sin, and not a sinful soul, which is lost. Evil is destroyed by the sense of good."

As the study of Christian Science makes it plain that nothing created by God could ever be condemned by Him, it follows that the condemnation could only attach to the belief in that which was not created by God, and eternal or everlasting condemnation could only mean the utter destruction of such beliefs. Hence it is plain that sin, not being God's creation, is unknown to Him, and is not punished by Him, but brings its own punishment, and therefore in time its own destruction. How, then, are we to explain the former concept of punishment, when we have been taught to believe that separation, lack, poverty, suffering, sickness, and death are due to the wrath of God, sometimes not for our own particular faults alone but for something done by our ancestors? In Hebrews we read, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." What then is this chastisement? Let us turn to our textbook, where we read as follows ([p. 201](https://concordexpress.christianscience.com/?query=We+cannot+build+safely+on+false+foundations.+Truth+makes+a+new+creature%2C+in+whom+old+things+pass+away+and+%27all+things+are+become+new.%27+Passions%2C+selfishness%2C+false+appetites%2C+hatred%2C+fear%2C+all+sensuality%2C+yield+to+spirituality%2C+and+the+superabundance+of+being+is+on+the+side+of+God%2C+good.&book=tfccs.main.sh)): "We cannot build safely on false foundations. Truth makes a new creature, in whom old things pass away and 'all things are become new.' Passions, selfishness, false appetites, hatred, fear, all sensuality, yield to spirituality, and the superabundance of being is on the side of God, good."

Everlasting or eternal punishment, then, must be clearly seen to be the complete destruction of all error, that the everlasting or eternal manifestation of all good may appear. In proportion as we clear away the mists of superstition about God and His universe, including man we see that the belief in separation, lack, poverty, sin, sickness, and death, and the self-condemnation and fearfulness arising therefrom are but the consequences of the belief of life and intelligence resident in matter. In proportion as we gain the true understanding of God and of man as spiritual and not material, the image and likeness of the loving Father-Mother God, we shall cease to yield to and be punished by any belief in error, and to be mesmerized into believing that we do not see our emancipation. On [page 372](https://concordexpress.christianscience.com/?query=When+man+demonstrates+Christian+Science+absolutely%2C+he+will+be+perfect.+He+can+neither+sin%2C+suffer%2C+be+subject+to+matter%2C+nor+disobey+the+law+of+God.+Therefore+he+will+be+as+the+angels+in+heaven.&book=tfccs.main.sh) of Science and Health Mrs. Eddy says: "When man demonstrates Christian Science absolutely, he will be perfect. He can neither sin, suffer, be subject to matter, nor disobey the law of God. Therefore he will be as the angels in heaven."