

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	106		Gary L.W. Johnson
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The Sixth Petition (Part VI)

Kenneth Copeland is considered the leading proponent of the Health and Wealth gospel. Others include Joyce Meyers, T.D. Jakes, Creflo Dollar and Joel Osteen. All of these (and those like them) frequently appear on TBN and some have spoken here in Mesa at the Living Word Bible Church. Copeland is, in my opinion, one of the most infamous heretics¹ of our time. I documented this in my chapter of the book I co-edited with Fowler White.² Regarding the incarnation, Copeland declared, "This man – Jesus – was a carbon copy of the one who walked through the Garden of Eden." In other words, Jesus was no different than Adam. And, not only was Jesus just like Adam, but even Christians are as much an incarnation as Jesus was. Copeland writes, "Every man who has been born again is an incarnation and Christianity is a miracle. *The believer is as much an incarnation as was Jesus of Nazareth.*" Copeland further expounds, "Even many in the great body of Full Gospel³ people do not know that the new birth is a real incarnation, they do not know that they are as much sons and daughter of God as Jesus. They only have a hazy concept of what God has done, of what He is to them, and of what they are to God. Jesus was first divine, and then He was human. So He was in the flesh a divine-human being. I was first human, and so were you, but I was born of God, and so I became a human-divine being!" If that analysis sounds a bit too hasty, take a look at the following Copeland remark: "He [Jesus] referred to God as His Father (which enraged the Pharisees), but He never made the assertion that He was the Most High God. In fact, He told His disciples that the Father God was greater and mightier than He (John 14:28). Why didn't Jesus openly proclaim Himself as God during His 33 years on earth? For one single reason. He hadn't come to earth as God, He'd come as man." All of this was in response to questions raised by a supposed revelation Copeland alleges to have had from Jesus Christ. Our Lord is alleged to have said, "Don't be disturbed when people accuse you of thinking you're God... they crucified Me for claiming I was God. But I didn't claim I was God; I just claimed I walked with Him and that He was in Me. Hallelujah. That's what you're doing." Since this alleged revelation, a number of Christians have sought to confront Copeland. In fact, the late Walter Martin sent a detailed letter expressing great concern over the comment. Copeland refused correction or even correspondence on the subject and reissued his position, standing by his alleged revelation. "Jesus hadn't come to earth as God; He'd come as man. He'd set aside His divine power and had taken on the form of a human being – with all its limitations," he said. He said Jesus lived on earth "not as God but as a man," and prayed "not as the divine One who had authority as God but as a man..." arguing that Jesus never believed Himself to be "the Most High God." During a crusade, Copeland gave his audience a familiar lesson: "I say this and repeat it so it doesn't upset you too bad... When I read in the Bible where He [Jesus] says, 'I Am,' I say, 'Yes, I Am, too!'" (But when Shirley MacLaine is shown in a television movie giving in to her New Age instructor's charge to repeat, "I am God," [which is what is meant by "I Am"], evangelicals get up in arms! Why the reaction to the one but not to the other?) In yet another prophecy, Jesus is alleged to have told Copeland, "Pray to yourself because I'm in yourself and you're in Myself. We are one Spirit, saith the Lord... Many of you are going to have visitations from the Spirit realm. Many of you will have divinely appointed visions and dreams... You're just part of the time. It's time for spiritual activity to increase." In fact, he asserts, historic Christianity is mistaken in believing that the incarnate Christ was any different from any other human being. "They mistakenly believe," Copeland asserts, "that Jesus was able to work wonders, to perform miracles, and to live above sin because He had divine power that we don't have. Thus, they've never really aspired to live like He lived." "They don't realize," says Copeland, "that when Jesus came to earth, He voluntarily gave up that advantage [deity], living His life here not as God, but as man. He had no innate supernatural powers. He had no ability to perform miracles until after He was anointed by the Holy Spirit as recorded in Luke 3:22." "He ministered," Copeland insists, "as a man anointed by the Holy Spirit." In other words, Jesus' power came not from His being the second Person of the Holy Trinity, but from His being indwelt by the Holy Spirit and anointed. Since believers are filled with the Holy Spirit and anointed, they too possess the same supernatural powers. According to the faith teachers, there is no qualitative difference between the believer

and the incarnate Christ. With training from the evangelist, you, too, can become a Jesus.⁴ But, this Jesus turns out to be “another Jesus” that the Apostle warns about in II Corinthians 11:3, 4. This text contains three important lessons that need to be heeded.

I. FIRST, THE TEXT SHOWS US A SPIRITUAL DISEASE TO WHICH WE ARE ALL LIABLE, AND WHICH WE OUGHT TO FEAR. THAT DISEASE IS CORRUPTION OF OUR MINDS; - “I FEAR LEST YOUR MINDS BE CORRUPTED.”

