

Religious studies essay sample

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The importance of the resurrection story to St Paul

Apostle Paul is considered the author of more than a half of the New Testament books. Nowadays, theologians continue studying his epistles, trying to resolve issues and find answers to many questions concerning Christian views on the world. Some of Paul's epistles reveal the topic of resurrection of the dead and the life after death. We find reflections on these issues in Paul's epistles to Corinthians, Thessalonians, Philippians and Romans.

- What motivated Paul to develop the theme of resurrection?

The book of Acts contains the story of the Apostle Paul's preaching in the Areopagus - preaching that started very well and was reinforced by quotations from the ancient poets, could be quite convincing for Athenian senators, if Paul hadn't started talking about the resurrection. As noted in Acts, when they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some began sneering and others said that they would like to hear his speech about this another time. Paul had to leave the meeting (Acts 17. 32-33). For preaching "Jesus and the resurrection" Athenians called Paul the "babbler" (Acts 17. 18).

The book of Acts mentions that the Sadducees opposed the preaching of the Apostles, resenting that they taught the people and preached the resurrection from the dead (Acts 4, 2). When the apostle Paul was summoned to the sanhedrin, he noticed that there were present as the Pharisees and the Sadducees. So he said that he was a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees and was going to be judged for the hope for resurrection of the dead. These words of the Apostle caused dissension between the Pharisees

and the Sadducees. Eventually Paul had to leave the sanhedrin because the argument flared up (Acts 23, 6-10).

Reading the Acts we understand why Paul decides to develop the topic of resurrection more broadly. He sees resistance from the people and misunderstanding the fact of Jesus resurrection.

- Why resurrection is the basis of the Christian faith?

The doctrine of the resurrection was most fully revealed in the 1 Corinthians. This epistle is the answer on the Corinthians' letter to Paul, where the members of Corinthian Church ask him to explain the main point of Gospel and future resurrection of those who are dead. In this epistle Paul gives advices and instructions about Christian devotion. Trying to explain the point of the Gospel, Paul is answering that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose from the dead (New International Version, 1 Cor. 15. 3-4). So the essence of Christianity lies in preaching the resurrection of Christ.

Apostles and disciples saw Christ arisen from the dead. Paul himself saw Christ, so it was a doubtless fact for him. That's why Paul is astonished by Corinthians' doubts about the possibility of their own resurrection and the fact that it happened to Jesus. Paul writes: " If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised." (1 Cor. 15. 13). But Christ has truly arisen. He was the first arisen from dead. Death befell people for Adam original sin, but life triumphed over death trough Christ sacrifice on Golgotha. " For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." (1 Cor. 15. 22) This is what Paul predicts, because the essence of Gospel is the Resurrection of Christ.

If somebody doubts in resurrection, the whole Gospel loses meaning for him.

If Christ didn't rise from the dead, then the faith is vain and life is vain. If those people, who consider themselves faithful, trust Christ only their lives on earth, they are miserable. Paul writes that Christ showed the way to the eternal life to those who trust Him. Christ will reign and all faithful Christians will reign with him. For the sake of this pure faith in eternal life, people have no fear living on earth and suffering, even death doesn't scare them. Paul writes that he dies every day. This means he's ready to give his life for Christ, who saved the mankind from sin and death. In proof of the correctness of faith in the resurrection of the dead Apostle Paul refers to the Christian baptismal practices and his own experience, which, in his view, would be meaningless if there was no resurrection.

- The question of the resurrection of the body in Paul's works.

The Corinthians wanted to know how the dead will be resurrected and what bodies they will have. Paul is answering that it wouldn't be right to think that we will have the same bodies that we had on earth. Human body will change and get new qualities, will become imperishable, glorious and immortal. But still we will have bodies, and they will have some connection with our old bodies.

