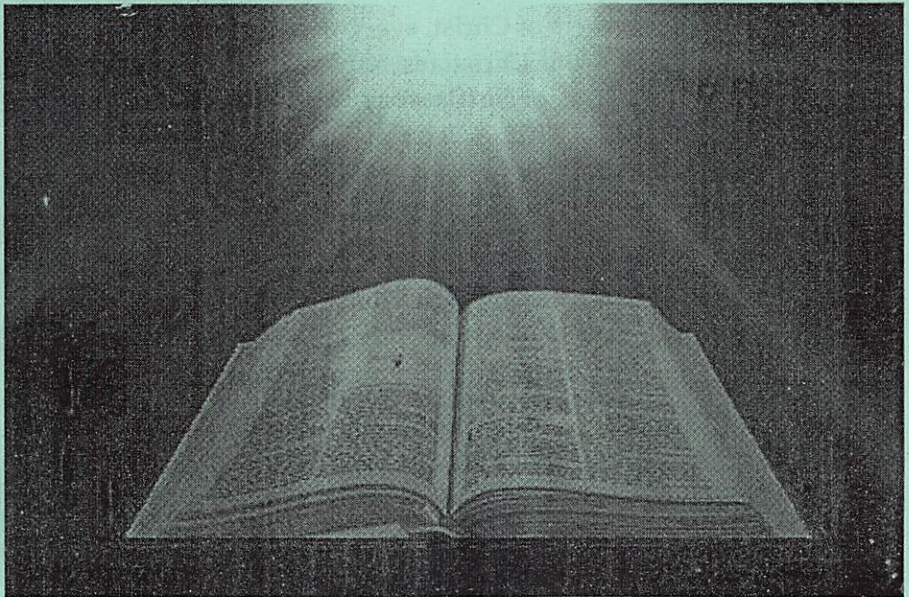


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THE BIBLE TEACHER



Our Plea

Let the Truth Prevail

1. That there should be only one church today, as it was in the beginning—Church of Christ—Which Christ Himself built, and about which we all can read in the Bible (Matthew 16:18; Col. 1:18). That congregations of the one church of the Bible everywhere may be known as churches of Christ, as we read at Romans 16:16. That there should be no denominations or sects in the name of the Church. (1 Corinthians 1:10; John 20:20, 21).
2. That there should be only one plan or guideline of salvation, as is revealed and taught in the Bible, followed everywhere. All must believe in Christ, repent of wrong, confess Christ the Son of God, and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-38). Those who obey these commands to be saved are saved by the Lord and He Himself adds the saved ones to His church (Acts 2:47); which is His Spiritual body. (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:4).
3. That all followers of Christ, everywhere, should be known as Christians, and Christians only, after His name alone, with no Prefixes or Suffixes, as it was in the beginning. (Acts 4:12; Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16). That all other names which exalt and glorify any other name of a man, or a doctrine, or a day or a movement, etc., must be forgotten.
4. That all man-made creed books must be put aside, with other books written by men which contain doctrines and commandments of men, and only the Bible which contains God's inspired message for man must be followed in all spiritual matters. (Matthew 7:21-23; John 12:48).
5. Let us accept the authority of Christ in all religious matters (Matthew 28:18), and strive to abide in the New Testament doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

Salvation Is In Jesus Christ

ALL ACCOUNTABLE HUMAN BEINGS, who know difference between right and wrong, except little children, have sinned against God by entertaining evil thoughts in their heart or mind, and have fallen to the temptations to do wrong, the Bible declares that all have sinned and are under condemnation because of sin. (Romans 3:23). Sin separates man from God, and that separation is called death—spiritual alienation of man from God. (Isaiah 59:2). Man wants to reach God. He knows one day he has to leave this world. All want to go to heaven. To appease God, man renders his offerings and worships, and works of his own righteousness. The Bible says, "But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are like filthy rags." (Isaiah 64:6). Again, "God who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things." (Acts 17:24-25). The inference is, there is nothing that man can do or give to God to make himself worthy of heaven.



Knowing the inability of man to make himself worthy of heaven, the loving God sent His Word from heaven to earth, allowed Him to be born in human flesh as Jesus Christ, the anointed Savior of man. (John 1:1, 14). "For God so loved the world that He gave His

only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). God so loved the world, because He has created man in His own image and after His own likeness. (Genesis 1:26-27). Man is God's offspring. (Acts 17:29). He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9).

It was the love of God for humans that allowed His Son to be betrayed into the hands of His enemies. Again, it was the love of God that allowed men to crucify Him. Through His death on the cross, God made Him the propitiation or atoning payment for the sins of the world. (1 John 1:1-2; 4:10). When Christ was dying on the cross, God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them. The Bible, in fact, tells us that on the cross, God had made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:19, 21).

