

Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 60

CHRIST INTERCEDING (CONCLUDED)

by A.W. Pink

Transcript

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John 17:20-26

The following is an Analysis of the dosing section of John 17:— 1. Christ's heart embracing all the redeemed, verse 20. 2. Christ's prayer for their unity, verse 21. 3. Christ's imparting to them His glory, verse 22. 4. Christ and His saints manifested in glory, verse 23. 5. Christ yearning for us to be with Himself, verse 24. 6. Christ contrasting the world from His own, verse 25. 7. Christ assuring us of the Father's love, verse 26. We have now arrived at the dosing section of this wonderful Prayer, a section which supplies a glorious climax to all that has gone before. In it our Lord gives the gracious assurance that He was here praying not for the apostles only, nor simply for the entire company of those who had followed Him while He was here on earth, but for all His people: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe in me through their word" (John 17:20). It is not that the Savior now begins to present separate petitions for another company than those prayed for in the preceding verses, but that those who were to believe, all through the generations that should follow, are here linked with the first Christians. Seven things Christ asked the Father for the whole company of His redeemed. First, He prayed for their preservation: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me" (John 17:11). Second, for their jubilation: "that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13). Third, for their emancipation from evil: "that thou shouldst keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). Fourth, for their sanctification: "sanctify them by thy truth" (John 17:17). Fifth, for their unification: "that they all may be one" (John 17:21). Sixth, for their association with Himself: "that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am" (John 17:24). Seventh, for their gratification: "that they may behold my glory" (John 17:24). A careful analysis of this Prayer reveals the fact that just as the Lord urged the one petition which He made for Himself by seven pleas, so He supported the seven petitions for His people by seven pleas, First, He asked the Father to preserve, sanctify and glorify His people, because they were the Father's love-gift to the Son; see John 17:9: this was an appeal to the Father's love for Him. Second, because of the Father's personal interest in them, see John 17:9, 10. What a mighty plea was this: "they are thine"—Thine elect, Thy children; therefore undertake for them! Third, because His own glory was

connected with them, John 17:10: Mine honor and glory are infinitely dear to Thee, and what glory have I in the world save what comes from My redeemed! These are they who show forth My praises here below! were they to perish, were they to apostatize, where would My honor be? Note how the Savior presses this again at the end of John 17:21 and in verse 23. Fourth, because He was leaving them: He pleads their desolation, and asks the Father to make it up to them in another way. Fifth, because He was leaving them "in the world," see John 17:11, 15: consider, O Father, where I am leaving them: it is a wicked, polluting place—then protect them for My sake. Sixth, the world hated them, see John 17:14: they are surrounded by bitter enemies, and urgently need Thy protection. Seventh, because He set Himself apart (died) for their sakes, see verse 19: therefore, let not My costly sacrifice be in vain! It is also to be observed that in this Prayer believers are contemplated in a sevenfold relation to the world. First, they are given to Christ out of the world, John 17:6. Second, they are left in the world, John 17:11. Third, they are not of the world, John 17:14. Fourth, they are hated by the world, John 17:14. Fifth, they are kept from the evil in the world, John 17:15. Sixth, they are sent into the world, John 17:18. Seventh, they will yet be manifested in glorified unity before the world, John 17:23. There are seven "gifts" referred to in this chapter: four of which are bestowed upon the Mediator, and three upon His people. First, Christ has been given universal "power" or dominion (John 17:2). Second, He was given a "work" to do (John 17:4). Third, He was given a "people" to save (John 17:6). Fourth, He has been given a richly-merited "glory" (John 17:22). Fifth, we have been given "eternal life" (John 17:2). Sixth, we have been given the Father's "word" (John 17:8). Seventh, we have been given the "glory" which the Father gave to the Son (John 17:22). Though verses 20-26 form a clearly-defined separate section of John 17, yet are they so closely connected with the previous sections that the perfect unity of the whole is apparent. That which is distinctive about these closing verses is the glorification of Christ's people. The Lord looks forward to the blessed consummation, while tracing the several steps or stages which lead up to it. Just as it was with the Head Himself, so is it with His members: in His own case, His impending sufferings merged into His glorification (John 17:1, 4), so after speaking of the afflictions which His people would suffer while in the world (John 17:14-19), He turns now to their glorification (John 17:22, 24). Thus did He fill out His "I am glorified in them" (John 17:10)—nothing more being said of them entering the kingdom of God through much tribulation. The position which John 17:20-26 occupy in this Prayer is the key to their interpretation. They are found at the end of it. This of itself is sufficient to indicate the scope of its contents. In the previous sections the Lord Jesus had prayed for His people according to their needs while they were here in the world. But now He looks forward to the time when they shall no more be in the world; when, instead, they shall be where He now is. Therefore does He pray that they may be unified, glorified, and satisfied. This will come before us in detail in the course of our exposition. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17:20). Up to this point the Lord had referred specifically only to the body of disciples alive at that time, but now He lets us know that He was here praying for all Christians. The "neither pray I for these alone" takes in all the petitions and pleas contained in John 17:6 to 19; "but for them also" intimates that not only does He hereby appropriate to all future disciples what He had just said of and asked for the living disciples of that day, but also that they, as well as we, were included in all that follows. What honor did the Lord here put upon individual believers: their names are in Christ's will or testament; they are bound up in the same bundle of life with the apostles. Just as David, when about to die, prayed not only for Solomon his successor, but also for all the people, so Christ not only prayed for the apostles, to whom was committed the government of the church after His departure, but for all believers unto the end of the age. "Neither pray I for these alone." How this reveals Christ's love for us! He thought of us before we had our being: He provided for us before we were born! As parents provide for their children's children yet unborn, so did the Lord Jesus remember future believers, as well as those of

