

Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

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PART 2: OVERVIEW OF THE MODERN CHURCH

DENOMINATIONAL CHURCHES

There is a vast difference between denominational churches and those that are independent. Protestants and Roman Catholics represent the two largest groups in the United States with 33% and 22% of the population respectively. The Protestants number 140 million as of 2021 and their numbers are fractured along the various denominational lines.

The main denominations are Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Evangelical Free Church of America. The Baptists are fractured into some 70 different denominations, with the Southern Baptist Convention being the largest, boasting 16 million members in 46,000 churches.

The main Pentecostal denominations feature the Assembly of God, who in 2023 boasted 1.74 million members in 12,681 local churches; Church of God in Christ, a predominantly black church with some 6.5 million members; the denomination Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, has 9.2 million members in 47,897 churches.

One of the oldest Pentecostal denominations is the Foursquare Church, which has some 8.8 million members spread out in 67,500 churches.

Calvary Chapel churches originated within the Pentecostal movement, birthed in the Jesus movement in the late 1960s in California, but it has since become more Baptist in its theology. There are some 1,800 churches, but since they do not have formal membership, there are no statistics on attendance.

The Association of Vineyard Churches originated from Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa in 1974. In 2010 they claimed 2,400 churches with a membership of 221,000.

STRUCTURE

Churches in denominations are governed by a centralized leadership at its headquarters. There are different titles for top leaders such as president, superintendent, bishop, etc., and they are usually elected on an annual basis. The leaders and staff at the different headquarters are salaried. The finances to run these operations come from local churches who pay dues to the denomination.

When a denomination is formed, doctrine is one of the first things that is hammered out in committee meetings and voted on by the local churches. Each church is mandated to uphold the doctrine of the denomination.

Denominations operate seminaries and Bible colleges where future pastors and teachers are trained. They also operate publishing houses and their curriculum is written by staff writers. Professors and other instructors must take an oath of loyalty to uphold the doctrine of the denomination. The same holds true for pastors, evangelists, and missionaries, who must also adhere to the doctrine. Most denominations have



medical and retirement insurance programs, so if a pastor is de-frocked, he loses the medical benefits, along with future retirement funds. This is a great method to keep pastors submissive.

Licensing and Ordaining Ministers

A man seeking to become a pastor must first be licensed. After he has been a pastor for some time, he can ask to be ordained. A pastor must have a good record to be ordained. The process of ordaining and licensing varies from denomination to denomination.

A pastor is licensed by the denominational leadership of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Episcopalians. Southern Baptist Convention pastors are licensed and ordained by the local church and these credentials are accepted by the rest of the Southern Baptist churches.

The Southern Baptist convention controls the local churches via “Area Missionaries” and their job is to make sure that each church upholds the official doctrine and to settle any conflicts. The area missionary has the power to force a church to revoke a license of a pastor if the area missionary feels that that pastor is not following the doctrine of the denomination. If the area missionary cannot successfully deal with the matter, it is handled by the convention leadership.

My Personal Story

When I attended a Southern Baptist seminary from 1969-73, I was called into the office and ordered to stop preaching about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, praying for the sick, and casting out demons. I was informed that these practices were contrary to the doctrine of the convention, and if I refused to adhere to the official doctrine, I would be barred from preaching in Southern Baptist churches. What was my response? I intended to obey God and ignore this man-made doctrine. What was the result? I was declared “unfit for ministry” and these words were placed on my seminary records. Any church seeking information about me as a prospective pastor came across those vile words. The seminary leadership effectively closed the door to any future work and I walked away a free man to preach the Gospel at places opened by the Lord.

Assemblies of God

The Assemblies of God has districts presided by a superintendent and office staff. A board of directors consisting of prominent pastors from that district meet from time to time. A man seeking to become a pastor must be licensed, after proving himself, he is ordained by the board of directors and effectively controlled by them.

If a pastor wishes to transfer to a church in a different district, he has to apply for new credentials because they are only valid in one district.

Pastors are mandated to send the tithes collected to the district office.

If a pastor does not adhere to the official doctrine, or if he is accused of misconduct, the board of directors will hold a trial at the district office. His license to preach is revoked if found guilty.

Membership

Some denominations have formal membership classes for new converts and some require that a person must also be baptized in water by immersion.