Now, because God has done this great and amazing and wonderful thing, we read, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1). Further, it says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17). When an individual gets into Christ, puts on Christ, he/she becomes a new creation or a new person; **Washed** of sins, because of the shed blood of Christ for sinners from the cross; **Sanctified**, or set apart to live for God; **Justified**, sins having been forgiven because of the propitiatory death of Christ; and **Preserved**, to live undefiled in a sinful world, by following in the steps of Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 6:11; Jude 1; 1 Peter 2:21). In this relationship with God, there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

Man's response and desire, therefore, should be to get into Christ as quickly as possible. How does one do that? The Bible says, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:27). One should believe in Christ with whole heart and repent of all wrongs, and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and live in Christ faithfully until death to be blessed not only in this life but also in the eternal life which is to come. (Revelation 2:10; 14:13). This is the Good News of God for man.

HEARING GOD'S WORD

J.C. Choate



AT THE TRANSFIGURATION OF Christ, God voiced his approval of his Son. The record reads: "While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."

(Matt. 17:5). Please note that God did not say that we are to hear Moses or one of the other greats of the Old Testament, but rather that we should hear Christ. Hence, that's exactly what we are to do. The Hebrew writer echoes this truth in affirming: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." (Heb. 1:1, 2). At one time God may have spoken through the prophets, etc., but now he speaks to us through his Son, and that means that Christ speaks to us through the word.

We are to hear Christ and in so doing we hear God and his word, for Christ has said: "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak." (John 12:49,50). It is imperative that we hear God's word, for the word is truth and the truth makes free. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17). "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:32).

The Bible nowhere says that we are to wait for some sign or miracle before putting forth an effort to obey God's will. The scripture nowhere hints to the fact that we should wait on a wee small voice, and so on. The God of heaven does not reveal his will to man through some miraculous medium; he does not endeavour to speak to man in a direct way; he does not send the Spirit upon a soul for the purpose of converting him. But the Bible teaches that we are to hear God's word, and if we will do this we are to hear God's word, and if we will do this we may know fully what the Lord would have us to do to be saved. Therefore, in the words of the Lord: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear". (Matt. 11:15).

Some adhere to the doctrine that one can be saved apart from

hearing God's word, but such is certainly foreign to the language of the apostle Paul, for he says: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God". (Rom. 10:13-17). According to these verses of scripture one must hear God's word before he can obey it. This is emphasized throughout the New Testament, and mind you, in every case of conversion which is recorded, there was always a preacher on hand to present the truth and then to assist the believers in obeying their maker.

There are two ways in which one may hear God's word: either by reading the scriptures or by the mouth of a faithful gospel preacher. Hence, it is not a matter of just hearing something. Many do this but are still lost. In order for a person to be saved he must hear the truth. But on the other hand, it is not enough just to hear the truth. If the truth is going to save one, he must of necessity obey it. James thus tells us to be doers of the word and not hearers only. (James 1:22).

Friend of mine, there are many reasons why we should want to hear God's word. Through such one is able to come to a knowledge of the truth, Faith is produced in the heart, and through all of this, there is a desire to obey the will of God and to walk according to his precepts. Since this is so, every soul should be intently interested in hearing God's word, ever remembering that he will bless those who handle aright the truth; but on the other hand, those who refuse will have to face it as their judge in the world to come. (John 12:48).

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IS DIVINE IN ORGANIZATION

Louis Rushmore

UNLIKE MANY CONTEMPORARY CHURCHES, the New Testament church has no chain of command through which newly formed

dogma filters down to the masses. It has no clergy, earthly headquarters or human creed. Each congregation is autonomous and independent from every other congregation. The New Testament church is governed in matters of doctrine solely by God's Word, overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers and teachers, and supported morally and financially by all its members.

Heavenly Headquarters

Instead of an earthly head or a select group heading the church, the Lord's church is headed by Jesus Christ alone. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18 NKJV). Further, the Lord is the Head of the body, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). Jesus Christ has not surrendered His throne, but is ruling now (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). Not on earth, but from a heavenly headquarters, Jesus exercises His Headship over the church (Ephesians 1:3; Philippians 2:9-11; 20-23; Hebrews 8:1; Acts 7:55). The degree of and place from which Jesus Christ demonstrates His authority is concisely noted in Ephesians 1:20-23: *"Which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."*

Plurality of Elders

Two or more elders were appointed over each fully organized church in New Testament times (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Scripture always refers to a plurality of elders serving a single congregation and only the church over which they were appointed. Appointment of elders was not regarded lightly, but men were carefully chosen to oversee a church only after the congregation ensured those candidates complied with divinely mandated qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-11). Noting that Christ is the Head of the church and the qualifications for elders are enumerated in Holy Writ, elders may not make new doctrine, only see that the New Testament is faithfully practiced in their congregation. In matters not addressed by Scripture, elders and the church may exercise liberty (e.g., time of services, place of assembly). Inspiration also calls these men "bishops" (1 Timothy 3:1), "the presbytery" KJV or "eldership" NKJV (1 Timothy 4:14), "pastors" (Ephesians 4:11), "overseers" (Acts 20:28) and "shepherds" (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Deacons: Special Servants

Though every member of the church may and should minister to the needs of brethren and non-members alike, deacons are special servants of the church. Unlike the elders, their degree of responsibility is departmental and lies in service areas. For instance, different deacons may direct benevolence, the treasury, maintenance of facilities, evangelism, the Bible school or some other area of concern requiring special attention. Deacons also are chosen after determination that they meet divinely given qualifications (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Preachers and Teachers

Gospel preachers (Romans 10:14-15), also called evangelists (Ephesians 4:11; 2 Timothy 4:5) and ministers (1 Corinthians 3:5), are charged to *"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching"* (2 Timothy 4:2). Preaching is a serious undertaking because a preacher affects not only his own soul, but the souls of his hearers as well. Therefore, the Bible urges preachers and teachers to be cautious (James 3:1) and also prescribes a remedy to remove impenitent false teachers from their sphere of influence (Romans 16:17-18).