the first generation. Christ foresaw that the Gospel would prevail, notwithstanding the world's hatred, and that numbers would yield themselves to the obedience of faith; therefore, to show that they had a place in His heart, He names them in this His testament. It was Esau's complaint, "Hast thou but one blessing, O my father?" when he came too late, and Jacob had already carried away the blessing. But we were not born too late to receive the blessing of Christ's prayers. He had regard to us even then; therefore, each born-again-soul can say, "He prayed for me"! "Who can reckon up the numbers which have been saved? Who can say how many more will be brought to swell the dimensions of the one flock, ere Christian testimony shall have attained its predestined consummation? Till then the full tale of those for whom the Lord prayed will not be disclosed" (Mr. C. E. Stuart). As this wondrous Prayer stretches forward into eternity, only in eternity will it be fully understood. "But for them also which shall believe on me through their word." Note three things: the persons prayed for; the mark by which they are identified—faith in Christ; the ground and warrant of their faith—the Word. Once again (cf. John 17:9) the Lord makes it known that believers, and believers only, have an interest in His mediatorial intercessions. Christ still confines Himself to the elect! He does not pray for all men, whether they believe or no. "His prayers on earth do but explain the virtue and extent of His sacrifice. He sueth out what He purchased, and His intercession in heaven is but a representation of His merit; both are acts of the same office. Partly because it is not for the honor of Christ that His prayers should fall to the ground: 'I know that thou hearest me always' (John 11:42). Shall the Son of God's love plead in vain; and urge His merit and not succeed? Then farewell the sureness and firmness of our comfort. Christ's prayers would fall to the ground if He should pray for them that shall never believe" (Mr. Manton). The description here given of those who do have an interest in Christ's intercession is their faith in Him. This is the fundamental mark of their identification. He mentions not their love, their obedience, their steadfastness (though these are necessary in their place), but their faith. Wherever our participation of the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection are spoken of, the one thing named is faith. Why? Because this is a grace which compels us to look outside of ourselves to Him! Faith is the great essential, for faith is the mother of obedience and the other graces. But mark it is no vague and undefined faith: "which shall believe on me." To believe in Christ is to have confidence in and to rely upon Him; it is to trust Him, to rest upon Him. The ground and warrant of our faith is "their word," that is, the word of the apostles. "Before the apostles fell asleep, they, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, embodied in the books of the New Testament their doctrine and its evidence, gave an account of what they had taught, and of the miraculous works which had proved that they were taught of God. In these writings they still continue to testify the Son. The apostles alone are 'God's ambassadors' in the strict sense of that word. They alone stand 'in Christ's stead' (2 Cor. 5:20). They had 'the mind of Christ' in a sense peculiar to themselves; and that mind is in their writings. 'Their sound is gone out into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.' Romans 10:18." (Mr. J. Brown). It is only through the Word that we believe in Christ (Rom. 10:14, 17). "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe in me through their word." This is the more blessed if we bear in mind the circumstances under which these words were uttered. The public ministry of Christ was now over, and those who believed on Him, in comparison with those who believed not, were few indeed. And now He was to be put to a criminal's death, and the faith of His disciples, already severely tried, would be made to tremble in the balance. How blessed then to listen to these words of His; He was not discouraged; He knew that the corn of wheat, which was to fall into the ground and die, would bring forth much fruit; like Abraham of old, He "staggered not at the promise of God (that He should have a 'Seed' that would satisfy him) through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." He looked to the future, from things seen to things unseen, and beheld them who were yet to swell the numbers of His "little flock." "This was the 'joy set before him' (Heb. 12:2), and 'these things he spake in the world,' in the presence of His

