

**For what are we grateful for?**



Hieronimus Bosch (1490-1510) Detail from 'The Garden of Earthly Delights'

**How can God send people to Hell  
because they don't believe?  
Marty's third question**



Hieronimus Bosch (1490-1510) Detail from 'The Garden of Earthly Delights'

# **How can God send people to Hell because they don't believe?**

A crucial question. That demands further questions.

## **GROUP DISCUSSION**

Has the idea of “God sending people to Hell because they don't believe” featured significantly in your religious experience?

And if you've asked Marty's question before, what was the response you received?

# How can God send people to Hell because they don't believe?

Christians can disagree with other Christians.

“The vision of Christ that thou dost see  
Is my vision's greatest enemy [...]  
Thine loves the same world that mine hates;  
Thy heaven doors are my hell gates [...]  
Both read the Bible day and night,  
But thou read'st black where I read white.”

—William Blake (1867) *'The Everlasting Gospel'*



**How can God send people to Hell  
because they don't believe?**

“Why am I actually worshiping God if *that* describes God?”

What does Marty value about God—what does Marty consider worshipful—that would preclude Marty's view of hell and how people get there?

**GROUP DISCUSSION**

What do you value about God? What have you been told is the reason to worship God, and what do you think now?

# How can God send people to Hell because they don't believe?

## GROUP DISCUSSION

What does it mean for God to *send* people to hell?

What is *hell*?

What does it mean to *believe* and *not believe*?

What does Marty think those things are?

What have you been told, and what do you think now?

# How can God send people to Hell because they don't believe?

## FURTHER DISCUSSION

What does it mean for God to *send* people to hell?

Does God *send* people there? Does one freely depart? Or is one cast out? Or both? Are you sent away, or into? Can one be recalled? Would this make any difference to Marty's question?



# How can God send people to Hell because they don't believe?

## FURTHER DISCUSSION

### What is *hell*?

Is hell the presence of God, or the absence of God? Is it eternal conscious torment—an endless period of torturous suffering? Is it annihilation—the complete deletion of someone from the universe? Or a temporary purgatory—a place where people can be sufficiently healed and perfected so they can properly enjoy God and others? Is it shame, or some other negative experience, in this present life only? Or a past event or place? Or multiple things? Or something else entirely? Would this make any difference to Marty's question?

# How can God send people to Hell because they don't believe?

## FURTHER DISCUSSION

What does it mean to *believe* and *not believe*?

Can you have belief while in another religion or worldview—pluralism? Can you have this belief through Christ while in another religion or worldview—inclusivism? Or do you need an explicit belief in Christ, according to Christian traditions—exclusivism? And if so which Christian tradition? Does belief mean trust—and what exactly would one be trusting in? Faithfulness—ours or Jesus's? Intellectual assent? Can we do anything about it? Can God? What's the default—believing or not believing? Would this make any difference to Marty's question?