The infant church of the first century was armed with an array of miraculously inspired religious instructors: *"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ"* (Ephesians 4:11-12).

The apostles no longer walk the face of the earth; the temporary, miraculous, but partial knowledge has been replaced with written revelation (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; James 1:25), and inspired prophets are also extinct today. However, pastors (elders), preachers (evangelists, ministers) and teachers equipped with the Bible are still charged with *"the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."*

Conclusion

The differences in organization between the church about which one can read in the Bible and contemporary churches are striking. Yet, few souls seem aware of these vivid contrasts. Divine name, divine origin, and divine organization are each crucial, identifying marks of the blood-bought, divine church (Acts 20:28). The one true church of the Bible also practices a divinely given worship, as

well as divine doctrine. All of these are key fingerprints of the church Jesus built. The churches of Christ today practice first-century Christianity in the present century by imitating the divine characteristics of the early church.

We plead with all who would follow Christ to turn back to the New Testament pattern, and to follow only what is written in Scripture.

GO TO YOUR BROTHER

Justin A. Hopkins

IT IS OFTEN SAID THAT Christians are not called to be sinless, but rather we are called to sin less. Herein is expressed the idea, not that we are given licence to sin, but rather that perfection has only ever been attained by one—Jesus Christ. God understands that we may mess up from time to time, this is why we are promised that *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). If there were not ongoing mistakes, then there would be no ongoing need for cleansing.

That being said, the New Testament is also very clear in teaching that we must not tolerate unrepentant sin to remain in the Lord's Body. Paul sets the example here, even in dealing with the faults of the apostle Peter, *“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed”* (Galatians 2:11). Peter's sin was apparently rather public, and in addressing that sin, Paul was able to help correct the problems that it had created. Another situation which Paul had to face was with Alexander the coppersmith, who was apparently contradicting Paul's inspired teaching! Obviously, such a thing could not be allowed to go unchecked. Paul did what he could, and then warned others, like the young evangelist Timothy. *“Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works”* (2 Timothy 4:12).

There are times when the sin of a Christian seems flagrant, or is publicly known. How should we respond in such situations? Should all public sin elicit a public response such as that which Paul gave in these inspired accounts? If not, why not, and how should we respond?

One important fact which should be noted in considering the actions of Paul in these instances as a pattern for dealing with sins of a public nature, is that we may not have all of the information.

We can correctly conclude from Paul's writing that these sins were indeed public, and that they were finally addressed in a very public manner. However, all of the surrounding circumstances, and any actions that may have been taken before the public rebuke were not shared with us; because those facts were not pertinent to the message of the inspired penman. What else should we consider in dealing with sin within the Church?

In approaching any one subject, it is important to consider all that the Scriptures have to say regarding the matter. In facing this particular issue, it would seem that we tend to run to one extreme or the other, much like the first century Christians in Corinth did.

When Paul first wrote to them, they were not only ignoring sin in the Church, they were embracing it as a way to relate to those in the world around them! Paul admonished them, *"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened"* (1 Corinthians 5:6,7).

At his second writing, the brethren at Corinth had grown so zealous in reproving sin that it had become a problem:

"Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. (2 Corinthians 2:6,7).

So, it would seem that there is a middle ground: a place where we reprove sin, but still show love and compassion to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Fortunately, our Lord Himself gave us direct teachings as well as principles to guide us in these situations. In Matthew 18:15-17, we find the process which should always be followed in addressing the sin of another.

As we consider this process let us remember the context in which the discussion occurs. In the preceding verses, our Lord has just told a parable of a shepherd, who having 100 sheep, lost one, and went out seeking the one. Jesus makes application in verse fourteen, saying, *"Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."*

In verse fifteen, He then instructs us that when dealing with sin, to first go to the individual in private. Though our Lord needs no support here, Solomon's wisdom explains: *"Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself and discover not a secret to another. Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away"* (Proverbs 25:9,10).

Jesus goes on in verses sixteen and seventeen to tell us, that if necessary, we should then go with two others, and finally, if need be make a public rebuke, as a last resort.

When we become aware of the sins of others, how often do we follow our Lord's command? Do we simply gossip to others about what they are doing? Do we air the Church's dirty laundry for all the world to see? Or do we, in simple loving obedience, act according to the wisdom and commands of our savior?

The final guiding principle that our Lord gives to us is short, yet powerful: *"therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets"* (Matthew 7:12). Place yourself in their shoes. Wouldn't you want them to show enough concern for your soul to talk to you? How would you want them to do it?

By following the New Testament pattern in confronting sin souls can be saved, love shown, and God will be glorified! *"Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins"* (James 5:20).

For What Should a Sinner Pray?