apostles, 'that they might have his joy fulfilled in themselves' (John 17:13). How well fitted was His cheerful confidence to re-assure their failing spirits—to revive their all-but-expiring: hopes! And how must the recollection of this Prayer have delighted them amid their painful yet joyous labors, when He successfully employed them to 'gather to Him His saints, those with whom He had made covenant by sacrifice,' Psalm 50:51" (Mr. J. Brown). "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). Upon this verse we write with some reserve, not being at all sure of the nature of the unity here prayed for by Christ. In 17: 11 He had asked for the oneness of all His people who were on earth at that time, here He adds to them those who were afterwards to believe—"that they all may be one." In John 17:11 His request was that His people "may be one as we," here that "they all may be one as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." It seems that a mystical union is in view here. But who is competent to define the manner in which the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father! No doubt one reason why the Savior mentioned the unity of His people so frequently in this Prayer (John 17:11, 21, 22, 23) was to intimate that the middle wall of partition which had for so long divided Jews from the Gentiles was on the point of being broken down, and that now He would "make in himself of twain one new man" (Eph. 2:15). "That the world may believe that thou hast sent me." This is what presents a real difficulty to the writer. The previous part of the verse seems to speak of the mystical union which binds believers together; but the last clause shows that it is one that shall powerfully affect the world. It is clear then the unity here prayed for by the Lord is yet to be manifested upon the earth. But it is equally clear that this manifestation is still future, for Christ is here speaking of those which were to believe on Him (John 17:20), and now asks, "that they all may be one." "That the world may believe that thou hast sent me." It is to be carefully noted Christ did not here pray that the result of the manifested unity of His people should be that "the world may believe in me," but "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." These two things are widely different. By the "world" is here meant, the world of the ungodly. But unregenerate men are never brought to believe in Christ by any external displays of Divine power and goodness—the benevolent miracles wrought by Him clearly prove this. Nothing but the Word applied by the Spirit ever quickened sinners into newness of life. "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them" (John 17:22). Christ here speaks of a "glory" which the Father had given to Him. Clearly, this is not His essential glory, which He possessed as the eternal Son, as co-equal with the Father; which glory He never relinquished. Nor is it the visible and external glory which He laid aside when He took the Servant form (Phil. 2:6, 7), when He "who was rich," for our sakes became "poor," which glory He had asked to be restored to Him again (John 17:5). Rather is it that "glory" which He acquired as the incarnate One, as the reward for His perfect work here on earth. It is to this that Isaiah referred when he said, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he hath poured out his soul unto death" (Isa. 53:12). An inheritance has been given Him (Heb. 1:2), and this He will share with His own, for, by wondrous grace, we are "joint-heirs" with Christ (Rom. 8:17). But what is meant by "the glory which thou gavest me I have given them"? The Lord is speaking from the standpoint of the Divine decrees, and thus "callest those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17). It is parallel with Romans 8:30: "Whom he justified, them he also glorified"—not "will glorify." So absolutely certain is our future glorification that it is spoken of as a thing already accomplished. But though the actual bestowment of the glory be yet future, it is presented for faith to lay hold of and enjoy even now, for "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). "That they may be one, even as we are one" (verse 22). Verse 22 opens with the word "And," and what follows explains what the Lord had said in the previous verse. The union referred to is the consequence of "glory given" to us—"the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that (in order that) they may be one, even as we are one"! Our spiritual