A candidate for membership is voted on by the church members at business meetings. Most denominational churches have the members vote when it comes to dismissing pastors.

The members control the salaries of the staff in a church.

It is normal that a person must be a member if they wish to hold an office in the church such as a Sunday School teacher.

Independent Churches

Independent churches can be started by a group or an individual. Resurrection Life of Jesus Church was founded in 1986 by myself and 60 persons attending a weekly Bible study that I taught. We were to be a full Gospel church and drew up bylaws based upon the New Testament. There is no formal membership; a person is considered a member once they start to attend regularly. Our church is not registered with the IRS or with the State of California since the Constitution grants us religious liberty.

There are many independent churches across America and they vary in structure and are usually only as good as their pastor.

CHURCH DOCTRINE

Salvation

Most of the mainline denominations believe and teach that a person must be born again in order to go to heaven.

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” (John 3:1-7)

This is done by repentance and a confession of Jesus.

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” (Acts 3:19)

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:9-13)

Some of the Pentecostal denominations teach that a man or woman can lose their salvation when they sin. They believe that when a man is born again, he receives the possibility of going to heaven provided he does not sin. Thus, a person is not saved at the time of confession, but given a conditional promise of eternal life. This is the doctrine of most Pentecostal churches and the result is that the same people keep coming forward to get saved because they sinned throughout the week and lost their salvation. This heresy is contrary to what Jesus taught:

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one.” (John 10:27-30)

How is a person saved? Does it take place when you stop sinning? No. A born again believer never ceases because they are saved. Will you relapse? Sure, because you still have a sinful nature in your soul. A redeemed soul still has the ability to sin; nobody can achieve sinless perfection. It is impossible to live a sinless life.

You can stop drinking alcohol and using drugs, walk away from fornication and pornography, murder, robbery, etc., but there are always attitude sins such as anger, unforgiveness, jealousy, hate, bitterness, etc. The apostle Paul made it clear that we are saved by grace and kept by grace.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Water baptism

Denominations are divided into two camps when it comes to water baptism.

1. Those who believe in sprinkling water of babies and new converted members.

- a. Liturgical churches like the Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Lutherans are in this category.¹
2. Those who believe that a person has to be born again and baptized in water through immersion.
 - a. Baptist, Pentecostals and most independent churches fall into this category.

The early church practiced water baptism through immersion as soon as people were born again. There were no classes in water baptism.

“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:37-42)

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Only Pentecostals and some independent churches believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is still valid today.

Most Baptist denominations are adamant that this practice ceased with the last apostle, when the Bible was completed with the Book of Revelation. They erroneously base this doctrine on the following verses:

“Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. (1 Corinthians 13:8-13)

¹ Liturgical churches employ worship with a set, traditional structure. This is in stark contrast to non-liturgical worship, which is more spontaneous, flexible, or sermon-centered.

The English word “charity” comes from the Greek word “agape,” which refers to a deep personal love without any reservations, the highest love possible. When the New Testament writers used this word, it was applied to the divine love of God. It is a given that the love of God will never end; it is eternal. In the future, there won’t be any need for prophecies, speaking in tongues, and moving in the gift of knowledge in heaven.

When Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, glass mirrors like we have today did not exist. They used naturally occurring black glass which was honed into a flat polished surface. It only allowed someone to darkly see their reflection. It was not a sharp reflection and contours of the face were difficult to make out. Modern glass mirrors did not exist until the 15th century.

“For now we see through a glass, darkly...” (1 Corinthians 13:12a)

Paul stated that he had some kind of image of Jesus. The good news is that we will all see Jesus in the future – face to face – without any distortion.

“...but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12b)

The perfect thing mentioned is the second coming of Jesus. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are the part that shall be done away.

“But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” (1 Corinthians 13:10a)

The New Testament does not record every word and action of Jesus. There were many things the apostles did not write down and John’s own testimony bears this out:

“This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.” (John 21:24-25)

This is what Jesus said:

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” (John 16:12-14)

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to

observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

Common Sense

If the disciples of Jesus who had been with him for more than three years needed the baptism of the Holy Spirit, how much more do we need it? Jesus forbade them from leaving Jerusalem until they had been saturated with power from on high.

And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:4-5, 8)

Who are you going to believe? Jesus or the doctrine of men?

Remember, it's not so important how you begin your life after salvation, but how you finish it!

Do you have an ear to hear with?