Dillard Thurman

AS A YOUNG LAD I attended many revivals in which sinners were begged to come forward to a mourner's bench to pray for pardon. Having heard them plead for God to be reconciled to sinners, rather than sinners turning to obey God, I can easily see why many sincere folk turned away in utter frustration, believing that God no longer cared for them.

But friend, God has not taught sinners to pray! They are to first obey, and then having become children of God they can then pray to the *"Father in heaven."* Even of old it was taught, *"Behold, the arm of the Lord is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that he cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face, that he will not hear"* (Isa. 59:1-2). Who will God hear? *"We know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth"* (Jno. 9:31). Before one is heard of God and has his prayers answered, he must first become obedient unto Him by doing His will.

But if a sinner should pray to God, for what should he pray? Just what is he taught to expect to receive from God in answer to his prayers? Let us examine the Scriptures to see for what a sinner should ask.

For God to Love Him?

This would be foolish in view of what has been recorded of God's love! *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (Jno. 3:16) In view of such a sacrifice, isn't it redundant to ask God to love us, when He has told us, and showed us, that He already does? *"But God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:8). How can any religious teacher ask sinners to pray for God to love them, when He has told us over and over that He does?

Pray to Be Accepted of God?

When Peter came to Cornelius with God's plan of salvation, he said, *"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him"* (Acts 10:34-35). Sinners do not have to pray that God will accept them; but rather they must come to where all are accepted of God; *"To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved"* (Eph. 1:6). It would be foolish to ask God to accept one who refuses to enter into Christ where God's acceptance has been located. Until one has put on Christ, he cannot expect God to accept him, for God has not so promised!

Pray for God to Be Willing to Save?

Who set forth that idea that God has not always been willing to save? The gift of His Son, the revealed plan of pardon and all within it attest to God's willingness to save sinners. *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet. 3:9). God is always willing to save—but on His terms rather than those that man may outline!

Pray for Christ to Love Us?

Why, the Son has reflected the Father's love for lost men! What more could we ask of Him? *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (Jno. 15:13). His whole life on earth manifests His love for lost men. *"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his*

life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). His interest in sinners is shown in His mission on earth. *"For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10). His promise dispels any doubt as to His great love: *"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matt. 11:28). Don't disparage the great love of Christ by teaching sinners to pray for Christ to love them!

Pray for the Gift of the Holy Spirit?

This has been done so frequently! Sinners kneel at the altar or prayer bench, and there ask God to send them the Holy Spirit. But you will never find a picture of this in the New Testament church! The Holy Spirit figured prominently in the salvation of those you read about in Acts; but in what way? Well, first it was by the Holy Spirit that the apostles spoke forth the words of God. They spoke *"as the Spirit gave them utterance"* (Acts 2:4). And when they were pricked in their hearts by the gospel, they cried out, *"What shall we do?"* Peter then replied, *"Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38).

Those people didn't pray for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. They obeyed the gospel terms of pardon, and the Spirit was then given to them. Paul said, *"And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father"* (Gal. 4:6). The Holy Spirit was never given to make one a son of God, but unfaillingly is given to all who become children of God.

Pray for Salvation?

Inspired men never told alien sinners to pray for salvation! In Acts 10, we find the prayer of Cornelius didn't save him; but he was commanded to send for Peter, *"Who will tell thee words, whereby thou and thy house shall be saved"* (Acts 11:14). And when Saul of Tarsus saw the Lord, he wasn't told to pray. Rather, the Lord said, *"Arise, and go into the city, and there it shall be told thee what thou must do"* (Acts 9:6).

From there we can read from Paul's own account how Ananias came to him, saying, *"And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord"* (Acts 22: 16). Ananias found Saul praying, and he stopped his prayer with a command to be baptized into Christ! Wouldn't it be great if these same words could be given the thousands who make "decisions" in the many religious meetings? Just tell them the same thing Ananias told Saul!

Pray for Freedom from Sin?

God has provided freedom from sin for sinners—but not through prayer! *“Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness”* (Rom. 6:16-18). You have only to read the first six verses of that chapter to find how that freedom came!

Peter wrote, *“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently”* (1 Pet. 1:22). Freedom from sin comes from obedience to the terms which God has presented through the gospel of Christ -not through prayer for it.

Pray for Pardon?

God's promise has been made abundantly clear on this point: *“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon”* (Isa. 55:7). Since man sinned against God, it is for Him to dictate terms of pardon. He says man must turn back to Him, but it must be in obedience rather than by vain prayer. Jesus said, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”* (Mark 16:16). One who refuses this plan of pardon obtains nothing by prayer. Jesus asks, *“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”* (Luke 6:46). He asks for obedience and not empty prayers.

Pray for Grace?

This has been a favorite petition at many prayer benches and altars. But what has God said on the subject? *“For the grace of God, which bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”* (Tit. 2:11-12). Why pray for God's grace when it has already been so abundantly given through the gospel? And isn't it very foolish to pray for grace while refusing the teaching which grace has given? God's grace must be appropriated by faith which works by love (Eph. 2:8-9). Have you sufficient faith to obey the teaching of grace? If not, then have you faith enough to be effectual in prayer?

