

“THE BEGINNING CORNER”

INTRODUCTION

Long ago, Christ promised to build His church, and His death would not prevent it’s building. (Read Matt. 16:18). It was built upon the ROCK of His Sonship to the “living God” that Peter had just acknowledged. Then, the church was fully established by the word of the apostles, who revealed the totality of God’s will about the church, showing HOW that Christ and the apostles brought the church into existence. (Connect Eph. 3:10-11 with 2:20).

The church was **ONE**—not a group of competing denominations like those that exist today in the world. We are living in the age of “CHURCHES”—all claiming to be right, and claiming certain passages of scripture for their authority for existence, while **at the same time**, furthering their OWN peculiar denominational programs and beliefs. Amidst all this, we ask, “**WHERE is the church Jesus established?**”

There are certain marks of identity OF the Lord’s church that are **so** obvious in scripture that clearly show that denominations of men are **counterfeits** and **apostates**. Our lesson at this time deals with the *origin* and *identifying marks* OF the Lord’s church, as revealed in scripture. Remember, the “seed” of the kingdom or church is the “word of God” or scripture. Luke 8:11

DISCUSSION

I. 1st, the church OF CHRIST ORIGINATED IN THE 1st CENTURY.

A. It was established upon Christ as the ROCK of Ages, with the apostles being a part of the foundation, as their inspired preaching and writing of Christ occurred.

1. It began in **Jerusalem**, and nowhere else. Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 1:1-4; 2:1, 5

2. It began with the **identifying marks** of *faith*, *repentance* and *baptism* being required as universal, everlasting requirements for entrance **into** that church. Acts 2:36-38, 47

B. The apostles warned about **apostasy** and **division** taking place. Acts 20:29-31, 32; cf 1 Cor. 1:10

II. 2nd, let’s think about the IDENTIFYING MARKS OF CHRIST’S CHURCH.

A. In the early days of civilization in America, thousands of acres of land came under the control of the U. S. government.

1. It was decided that one could lay claim to some of that acreage in the west, by marking the desired property in some manner, as that of placing certain marks on the trees.

a. It would begin by a tree which would be the “**beginning corner tree**” of said property, with one’s personal marks of identity placed UPON that tree.

b. The identifying marks of that “corner tree” would face a particular opposite direction, such as the east, which would point to another tree a certain distance away (500 yards, for instance) and THAT tree would be called a “**pointer tree**”, which would then have a mark on IT, pointing another direction, making a right angle, and then to other “pointer” trees”, until the 4 sides would be completed as the 3rd pointer tree pointed back to the first tree, or “pointer tree”, and all the land claimed would be within this squared measurement.

2. We illustrate this with a man from Virginia who made his claim, and eventually became a soldier in the Revolutionary war, and upon his return decided to go and claim the land he had identified.

a. After much search, his “corner tree” was found, which had 3 horizontal marks made with a hatchet, pointing to the east, and then 500 yards east, and 500 yards south, and 500 yards back west, and finally 500 yards back north, the “corner tree” was there.

b. However, it was learned that OTHER identifying marks had been **later** made by some other men who came in with THEIR “identifying marks” while the soldier was away.

1) Would the original rightful owner have to give up his ownership for the benefit of those “johnny-come-lately” claimants, who said **their** claims were right, while bad-mouthing the old Virginia soldier who was there first?

2) Finally, the original marks of 3 horizontal hatchet marks were identified as the ones the old soldier had registered with the government, which proved the land to be his.

B. Now, let’s make application of this illustration, to the church Jesus built, as He left the 3 identifying marks of HIS church as the “beginning corner stone.”

1. 1st, there was the mark of FAITH. Acts 2:36; cf Heb. 11:1; Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:10
2. 2nd, there was the mark of REPENTANCE, or the change of mind about sin. Acts 2:37-38; Luke 13:3; 2 Cor. 7:10
3. 3rd, there was the mark of BAPTISM (immersion in water) in order to obtain the remission of sins. Acts 2:38; cf Mark 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21

III. Now, let's look at some of the claims by some johnny-come-lately religious claimants.

- A. The Roman Catholic church was the first to find a new beginning corner tree, to claim ownership of the church.
 1. Their claim of identifying marks are different in many ways.
 2. Immediately, their location of Rome instead of Jerusalem as a beginning place makes it an obvious fraud and counterfeit.

- B. The Episcopalians then looked for a corner tree.
 1. They ran past Jerusalem and found their tree in London.
 2. Their founder was Henry VIII instead of Christ, proving them to be counterfeit also.

- C. Next, Methodism sprang up from the Episcopalian denomination, with their beginner tree being too late, beginning in 1739 instead of 33 A.D.
 1. This so-called corner tree was found in at Oxford in England, instead of Jerusalem.
 2. It's founder was John Wesley instead of Jesus Christ, making it a fraud.

- D. Then, the Baptist movement began in Amsterdam, Holland by one John Smyth, with different marks on it's tree.
 1. Their mark of salvation by "faith only" instead of faith, repentance and baptism, did not match the 3 marks Jesus set.
 2. Even though they reject baptism as an essential step to salvation, they maintained that one should be baptized to become part of their movement, but not to be saved.

- E. Next came the Lutheran movement, which had pulled away from the Catholic Church, with Martin Luther as it's founder, marking it's tree at 1530 A.D. rather than 33 A.D., in Germany instead of Jerusalem as it's beginning point.

- F. Then, there was Presbyterianism, which marked it's beginning tree in Scotland, with John Calvin as it's founder in 1536, making this tree a counterfeit as well.

- G. Then, down the stream of time came Mormonism, founded by Joseph Smith (instead of Jesus) in New York (instead of Jerusalem), and in 1830 (instead of 33 A. D.), making it an obvious fraud as well.

IV. 4th, let's consider the ROLE OF ALEXANDER CAMPBELL IN AMERICA.

- A. Johnny-come-lately folks claim that Alexander Campbell ALSO founded a denomination like the other established denominations of the day, calling it the "church of Christ."
 1. Campbell did **not** mark any tree anywhere, but helped to tear away the errors and traditions of pretenders, to FIND the tree with the identifying marks Jesus left.

2. Campbell was despised by leaders in the counterfeit churches, because he used the truth of the New Testament to identifying the marks Jesus left, and he was despised because his efforts proved fatal to their claims and teachings.

3. if Campbell had **marked a tree somewhere**, as others did to establish their movements, then **HE** would have been praised rather than despised, for he would have been guilty of the same crime of which they were guilty.

B. BUT, Campbell was not the founder of a new system or denomination, but helped **FIND** the **original beginning corner tree**, and urged people to be a part of the original church that Jesus established.

CONCLUSION

I. Friends, that 3-marked corner tree Jesus gave for us will stand till the end of time.

II. Won't YOU be a part of this divine tree—marked properly by the Lord?

A. He is the head of only one property—HIS CHURCH.

B. The saved are added TO that church daily, as folks confess their FAITH, REPENT of their sins, and are IMMERSED into Christ, the founder and savior of that body.

C. If we can assist you in this matter, we invite you to respond now, as we stand together and sing the song selected.

Don Tarbet (This outline is made from a sermon by J. R. Howard in the 18th century. We send it forth with thanks to bro. Howard for his dedication to the word of God.)