The idea of " body" is not that simple. For example bodies of plants are able to change here on earth. Plant's body has completely different qualities than seed's body. Paul explains that what you sow won't come to life if doesn't die: if the seed doesn't give its vital energy, the plant won't grow. An acorn doesn't look like an oak-tree at all, but they have physical kinship and continuity with each other. Caterpillars don't look like butterflies, but they have natural connection. Our transformation may include even more

impressive changes. So it is impossible to predict what we will look like. Just look at unfamiliar seed. Can you predict what sort of plant it will grow into? Will it be a tree, a bush or a flower? The seed is small and bears little resemblance to the plant (Tkach). Our bodies are like seeds that have a purpose to transform.

Paul's words about resurrected bodies might be understood in different ways, but it seems that he tries to unite two conceptions – change and continuity. He doesn't claim that people will have the same bodies, nor our bodies would be completely different. We understand that thinking of bodies, composed of the same molecules and atoms is completely wrong. All flesh decomposes after death and billions of atoms become parts of other things and even human bodies. But Paul writes about restoration of body. He talks about empty tombs and metamorphosed dead people. The bodies of the saints will be completely free from exhaustion, infirmity and sickness from their present life. As for the sinners, their bodies will rise to a new form with immortality and spirituality, but at the same time they will reflect sinners' mental state.

We can't understand how it works and Paul couldn't, but he knew how Christ rose from the dead. And we know from the Gospel that His dead body was no longer dead, but transformed into something new. If this is the way that He had shown His apostles, then Paul couldn't explain this idea in other words. Reading Mark 16 we notice the episode with two women entering the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. They didn't find the dead Christ, but God's angel, who said that they were looking for the one who wasn't dead. The angel told women to look at the place where Jesus was laid. They saw nothing, but

burial shroud. So we see that His body was fully transformed. And Paul writes about this fact, predicting that bodies will be raised with new qualities. Our natural body will have to transform into spiritual body, which is immortal. The first human is fleshly, like Adam; the other human is spiritual, like God. In the sacrament of Christening we are born spiritually from water and Holy Spirit. So Paul teaches us that resurrected people will have transformed bodies, completely different from our flesh - spiritual bodies. In Philippians Paul says that at the Second Coming Christ will change our bodies and they will be like His glorious body (Phil. 3. 21). This body, according to the Gospel evidences, had only a slight resemblance to the earthly body of Christ. That's why people recognized Christ not by appearance, but by voice or gesture. The pledge of our resurrection is resurrection of Christ. He rose from dead as God and those, who died with Him will rise first. The belief in resurrection according to Paul is the essential condition of salvation: " That if you confess with your mouth, " Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Rom. 10. 9) In Paul understanding the atonement of Christ is the way for people to be involved in His suffering, death and resurrection. If people are connected with Him in death, they become connected with His revivification in new quality. Another words, we die for sin and start living for God.

Giving His own body to death, Jesus isn't leaving the world, but is rescuing us. (Rom. 8. 21) Here Paul writes about liberation from slavery of flesh and transformation into glory. Christ has made resurrection possible for us. And the fact that God will raise our physical bodies means that people should value His creation - the world that He gave us.

Apostle Paul was the first Christian theologian, who gave the doctrine of the resurrection form of the system - all the subsequent development of this Christian doctrine is based on the grounds that were laid by Paul. The dogma of the resurrection of the dead has a deep spiritual and moral significance. It opens an eschatological perspective, in the light of which the Christian moral law makes sense. The main point of Paul's explanations concerning resurrection is that the Christian faith just can't exist without this fundamental principle. He emphasizes that every faithful Christian must truly believe in Christ resurrection, because only in this way he is able take the path to his own eternal life.

Works cited

- New International Version (NIV Bible). BibleStudyTools. com. N. p., n. d. Web. 7 Feb. 2014. .
- Tkach, Joseph. " The Resurrection of the Body and Why It Matters." Grace Communion International. N. p., n. d. Web. 7 Feb. 2014. .