Pray for Reconciliation?

Sure, many people have been taught they should pray for God

to be reconciled unto them. But that has never been taught by inspired men! Paul said, *“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God”* (2. Cor. 5:18-20). Don’t pray for God to be reconciled to you, but become reconciled unto God by accepting His terms of reconciliation!

Pray for Light? Faith? Saving Power?

Again we turn to the Word of the Lord. *“Thy word is a light unto my feet, and a light unto my path”* (Psa. 119:105). That light has been given to all who will walk within it. *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom. 10:17). Faith is developed by accepting the word of God as true and authoritative, not by prayer. *“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul”* (Psa. 19:7) Sinners have only to accept the will of God in obedience to be changed (converted) to Him. *“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek”* (Rom. 1:16). Don’t pray for saving power while despising that which God has given to lost men.

Now for a Brief Summary

It does not appear logical for one to call on *“Our Father which art in heaven”* until he has entered into the family of God. Therefore, the alien sinner must hear the gospel of Christ and believe it. This faith in God and His Son must lead to repentance. Then upon a statement of this faith, he can enter Christ by being baptized into Him (Rom. 10:17; 2 Cor. 7:10; Gal. 3:27). Then as a child of God, he has the privilege of prayer, which is one of the spiritual blessings located in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3). But don’t try to ring Central before you have installed your telephone! First, be sure you have the proper connection before you begin talking!

FOR THE JOY THAT LAY BEFORE HIM

Wayne Jackson

THE 11TH CHAPTER OF Hebrews is said to be God’s “hall of faith”. Thrillingly, it chronicles a variety of marvelous examples of Old

Testament faithful obedience, which are intended to encourage us in our Christian lives. With reference to this matter, the author declares:

"Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily besets us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the author and finisher of the faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1,2).

There are so many rich truths here tucked away that it is scarcely possible to consider them all in a brief article. Let us, though, mention a few matters.

1. The heroes of the Old Testament are said to represent a great cloud of "witnesses" which, almost stadium-like, surrounds us. This does not affirm, as some believe, that our deceased spiritual kinsmen literally are looking down, observing our present activity (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6). Rather, it merely suggests that their abiding examples of faithful endurance are like a cheering crowd, urging us toward victory.

2. Like the ancient runner who was compelled to shed every hindrance, the child of God is to lay aside every hindrance and distraction, especially "the sin" which so easily besets (encompasses). The definite article seems to suggest a certain sin. While some would see this "besetting sin" as any weakness to which one might be especially vulnerable (e.g., drunkenness or temper), the expression more likely denotes the sin of unbelief. Earlier the writer had emphasized: *"Take heed, brothers, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12).*

3. The inspired writer urges that we are to keep running (the verb is a present tense form, denoting continuous activity) the race that is before us. As we run, we are to be *"looking unto Jesus"*. "Looking" reflects a present tense participle form, and the original term suggests *"turning the eyes away from other things"* and fixing them on something else. Obtaining the goal of heaven requires the utmost concentration; a haphazard disposition is not conducive to eternal salvation.

4. Christ is said to be the "author and finisher of the faith." But "the faith" is more precise. Here the expression denotes the fact that Jesus is the source (the originator) and consummate of

“the faith,” i.e., the gospel system (cf Galatians 1:23; 1 Timothy 5:8; Jude 3). No person has a right, therefore, to add to, subtract from, or to modify the New Testament body of doctrine. Let innovators who repudiate what they call “pattern theology” be admonished.

5. The most enigmatic portion of this verse is the affirmation that Christ endured the cross “for the joy” that lay before him. A key word is the preposition “for”. The Greek word is “*anti*”, which has several possible meanings. It commonly connotes “*instead of*”. This would suggest that Jesus chose to come to earth and endure the agonies of Calvary instead of continuing in His pre-incarnate heavenly state. It would emphasize the great sacrifice He made (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9).

On the other hand, “*anti*” can mean “*in exchange for*”, in the sense of “to obtain”. If this is the significance of the term here, then the meaning would be that the Lord willingly endured the shame of the cross in anticipation of the joy of effecting redemption for Adam’s fallen family. This view is probably more consistent with the context, inasmuch as Jesus is portrayed as the model for the saints who long for the prize which is yet in their future.

Can we fathom the depth of love that Jesus Christ had for lost humanity? The horrors of Golgotha paled into insignificance when the Savior contemplated the refreshing salvation that would be available for all who choose to obey him (Hebrews 5:9). This is absolutely astounding. How utterly selfish our own level of dedication appears by comparison.

6. On account of His incomparable love, Christ “endured” the cross. The word is interesting. The idea suggested is to “bear up under”. It hints of the magnificent courage of the Lord as He hung suspended from the cross for six hours.

7. Additionally, the inspired writer affirms that the Savior “despised” the “shame” connected with the cross. It was not the prospect of physical death that so repelled the Lord. Rather, it was the association of the cross with sin. His holy soul recoiled at the idea of being involved with the shame of man’s rebellion against God.

8. Finally, as Christ won the victory (having sat down on the throne—the perfect tense emphasizing the permanence of His accomplishment), so also shall the faithful. Observe, too, that Jesus has achieved the “throne” already; it is not a future hope, as alleged by millennialists.

