

Text: 1 Cor 12.1-3

Our question today is on a phrase that we find in 1 Corinthians 12.3. Our recent teaching in this passage brought the question up.

1 Cor 12.3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "**Jesus is Lord,**" except by the Holy Spirit.

You see I've highlighted the phrase, "Jesus is Lord."

This phrase is ripped out of its context and used by Kenneth Copeland in his "ministry" logo – I put "ministry" in scare quotes when it comes to him, because Kenneth Copeland is a false teacher. He is not a Christian minister.

Kenneth Copeland got started as a pilot for Oral Roberts but was heavily influenced by another "health and wealth" preacher, Ken Hagin. He subsequently set out in his own "ministry" and has become one of the chief proponents of the "health and wealth" error.

On his website, there is an article that explains how his use of 1 Cor 12.3 came about.

Throughout the years, Brother Copeland has declared "Jesus Is Lord!" over the world and its nations time and again. He has confessed it over families and individuals. He has boldly declared it over national elections and government leaders on every level. He has used his faith year after year to profess Jesus is Lord over every kind of sickness, disease, famine and global calamity.

It began nearly 40 years ago, as Brother Copeland was reading his Bible in his bedroom. First Corinthians 12:3 exploded with meaning in his heart: "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." At that moment, Brother Copeland decided he was going to declare those words all the time, and over every situation. The rest of that afternoon he walked around declaring the lordship of Jesus. "Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord over my body. Jesus is Lord over my mind. Jesus is Lord over my spirit. Jesus is Lord over this bedroom. Jesus is Lord over my clothes. Jesus is Lord over my car. Jesus is Lord over this ministry. Jesus is Lord over anything that has to do with me, because I make Jesus the Lord over my life." He wrote "Jesus Is Lord!" every time he had a pen in his hand, and ended his letters with the same

confession. He even had a plaque made for the front door of his home, announcing to every person who stepped onto the porch, "Jesus Is Lord!"

"Jesus Is Lord!" not only became the theme for his ministry, it was the theme for his life.

The Bible says that every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11). The day is coming when everyone, Christian or not, will bow and confess that Jesus is Lord. He is the undisputed Savior of the universe.

Every person on earth can be saved by believing and making that declaration now! We hope every one of you has had your own personal historic moment and come to the same conclusion Brother Copeland did more than 40 years ago.¹

There is some truth mixed with error in that statement.

There are many problems with this, and I can't really take the time to deal with them all. One thing that really bothers me about this is using the phrase, "Jesus is Lord," as some cure-all magic formula.

I ran across an editorial in Christianity Today that strongly criticized Copeland and his theology. This was in 1985 when CT was stronger, but for them to criticize anyone is remarkable.

"The Cut-rate Grace of a Health and Wealth Gospel"²

- The autobiography of Paul is the exact opposite of the gospel of "health and wealth" (2 Cor 11-12)
- The "health and wealth" gospel makes false promises
- Twist Scripture out of context
- Complete reversal of biblical values: "abundance of things we possess is not the measure of our true success"³

¹ kcmblagsite, "A Historic Moment: JESUS IS LORD!," KCM Blog, June 10, 2009, <https://blog.kcm.org/a-historic-moment-jesus-is-lord/>.

² Kenneth S. Kantzer, "The Cut-Rate Grace of a Health and Wealth Gospel," *Christianity Today*, June 14, 1985, 14.

³ Kantzer, 14.

- Promises of healing in the gospel (Isa 53.5, *by his stripes we are healed*) waits for the final redemption before all brokenness and disease is eliminated (Rm 8.18-25, creation *groans* until final redemption)

“The root error of the false gospel of health and wealth is this: It seeks to apply a theology of future glory to the believing and obedient Christian *right now*. But our Lord taught a theology for here and now that both sustains us in hard times and holds out hope for tomorrow. We cannot claim *now* what God in his grace has promised only for the future. God loves us too much to give us everything we want right now.”⁴

Alright, enough about Copeland and the health and wealth gospel. Let’s look at 1 Cor 12.3. What does it really mean?

Read 1 Cor 12.1-3

I. Reconstructing the Corinthian question (1)

A. Now concerning “spirituals”

1. Compare use in chapter 14

1 Cor 14.1 ¶ Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.

1 Cor 14.37 ¶ If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment.

- In 14.1, it refers clearly to spiritual gifts — esp. tongues and prophecy
- In 14.37, it refers clearly to spiritual people

2. Ambiguous here, but Gordon Fee [a charismatic] suggests making it “spiritual things” to refer to both gifts and people

B. Their question had to do with Christians doing spiritual things

1. No specific wording

⁴ Kantzer, 15.

2. Something like, “must we speak in tongues to be spiritual?” or “if we are all spiritual, should we speak in tongues”
 3. Perhaps there is some question about how to tell if someone’s use of a gift really is coming from the Spirit, given the following two verses
- C. Paul’s aim is to correct, to expand understanding, about something the already know (“I do not want you to be unaware”)

II. Recalling the Corinthian past (2)

A. Verse two is challenging grammatically

1. Fee gives a literal rendering: “You know that when you were pagans, to mute idols whenever you would be led, being carried away”
2. He suggests (I think rightly) that a “you were” needs to be supplied

Fee TRANS: “When you were pagans, you were carried away, as you were continually being led about to mute idols”⁵

B. The pagan context

1. Often in mystery religions, religious ecstasies (esp. Dionysius)
2. The “being led” seems compulsive
3. When one was “being led” or in an ecstasy, the person might utter speech

C. The Corinthian concern

1. By some: Our people could be saying anything, what if they are cursing Jesus?
2. Bo others: These narrow-minded ones are accusing us of being just like the old pagans and we are following the Spirit

III. Reassuring the Corinthian experience (3)

A. Paul makes a conclusion about v. 1 and v. 2 in v. 3: “therefore”

⁵ both points 1 & 2 from Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 576, 577.

- B. The focus of the speaking is “by the Spirit” — that is, whoever is speaking is speaking by the Holy Spirit of God
1. No one, speaking by the Spirit, can say “Jesus is accursed”
 2. Anyone who is speaking by the Spirit will always say, “Jesus is Lord”
- C. What about non-Christians who say, “Jesus is Lord”
1. That doesn’t mean they are speaking by the Spirit
 2. Anyone can say the words
 3. But the person who is truly speaking by the Spirit will never curse Jesus, but always praise Jesus
 4. The key is: “by (or ‘in’) the Spirit”

Paul’s meaning: whatever the spiritual gifts are, when the spiritual person is speaking *by the Spirit*, he will always affirm the Lordship of Christ ... even if you can’t understand the tongue he is saying it in.

- D. The rest of the argument in 1 Cor 12-14
1. Paul goes on to insist that not everyone will speak in tongues, the Spirit gives different gifts to different Christians individually
 2. Paul also insists that the emphasis should be on relating rightly to each other (1 Cor 13, fruit of the Spirit over gifts of the Spirit)
 3. Paul insists that in church services, all speech must edify [build up] other believers: if no one can understand you, sit down and be quiet (1 Cor 14)

Conclusion:

The bottom line: the passage is meant to reassure troubled Christians about what could or could not be said when “under the influence of the Spirit.”

To take the phrase out of context, as Kenneth Copeland does, strips it of all its original meaning.

Copeland takes it and invests it with his own meaning, using the phrase to simply bring about fleshly desires in this life — health and wealth.

In a sense, he is being “carried away” to a false idol, and is leading foolish people into a kind of idolatry.