Bishop Ryle, in a sermon on this text titled “Apostolic Fears,” wrote, “But of all the burdens which St. Paul had to carry, none seems to have weighed him down so much as that to which he refers, when he writes to the Corinthians, - ‘the care of all the Churches’ (II Corinthians 11:28). The scanty knowledge of many primitive Christians, - their dim hope, - their low standard of holiness, - all these things made them peculiarly liable to be led astray by false teachers, and to depart from the faith. Like little children, hardly able to walk, they required to be treated with immense patience. Like exotics in a hothouse, they had to be watched with incessant care. Can we doubt that they kept their Apostolic founder in a state of constant tender anxiety?”⁵ Note carefully that the Apostle was not impressed with people using the name of Jesus and claiming to preach the gospel. “It was, in fact, the historical goal of most of the Pauline epistles to clarify the gospel so that its acute misrepresentation might be prevented.”⁶

II. SECONDLY, THE TEXT SHOWS US AN EXAMPLE WHICH WE OUGHT TO REMEMBER, AS A BEACON: - “THE SERPENT BEGUILLED EVE BY HIS SUBTLETY.”

The word translated “beguiled” (KJV) or “deceived” (ESV) is EXAPATAO, which means “to completely mislead.” Paul used this word in I Timothy 2:14 in a similar context. The word translated “subtlety” (KJV) or “cunning” (ESV) is PANOURGOS and is a compound of PAN (“every” or “all”) and ERGON (“to work”). The person who does this is ready to do everything to trick or snare. Charles Hodge, the great Princeton theologian, wrote, “All seduction is by means of deception. Sin is in its nature deceit. The imagination is filled with false images, and the foolish heart is darkened. Eve was thus deceived by the subtlety of Satan. She was made to disbelieve what was true, and to believe what was false. Man’s belief, in a very large sphere, is determined by his feelings. The heart controls the understanding. The good believe the true; the evil believe the untrue. This is the reason why men are accountable for their faith, and why the wicked are led captive by Satan into all manner of error. Eve was deceived by exciting unholy feelings in her heart. Paul’s apprehension was lest the Corinthians, surrounded by false teachers, the ministers of Satan, should in like manner be beguiled. What he feared was that their *minds should be corrupted*.”⁷ Note the emphasis here. It was a moral perversion, or corruption, that he apprehended – “Your minds.” The word NOEMA means first “thought”; then that which thinks, the understanding; and then, the affections or dispositions (Phil. 4, 7). The ESV translation, “your thoughts,” as including the idea both of mind and feeling, is the most appropriate rendering.

III. THIRDLY, THE TEXT SHOWS US A POINT ABOUT WHICH WE OUGHT SPECIALLY TO BE ON OUR GUARD. THAT POINT IS CORRUPTION “FROM THE SIMPLICITY THAT IS IN CHRIST.”

“Corrupted from” is a pregnant expression. The word PHTHEIRO means corrupted so as to be turned from. The simplicity that is in Christ is wholeheartedness, singleness of devotion, and freedom from duplicity. The word translated “pure devotion,” HAPLOTETOS, underscores the notion of intense loyalty – as the following phrase makes clear – “from singleness of mind towards Christ.” That is, the undivided *affection* and *devotion* to Christ which is due from a bride to her spouse. “The allusion to the marriage relation is kept up. Paul had compared the Corinthians to a virgin espoused one man, and he feared lest their affections might be seduced from Christ and transferred to another.”⁸

CONCLUSION: Under the banner “Jesus is Lord,” Kenneth Copeland preaches “another Jesus.” In fact, the Jesus that Copeland promotes bears an uncanny resemblance to that which attracted the Corinthians. “Satan tempts God’s people by presenting a substitute Savior: In the garden, it was the false promise that they could provide for themselves without consequence; in Corinth it was that the real ‘Christ’ would provide for them health and wealth.”⁹ Like the Corinthian seducers of old, today’s “faith teachers” stress a metaphysical, mystical, magical Jesus. Of course, all orthodox Christians believe in a *supernatural* Savior, but these heretics view Jesus as a power-dispensing fetish who gains them access to both mystical and material treasures. Copeland and his followers’ heresy are not restricted to the Person of Christ. They are equally heretical on the work of Christ. One