This passage thus sets forth the wonderful example of Christ. May we ever follow in His path.

DO YOU DISCERN THE LORD'S BODY?

Dayton Keesee

PAUL AFFIRMS THAT THE Lord's people can eat and drink judgment or condemnation on themselves if they "*discern not the body*" (1 Corinthians 11:29 AS). What does that mean?

Defining the Term

The term *discern* (Gk. *Diakrino*) means "...to make a distinction, to prefer, yield to him the preference or honor...making for yourselves a selection" (J.H. Thayer). It is truly fitting that we make a distinction between the body of Christ and all other bodies that have ever lived on the earth.

Christ's Unique Body

Note the following ten ways that Christ's body is unique:

1. How it was made. All other bodies are conceived by man and woman. The angel told Mary: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God*" (Luke 1:35 NAS). He alone was made of woman (Galatians 4:4).
2. His body was the only responsible soul that lived and never sinned (1 Peter 2:21; Romans 3:23).
3. He is the only one who "*bore our sins in His body on the cross*" (1 Peter 2:24).
4. Though He died, yet His body did not "*decay*" (Acts 2:27, 31), fulfilling prophecy and being affirmed by Peter.
5. His resurrected body ascended into heaven to "*appear before the face of God for us*" (Luke 24:51; Hebrews 9:24).
6. His body is seated on the throne, at God's right hand (Acts 2:34,35; Revelation 3:21). No other body ever occupied that position.
7. His body is "*alive for evermore*" (Revelation 1:18). While Lazarus may have been resurrected from the dead (John 11:43f), he could not say what Jesus did in Revelation 1:18!
8. His body is our example (1 Peter 2:21; Acts 4:12). While we usually think of His footsteps as a standard by which we are to live today, in this context remember where His body went! He is our example to prove that where His body went we can go (John 14:6; 17:24; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).
9. His body is our sacrifice (1 Peter 1:18-21; 2 Corinthians 5:14,

15; Isaiah 53:4-6,10,11).

10. His body now reigns as "*King of kings and Lord of lords*" (read carefully Revelation 19:11 -16).

Meditate on this. Ten truths turned into triumph! No other body can claim one, much less, all ten of these unique characteristics! Have you discerned—made a distinction—in these ten ways as to the honored position of King Jesus?

The Price Paid For Neglect

While Paul stated that only one may have been guilty of drunkenness relative to the Lord's Supper at Corinth (11:21), he charged that *many among you* are: "*weak*" (not able); "*sickly*" (not active); "*sleep*" (not alert -v 30). How many "*for this cause*" (a failure to properly discern His majestic deeds done in the body) falter and fail in worship and work?

Note that this context also teaches that if we do properly discern His body, we can move from weakness to strength, from being sickly to healthy, and from being asleep to alert service for the Savior. Think on these things the next time you reach to break the bread and drink the fruit of the vine.

What Does It Mean To Receive Christ?

Grady Miller

Have you ever sat and listened to someone try to explain his position on a certain matter and suddenly realize that he wasn't really saying anything at all? While he may go on and on with his explanation, the words mean nothing. One fellow might understand him to have said the complete opposite of what another listener heard. Although we sometimes joke that politicians are masters of this art, we should recognize that all of us are guilty of occasionally using words and phrases that, upon reflection and examination, mean little or nothing at all.

One expression that is quite popular today is the exhortation to "receive Christ" for salvation. This is unquestionably the key phrase in modern-day evangelism. At the end of a broadcast or revival service the audience is invariably encouraged to "receive Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior". In view of the widespread usage of this phrase, it might be good for us to take a moment and examine the meaning behind these words.

Many people are shocked to discover that nowhere in all the

Bible is a sinner told to receive Christ for salvation. Why not? It just may be because if the sinner was told to "receive Christ" he *still* would not know what to do in order to be saved! **What do you do** when you *receive* Christ? **How** does one *receive* Christ? **In what way** can we *receive* Christ today? The expression "receive Christ", in and of itself, tells us nothing at all.

Of course, we must "receive" Jesus in some way if we are going to be saved. The Bible records that some disciples did receive Him in a spiritual sense (Colossians 2:6; John 1:12). Thus, we do not question *whether* we should receive Him, but *how* we are to receive Him. The world desperately needs to know just what to do in order to receive Jesus as Savior.

You should know that **the message concerning the Christ** has been revealed unto the world, and that **you receive Christ when you receive that message—the Gospel—and obey it**. Paul summarized that message for the saints in Corinth (1 Corinthians 15); he declared that *they had received the Gospel* he had preached unto them and that *they were standing in it*, or were *being faithful to its demands*. In verse two he assured the Corinthians that **they were saved by their obedient reception of the Gospel of Jesus Christ**. The Christians in Corinth **received Christ when they received and obeyed His Gospel**.

Another example of believers receiving Jesus is found in Acts 2. There, on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, Peter preached a powerful sermon that centered on Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Christ (verses 22,36). In verse 41 we read that all those who "*gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*"

One may receive Jesus as his Savior today *by responding to the gospel invitation just as first century disciples did in Corinth and Jerusalem:*

- * Place your faith and trust in Jesus (John 8:24).
- * Repent and turn away from your sins (Acts 17:31).
- * Confess Jesus to be the Son of God (Romans 10:10).
- * Be buried with Him in baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) and arise to walk as a new creature (Romans 6:4).

