

Temporal punishment for sin stands in contrast to eternal punishment for sin.

Eternal punishment for sin is that punishment which is everlasting. Without end. Thus, eternal. That is the punishment due to mortal sin.

Temporal punishment for sin is a punishment which will have a definite end, when the soul is purified and is permitted into heaven. Thus temporary. Temporal punishment for sin is that which is experienced in Purgatory.

“Why is there an eternal punishment?” Eternal punishment is due to unrepented mortal sin. A person who commits a mortal sin, essentially cuts himself off from the grace of God. If he persists in this condition without repenting, until he dies, then he has essentially cut himself off from the grace of God, for eternity.

Catechism 1035: : The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, “*eternal fire*.” The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.

A good illustration of this is neglecting the Mass. The Catholic Church teaches that *one needs to attend the Mass every Sunday on pain of mortal sin*. The Mass is where Catholics gather to worship God and remember Christ’s sacrifice. If we place such a low value upon the worship of God and the sacrifice of His Son for our salvation, that we miss it whenever there is a football game or whenever we want to get a new hairdo, then we have cut ourselves off from the grace of God. If we persist in insulting God this way, until we die, without repenting that we have neglected the Mass, we will merit eternal punishment. Scripture puts it this way:

Hebrews 10:25 ²⁵*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.* ²⁶*For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,* ²⁷*But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.* ²⁸*He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:* ²⁹*Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?* ³⁰*For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.* ³¹*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

If we repent of a mortal sin, do we still get eternal punishment?

No. If you repent and go to Confession, then God forgives the sin and the eternal punishment. Depending upon the intensity of your repentance and upon your behaviour the rest of your life, that determines whether you will have to suffer any temporary punishments in Purgatory.

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Why is there temporary punishments for sin in the afterlife?

In order to purify the soul. Most of us will die in an imperfect state of grace. God, in His mercy, will cleanse us of the imperfections so that we can enter heaven to receive our eternal reward.

Some will not endure any punishments in the afterlife. Scripture says:

1 Peter 4:1 *Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;*

Hebrews 12:7 ⁷*If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?* ⁸*But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.* ⁹*Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?*

Some, in this world, will suffer enough to cleanse them of all their sins before they die. These are exceptional and heroic people, who dedicate themselves to God and to love of their fellow man. This is actually the goal that we should all aim to achieve.

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