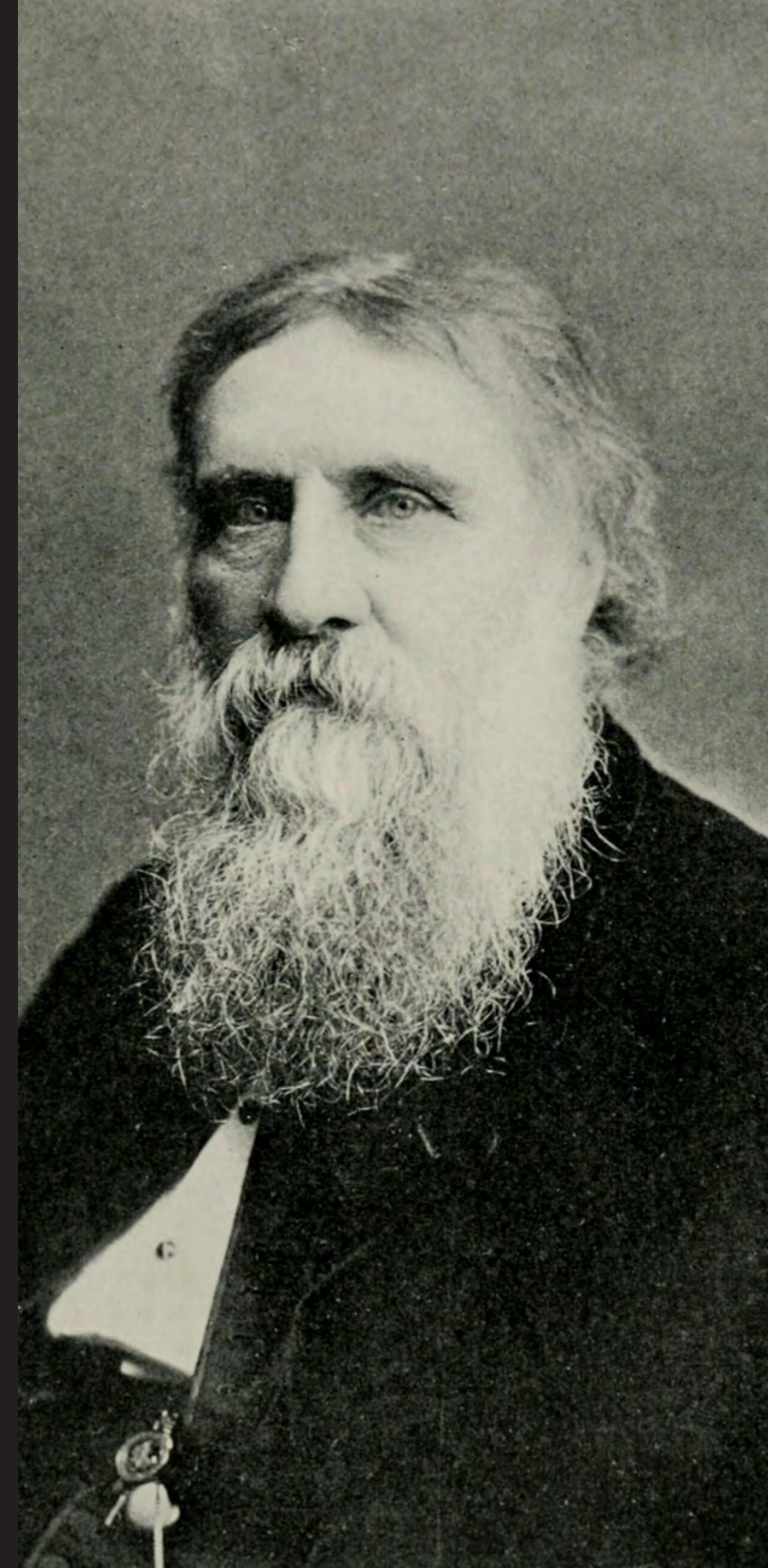
**How can God send people to Hell  
because they don't believe?**

So is there an answer?

There's a heuristic answer: Seeing and choosing white,  
to follow William Blake in his poetry.

“Let no one persuade you that there is in God a little darkness, because of something God has said which God’s creature interprets into darkness. The interpretation is the work of the enemy—a handful of tares of darkness sown in the light. Neither let your cowardly conscience receive any word as light because another calls it light, while it looks to you dark. Say either the thing is not what it seems, or God never said or did it. But, of all evils, to misinterpret what God does, and then say the thing as interpreted must be right because God does it, is of the devil. **Do not try to believe anything that affects you as darkness. Even if you mistake and refuse something true thereby, you will do less wrong to Christ by such a refusal than you would do by accepting as God’s what you can see only as darkness... Above all things believe in the light, that it is what you call light,** though the darkness in you may give you cause at a time to doubt whether you are truly seeing the light.”

—George MacDonald (1867) *‘On Light’ from Unspoken Sermons*



**How can God send people to Hell  
because they don't believe?**

Is there a more affirmative answer?

Hope.

“[...] hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”

—*Fourth Chapter, Tenth Verse, First Epistle of Timothy*