This is how we receive Jesus, not by some "magic" formula of words devised by men.

WHAT ABOUT THE SABBATH?

Randy Kea

Question #1—What is the Sabbath?

The word *sabbath* means the “ceasing from work or activity.” In the Old Testament Law the word is used in connection with (1) the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31); (2) the Seventh Year (Leviticus 25:2-4); (3) the Fiftieth Year (Leviticus 25:8-11); (4) the Seventy Years of Judah’s bondage (2 Chronicles 36:21); and (5) the Seventh Day of the week. This study will focus on the Sabbath as the seventh day of the week.

Question #2—To whom was the Sabbath given?

The sabbath law was given only to the Jews (Deuteronomy 5:1-3, 6-21). The command to keep the sabbath holy was never given to any other people.

Question #3—When was the sabbath law given to the Jews?

Some might point to Genesis 2:1-3 to prove that the sabbath law was given at creation. However, Genesis 2 is a statement of fact, not a command. The sabbath was not given until the institution of the Old Law (the “Law of Moses”) to the Jews at Mt. Sinai (Nehemiah -9:13,14; Ezekiel 20:10-12).

Question #4—Why was the sabbath given to the Jews?

It was given as a day of rest and a day of remembrance of the Jews’ deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 31:15-17; Deuteronomy 5:15). Also it was given as “a sign” between God and Israel (Exodus 31:13-17). This within itself indicates that it was exclusively a law for the Old Testament Jewish nation.

Question #5—When did the sabbath end as a law to be observed by God’s people?

The Old Testament anticipated the end of the Old Law and of the Sabbath as a holy day (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hosea 2:11). The New Testament says that when Jesus died on the cross, the Old Law (of which the sabbath was part) was “nailed” to the cross and ended, giving way to the New Testament of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8:5-13; Colossians 2:14-16; Hebrews 10:9,10; Hebrews 9:15-17; Ephesians 2:14-16; Galatians 3:19-28).

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements

that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

*“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or **sabbaths**, which are **a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ**” (Colossians 2:14-17).*

Since the Old Law has been taken out of the way, we now live and serve under the New Testament of Christ. As Christians we assemble on the first day of the week (Sunday) to eat the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7), give of our means (1 Corinthians 16:1,2), and worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:23,24).

Sometimes we hear someone talking about the “Christian Sabbath”. This is an unscriptural term. There is nothing “Christian” about the “sabbath”. It was a part of the Old Testament Judaism, not a part of New Testament Christianity.

No one today can take a Bible and scripturally condemn anyone for not “observing the Sabbath” (Colossians 2:16). Let us always *“rightly divide the word of Truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15).

Dealing with Discouragement

David Pharr

THE DEVIL WANTS TO get you out of the church, or at least to make you less committed. If he cannot get you involved in obvious sin, he may try to destroy you through discouragement.

It is not unusual for a Christian to have times of discouragement. It is not reasonable to think that everything can be going well all the time. Even the strongest Christian will have disappointments when the burdens of life are hard to bear. Though they may not let this show to others, but their discouragements are real, nonetheless.

Discouragements may be caused by problems which arise in the home, at school, with friends, etc. Christians are not immune from financial problems, family problems, career problems, and the many other problems that arise in human life. Even Christian couples sometimes have difficulties! Relatives do not always act as we would like. Sickness can be discouraging.

Discouragements also may come because of disappointments related to our service to Christ. Sometimes other members may appear to be hypocritical in their conduct. (Perhaps they, like you, are fighting against Satan's intrusions into their life, and maybe they even temporarily lost the battle.) Brothers and sisters may not do

as we feel they should. Then there are disappointments that come in our efforts to lead others to Christ. It may happen that you have worked and prayed diligently to win someone you love, but thus far it appears your efforts have failed. This kind of discouragement can also be used by Satan to tempt you to give up.

Then there is the possibility of being disappointed with self. You may not have grown in knowledge as fast as you expected. Or you may have found it hard to deal with certain weaknesses. Of course you ought to be disappointed in yourself if your failures are because of sin. But even this should not be allowed to discourage you to the point of giving up. Instead you should ask for forgiveness and determine to never give up in your efforts to live for God.

There are precious promises to help us overcome discouragement. Read the following passages and remember these promises.

Romans 8:28. *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."* This does not say that all that happens will be good, but that God will cause everything to work out for good.

Philippians 4:6,7. *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."* This means that we should not be overcome with anxiety. Rather we should pray about our problems. God will give us peace to carry us through our troubles.

1 Corinthians 15:58. *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* If we never give up we can be sure our efforts will not be in vain.

Galatians 6:9. This tells us not to get tired of doing right, even when it seems hard. We may feel discouragements now, but *"in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."*

1 Corinthians 10:13. Though you may feel your burdens are especially heavy, remember that such things are common to mankind. Others also have burdens. But as Christians, we have this precious promise: *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."*

The wonderful message of these verses is that we should never let ourselves be discouraged to the point that we give up our

faithfulness to God. Instead we should do His will and trust Him to help us through it.