of the key doctrines that they advocate is that of “the born-again Jesus.” Copeland claims to have received direct revelation from God concerning this: “The Spirit of God spoke to me and He said, ‘Son, realize this. Now follow me in this, and don’t let your tradition trip you up.’ He said, ‘Think this way – a twice-born man whipped Satan in his own domain.’ And I threw my Bible down... like that. I said, ‘What?’ He said, ‘A born-again man defeated Satan, the firstborn of many brethren defeated him.’ He said, ‘You are the very image, the very copy of that one.’ I said, ‘Goodness, gracious sakes alive!’ And I began to see what had gone on there, and I said, ‘Well now you don’t mean, you couldn’t dare mean, that I could have done the same thing?’ He said, ‘Oh yeah, if you’d had the knowledge of the Word of God that He did, you could’ve done the same thing, ‘cause you’re a reborn man too.’” It is difficult to believe that anyone would claim that Jesus was born again, since such an act is necessary only for sinners. But to be consistent with the belief that Jesus was a sinner or at least made a sinner for us when He went to hell, then His being born again would make sense. *This is, however, blatant heresy and beyond belief.* They teach that when Jesus died, he received the nature of Satan, went to hell to pay off Satan; and when He was raised from the dead, it was thus necessary for Him as a *sinner* to be *made* righteous, to be born again by receiving the very nature of God.¹⁰ Be not deceived by their motto “Jesus is Lord” – This “Jesus” is another Jesus.

ENDNOTES

¹ The word “heresy” is the English version of the Greek noun HAIREISIS, originally meaning nothing more insidious than “party.” It is used in this neutral sense in Acts 5:17, 15:5, and 26:5. Early in the history of the first Christians, however, “heresy” came to be used to mean a separation or split resulting from a false faith (I Corinthians 11:19; Galatians 5:20). It designated either a doctrine or the party holding the doctrine, a doctrine that was sufficiently intolerable to destroy the unity of the Christian church. In the early church, heresy did not refer to simply any doctrinal disagreement, but to something that seemed to undercut the very basis for Christian existence. Practically speaking, heresy involved the doctrine of God and the doctrine of Christ – later called “special theology” and “Christology.” “Heresy not merely undermines one’s intellectual understanding of Christian doctrine, but threatens to sink the ark, and thus to make salvation impossible for everyone, not merely for the individual heretic.” H.O.J. Brown, *Heresies: The Image of Christ in the Mirror of Heresy and Orthodoxy from the Apostles to the Present* (Doubleday, 1984), p. 3.

² Cf. *Whatever Happened to the Reformation?* (P&R, 2001), p.11.

³ It should come as no surprise that Copeland, along with his mentor Kenneth Hagin, are the products of the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition. The term “Full Gospel” is the term used to describe this group. *The Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. S.M. Burgess and G.B. McGee (Zondervan, 1988). Written by people from within this tradition nevertheless, practically every other page documents some prominent figure who was heretical. In addition to Copeland and Hagin, other contemporary Faith Teachers would include Benny Hinn, Charles Capps, Fred Price, Marilyn Hickory, Jerry Savelle, Jesse DuPlantis – all of whom appeared regularly with Paul and Jan Crouch on TBN. (The irony is that TBN stands for Trinity Broadcasting Network, and yet many of the people on TBN are anti-trinitarian!)

⁴ Citations are from Rod Rosenblatt’s chapter entitled “Who Do You Say I Am?” in *The Agony of Deceit*, ed. Michael Horton (Moody, 1990), pp. 107-116. For further documentation on Copeland’s heresy, see Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity In Crisis* (Harvest House, 1993) and Curtis Crenshaw, *Man as God: The Word of Faith Movement* (Footstool, 1994).

⁵ J.C. Ryle, *Warnings to the Churches* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1963), p. 123. I have adapted Ryle’s headings.

⁶ Leonard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament II* (Eerdmans, 1982), p. 113. He adds, “In Galatians, Paul interpreted the gospel as the message of justification by grace alone and by faith alone in order to fight against its Judaizing misrepresentation. It was interpreted as *theologia cruceis* in the First Epistle to the Corinthians because it had been misunderstood syncretistically as an enthusiast doctrine of wisdom. Both II Corinthians and Colossians also showed opposition to syncretistic distortions that had a Judaizing impact, just as did I Corinthians. These distortions were provoked, to put it pointedly, by the gospel itself. The distortions were attempts to make the gospel, in keeping with its intention, relevant for Jewish and Hellenistic people and to present it as the solution to their problems. In addition, there emerged, unintentionally, a ‘conformity’ (Romans 12:2) to the thought-forms of the addressees. Heresy arose, quite tragically, right where the gospel was advancing into a world of altered circumstances. For this reason, heresy could not be overcome through repetition of what was said earlier but only through a more adequate application of the gospel to new questions. It was hardly coincidental that the Pauline gospel took shape positively in the midst of these very controversies.”

⁷ C. Hodge, *I & II Corinthians* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1974), p. 629.

⁸ Hodge, op. cit.

⁹ Scott Hafemann, *II Corinthians: The NIV Application Commentary* (Zondervan, 2000), p. 427.

¹⁰ See the extensive documentation in the work by Curtis Crenshaw.