

You can't be a Unitarian if . . .

Unitarians, sometimes humourously, note that "we are a tolerant community; if you're not tolerant you're not welcome." In practice, everyone is welcome, but it is true that if you hold certain beliefs, you may not be comfortable. Rebecca Ann Parker, President of one of the three main seminaries for UUism, makes four vital points about "some theological options that are outside the pale" even in the broadly inclusive Unitarian Universalism. (as cited in "Unitarian Universalism in 30 Seconds: Developing Your UU Elevator Speech" by Carl Gregg, in his blog, Patheos). Parker's four points follow:

We have room for many different understandings [of] God as well as for many people who don't believe in God, but you can't be a Unitarian Universalist and "*hold the view that God is the all-powerful determiner of everything that happens.*" Many of our Unitarian and Universalist forebears defined themselves against such views of absolute divine sovereignty and predestination. Such views conflict with the cherished UU values such as of human freedom and individual responsibility.

Second, you can believe many different perspectives about the afterlife or that there is no afterlife and find a comfortable place for yourself within UUism, but you cannot believe that there will be an eternal "*separation of the saved from the damned in which the good are rewarded with eternal bliss and the damned are punished with eternal suffering.*" Such a view would violate our First Principle, which proclaims "The inherent worth and dignity of every person." Even more problematically, it would violate the entire Universalist half of our heritage, which holds that whatever we mean by salvation "is universal" not limited to some elite group.

Third, you can't be a Unitarian Universalist and believe in "*one religion that encompasses the exclusive, final truth for all times and places.*" We're a living tradition, not one that believes we just need to hold fast to the absolute truth that was already discovered millennia ago. Historically there were hard-fought

battles in our tradition particularly with some individuals and groups who wanted to keep the Christian tradition central, privileged, and elevated, but the decisive shift was eventually toward a robust religious pluralism that explicitly includes the Jewish and Christian traditions which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves, but only as one among many equally legitimate sources for truth and meaning.

Fourth, you can believe many different views about this world and even about the next world, but *"you cannot hold the view that salvation is to be found solely beyond this world."* There is a long-standing tradition in Unitarian Universalism in valuing this world and this life — and that here and now really matters.

Notice that none of those four points is a creed. In each case, the starting point is the wide, expansive number of positions that one can comfortably hold within Unitarian Universalism. But there are positions and ways of relating that are incompatible with the core values of our liberal religious tradition, which historically has emphasized freedom, reason, and tolerance.

- With these four beliefs that are "beyond the pale" in mind, and returning to Unitarian humour, it has been noted that if there is a hell, for Unitarians, it is a place where no one disagrees.