When you feel discouraged, tell God frankly how you feel. Then name the many things for which you are thankful. God loves you because of the decision you made to become His child and also because of the progress you have already made. He is pleased that you are still seeking to become better than you are.

“Marriage Is Honorable”

Dalton Key

THE WORLD HAS MADE a god of sex and a mockery of marriage. Jumping from partner to partner, from mate to mate, from bed to bed has become more rule than exception. “Free love”, which in truth is neither free nor loving, is now running roughshod over the sacred vows of marriage.

But this flippant attitude toward marital commitment should not surprise us. The problem is by no means a new one. According to Gibbons, the renowned historian, the divorce problem was one of five leading causes behind the fall of ancient Rome. Seneca spoke of Roman women as married to be divorced and divorced to be married. Many of them, not unlike their modern prototypes, were said to have distinguished the years by the names and number of their husbands. It seems some things never change.

And yet we expect better of the church. The world may have “*eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin*” (2 Peter 2:14), but the church, as the bride of Christ, must remain pure and chaste (2 Corinthians 11:2). Our standards are not set by Hollywood, but by the Bible.

Current norms, morals, and philosophies notwithstanding, God's decree for marriage remains constant: one man and one woman for life. Aside from the death of a spouse, or the unfaithfulness of a marriage partner, there are no exceptions. When all else fails, read the instructions: “*And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder*” (Matthew 19:4-6).

REMORSE

Emmett Smith

IN HIS SECOND LETTER to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul wrote, "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10 ESV). The older translations used the word sorrow rather than grief, but grief is probably closer to the original meaning. Regardless, the passage teaches a very important lesson about how we deal with remorse.

The Corinthian brethren had been chastised by Paul in his first epistle, and the above passage was Paul's comment on their reaction to his criticism. He was praising them for having repented and corrected the situation, and he attributed their positive response to "godly grief." In contrast, however, Paul wrote that "worldly grief produces death." What a contrast! *Having a godly world view does make a tremendous difference in one's life.*

This difference can be illustrated in several ways. The example of Judas is often cited in discussions of this passage. He was *remorseful*, but apparently not with **godly** remorse. So he committed suicide. Of course, physical death is not the ultimate consequence Paul had in mind here. He was comparing opposite results, *salvation* versus *spiritual death*. And if the evil one can cause someone to despair of life itself then he can forestall that person's repentance and salvation.

The latest U.S. statistics on suicide are sobering. Among them please note the following:

- Persons under age 25 made up 15% of all suicide victims in the year 2000.
- Between 1952 and 1995, the suicide rate for adolescents and young adults nearly tripled.
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death for young people aged 15-19 years. These suicide deaths outnumber deaths from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, and chronic lung disease combined!

It could easily be argued that the tripling of the suicide rate among young people since the early 1950s correlates to *the increasingly secular nature of the government, schools and our society* in general. And this secularization is being pushed with a vengeance these days. How many more victims will be lost to the despair brought on by worldly grief? Don't let yourself be one of them.

"And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you" (Psalm 9:10 ESV).

God's Chosen One, THE CHRIST

Thomas R. Dohling

"...AND THE LEADERS MADE fun of Jesus, saying 'He saved others, let him save himself if he is God's chosen One, the Christ'" (Luke 23:35).

Jesus was grossly misunderstood by the religious leaders and the general public of His day. They simply failed to grasp that **it was precisely because Jesus was God's Chosen One—the Christ—that He chose not to save Himself; chose to endure the insults, the pain, the humiliation, and suffering.** Had He saved Himself, as He was quite capable of doing (Matthew 26: 53,54), we would have been lost forever. He came in *our* interest, not His own.

Actually, the Lord did not *have* to come, but He *wanted* to come in order to save us from the clutches of the Evil One. He did not come to earth just for the fun of it! He came for a purpose—to save humanity, us.

Death on the cross was *the only way* whereby we could be saved. Jesus is *the only way* whereby we could be saved.

Jesus was God's holy, chosen Lamb, set apart from the foundation of the world to be the perfect sacrifice that would take away our sins. Thus, He, the Lord of Life (John 5:26; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16ff), submitted Himself to death on our behalf. He was slain from the creation of the world so that we could be in His book of life (Revelation 13:8)!

Many times we fail to realize that we ought to be fashioned after Him. As He was submissive in all humility (Philippians 2:8b), we also must submit to scorn, insult, pain, humiliation, and suffering for Him (1:29) in order to be transformed into His image (2:5). As we grow in our Christian life, our focus should be more on Christ and less on ourselves until He becomes our **only focal point.**

Jesus must be our **Source of life.** The more we keep looking at the Source the more we will draw from Him, and out of us will flow rivers of living water influencing the lives of those around us, and bringing glory and honor to God. Then, no matter what Satan hurls at us through the world, we won't despair for we will be firmly founded in Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us. We will be convinced that He who could sacrifice so much for us **is surely mindful of us.** Knowing this, **we will never doubt, but fully trust Him Who is eternal life (1 John 1:2).**

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