

# Keys to Understanding and Believing Christian Universalism

*Christian Universalism is an understanding that God  
will eventually save all people because of Jesus Christ's sacrifice.*

There are several troublesome concepts which block the way to seeing the Christian Universalist viewpoint. Each of these must be studied in depth from *both* sides of the argument. Most Christians have heard the traditional viewpoint many times, so it is usually a matter of being open minded enough to hear the Universalist side of things. What follows is not intended to be comprehensive proof of each concept but an introduction to the key points of misunderstanding. Each needs to be researched thoroughly.

## Concept #1 – The Greek words “aion” and “aionian”.

The little Greek word “aion” (and its adjective form “aionian”) carries most of the weight concerning those things blocking the way to believing the Universalist viewpoint. Traditional translating of this Greek word yields English words like “eternal”, “everlasting”, “forever”, “forever and ever”, and “world”. The Universalist viewpoint simply believes that these are not correct translations of these words. A much better English word would be “age” or “eon” for “aion”, and “age-lasting” or “age-long”, or “having-to-do-with-ages” for “aionian”. Obviously the adjective is a bit clumsy, but once an understanding of “aion” is gained it is easy to see how the adjective form works. The equivalent Hebrew word for “aion” is “olam” and suffers much the same translational havoc as its Greek counterpart.

## Concept #2 – The English word “hell”.

The English word “hell” is used for at least 3 different Greek words “Hades”, “Gehenna” and “Tartarus”, and at least 1 Hebrew word “Sheol”, none of which turn out to be the traditional “hell” as most Christians (and non-Christians) understand the concept of hell, that is, a place of unending torment for the individual who finds themselves there. Hades, and its equivalent Sheol, turns out to be a place where *nothing* is going on there (see Ecclesiastes 9:10, translated “grave”) and the people there don’t do, feel, or think anything – basically a big *zero*. Gehenna turns out to be the city dump, and not some supernatural thing (see Isaiah 66:24). Tartarus seems to be a basic *jail cell* for bad angels, a holding tank till Judgment Day. The only thing resembling the traditional hell seems to be the “lake of fire” and we are told specifically that “This is the second death”. Once a proper understanding of death is obtained then it is obvious that the lake of fire would be an anguish only to immortals, which word “immortal” denies the very definition of “death” which the lake of fire is said to be, that is to say if you are immortal then the lake of fire can’t kill you. Furthermore we are told that God will abolish “death” in Cor. 15:26, and so if the lake of fire is a death, even a second one, then the lake of fire must be abolished.

Another very important study is that of tracing the origin of the English word “hell” which simply meant to cover something up or hide it, not to burn it unendingly in the flames. In fact one writer of old said that he wished he could get his girlfriend alone for just a moment in “hell” so he could give her a little kiss (try that for your honeymoon). Of course if “hell” is really just an old idea of the “grave” then it makes perfect sense to cover up dead people - we do it all the time.

## Concept #3 – A Proper understanding of “death” and what it is to be dead.

As mentioned previously the verse Ecclesiastes 9:10 pretty much says it all concerning what death is and what it is to be dead: “Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; for *there is* no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the **grave**, whither thou goest.” The word “grave” is a translation of the Hebrew word “Sheol”, and everybody goes there (except the rapture goers) and there’s nothing going on there and nobody feels anything. Not exactly the hell of your nightmares. We know that the Greek word “Hades” is the same place as Sheol because God translates “Sheol” in Psalm 16:10 into Greek “Hades” for us in Acts 2:27, the mistranslation of which has led to the entirely false notion that Jesus Christ died and “went to hell”, when what he really did was to die and get covered up, ie buried.

## Concept #4 – A Proper understanding of the Rich Man and Lazarus account

This account is often used as a vehicle for describing “hell” but taking the account literally leads to all sorts of strange interpretive problems. Perhaps the most noticeable is the way it contradicts Ecc. 9:10. The key to understanding this is to realize that this is a parable, intended to contrast the faithful Israelite with the unfaithful one, and follows four other parables, which are introduced in Luke 15:3 as “...he spake this **parable** unto them...” which is singular, leading us to believe that the parable has five parts to it. Indeed the five parts form a unit with a message of comfort to the “publicans and sinners” and a message of offense to the “Pharisees and scribes” (v.1 & 2). There is also good reason to believe that Jesus’ story of the Rich Man and Lazarus was an adaptation of a story already in common usage among the Pharisee’s to argue hypothetical after-death situations. The story shows up in very similar form in the Talmud which was written down some 500 or so years later as a written record of the Jewish oral traditions.