**"Everlasting punishment"**

By Annie M. Knott

From the [November 25, 1916 issue](https://sentinel.christianscience.com/issues/1916/11/19-13) of the *Christian Science Sentinel*

TEACHERS in Christian Science Sunday schools are often asked by their pupils to explain the meaning of "everlasting punishment," when this subject comes up twice a year in the Lesson-Sermon. It goes without saying that both young and old shrink from the thought held by people at large on this subject, which in many instances means a belief that sinners are punished eternally, either in a literal fire or by mental or physical suffering of a terrible sort. Now it is very important that children should not be taught anything which is contrary to our Master's instructions as spiritually explained in our Leader's writings, and Christian Science presents no easy concessions to error, although a good many outsiders suppose this to be the case. The Master himself was responsible for the term "everlasting punishment," but as it appears in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew we find in close connection therewith a promise of life eternal, and this does not mean an endless duration of misery but eternal unfoldment of the true consciousness of Life.

The student of Christian Science soon learns that with the true understanding of cause and effect he must constantly keep in view divine reality, proceeding from God and giving eternal life to man as His idea, and at the same time he must remember the words of Scripture, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Throughout his whole teaching Christ Jesus showed that not only must we never sow tares in human consciousness ourselves, but that we must never go to sleep and allow the carnal mind to sow them in our consciousness. From the Christian Science viewpoint these tares not only typify the lusts of the flesh and all erroneous tendencies, but they include the belief in diseases of every sort and also the belief in death.

It is too well known that until the revelation of Christian Science came to humanity Christian people were not aware that they were constantly consenting to the sowing of tares as disease beliefs, if not actually participating in moral offenses, quite forgetful of the Master's words, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." They would, however, have been greatly surprised to be told that for this reason their sufferings were mainly self-imposed, that in no case did they ever come from God; yet this is what Christian Science affirms, and it is now being understood to a large extent even by those who have not yet accepted all that Christian Science teaches.

Most people would be surprised if in answer to their questions as to whether Christian Scientists believe in everlasting punishment they were told that it was largely a matter of individual choice. To the student of Christian Science it is no longer a question of an uncertain experience in an unknown future, but relates itself to the individual's acceptance or rejection of Truth from day to day. If one fails to understand or to accept the divine law which St. Paul names "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," and which he says makes "free from the law of sin and death," he will be under a self-imposed sentence of "everlasting punishment."

Christ Jesus said on one occasion, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," and the failure to do so is followed by suffering and disappointment until the lesson is learned that when we come to God through the understanding of His Christ there is for us no longer either sin or suffering. In one of the tenets of The Mother Church we are told (Science and Health, [p. 497](https://concordexpress.christianscience.com/?query=the+belief+in+sin+is+punished+so+long+as+the+belief+lasts.&book=tfccs.main.sh)) that "the belief in sin is punished so long as the belief lasts." Humanity may well rejoice that the belief that sin has either power or pleasure attached to it is being broken by the understanding of divine Truth.

The one enlightened by spiritual understanding rises above the dreary belief in the everlasting punishment which comes from day to day because of ignorance of divine law or disobedience thereto, and instead finds in the Scriptures the Master's glorious promises of everlasting life, which are echoed by the apostles one after another, and thus one gains new strength and courage each day to lay hold upon all that divine Love so freely provides for us.

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