union is begun now, but it only attains its full fruition in the life to come. That this oneness results from Christ's bestowal on us of His acquired glory proves that it is no man-made unity about which we hear so much talk and see so little evidence these days! "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:23). Here is further evidence that the unity for which our Lord prayed in John 17:21 is one that is to be manifested in the future, for John 17:22 and 23 follow without any break. The being "made perfect in one" is to have its realization at the return of Christ for His saints: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). "God having provided some better thing for us (New Testament saints), that they (Old Testament saints) without us should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:40). It is then that Christ will "present it to himself a glorious church... holy and without blemish" (Eph. verse 27). Then will there be perfect oneness in faith, knowledge, love, holiness, glory. "That the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." When God's elect have all been gathered together in one (John 11:52), when the glory which Christ received from the Father has been imparted to them, when they shall have been made perfect in one, then shall the world have such a clear demonstration of God's power, grace and love toward His people, they shall know that the One who died to make this glorious union possible was the sent One of the Father, and that they had been loved by the Father as had the Son, for "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4); then "he shall come to be glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe... in that day" (2 Thess. 1:10). "And hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." As one has rightly said, "This expression is stupendous—God loveth the saints as He loveth Christ." Mr. Manton points out that "The 'as' is a note of casuality as well as similitude. He loveth us because He loved Christ, therefore it is said, 'He hath made us accepted in the Beloved'. (Eph. 1:6). The ground of all that love God beareth to us is for Christ's sake. We are chosen in Him as the Head of the elect (Eph. 1:4), pardoned, sanctified, glorified, in and through Him. All these benefits and fruits of God's love are procured by Christ's merit. Three chief ends are accomplished thereby. First, it makes the more for them the freeness of His grace that the reason why He loveth us is to be found outside of ourselves. Second, it makes for His own glory: God could not love us with honor to Himself if His wisdom had not found out this way of loving us in Christ: there was a double prejudice against us—our corrupt nature was loathed by His holiness, our transgressions provoked a quarrel with His justice. Third, it makes for our comfort, for if God should love us for our own sakes it would be a very imperfect love, our graces being so weak, and our services so stained." The particle "as" also signifies a similitude and likeness. First, there is likeness in the grounds of it. The Father loveth Christ as His Son, so He loveth us as His sons (1 John 3:1). Again; the Father loveth Christ as His Image, He being "the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person" (Heb. 1:3); so He loveth the saints, who are by grace renewed after His image (Col. 3:10). Second, there is a likeness in the properties of it. He loves Christ tenderly; so us—"as dear children" (Eph. 5:1): He loves Christ eternally: so us—"I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3). He loves Christ unchangeably: so us—see Malachi 3:6. Third, there is a likeness in the fruits of it. In the intimacies of communion: John 5:30, cf. 15:15. In the bestowal of spiritual gifts: John 3:35, cf. 1 Corinthians 3:22, 23. In reward: Psalm 2:7, 8, cf. Revelation 2:26. What a stay for our poor hearts is this! What comfort when hated by the world, to know that the Father loved us as the Son! What a glorious theme for our daily meditation! What cause for adoring worship! "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me" (John 17:24). As we have meditated upon the different verses of this profound chapter the words of the Psalmist have occurred to us again and again: "Such knowledge too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it" (Ps. 139:6). How pertinently do they apply to the lofty point which

we have now reached! This 24th verse may well be regarded is the climax of this wonderful Prayer. Once more, the Redeemer says, "Father," for He is suing for a child's portion for each of His people; it is not simply wages, such as a servant receives from his master, but an inheritance such as children receive from their parents—the inheritance being the Father's House, where the Savior now is. Here for the first time in this prayer Christ says "I will." It was a word of authority, becoming Him who was God as well as man. He speaks of this as His right, on account of His purchase and of the covenant transactions between the Father and the Son concerning those given to Him. "I will" comported with the authority (John 17:2) which the Father has given Him over all flesh and the glory into which He has entered (John 17:5, 22). Or again, this "I will," uttered just before His death, may be regarded as His "testament"—this was the legacy which He bequeathed to us: Heaven is ours, an inheritance left us by Christ! "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." What comfort is here! What sweeter words for meditation than these of Christ? What assurance they breathe: not one of the elect shall fail to enter Heaven! What joy is here: "In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). The queen of Sheba said, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom" (1 Kings 10:8). They that shall stand before the Lord and see His glory are much more happy. How this reveals to us the heart of the Savior: He will not be satisfied till He has all His blood-bought ones in His presence—"for ever with the Lord." For this He is coming personally to take us to be with Himself: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). "That they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me." "It is not on the one hand that which is personal from everlasting to everlasting, beyond creature ken, that in the Son which I presume none really knows nor can, save the Father who is not said to reveal Him. Neither is it on the other hand the glory given to the blessed Lord which is to be manifested even to the world in that day, in which glory we are to be manifested along with Him. Here it is proper to Himself on high, yet given Him by the Father, as we are in His perfect favor to behold it: a far higher thing than any glory shared along with us, and which the Lord, reckoning on unselfish affections Divinely formed in us, looks for our valuing accordingly as more blessed in beholding Him thus than in aught conferred in ourselves. It is a joy for us alone, wholly outside and above the world, and given because the Father loved Him before its foundation. None but the Eternal could be thus glorified, but it is the secret glory which none but His own are permitted to contemplate—'blest answer to reproach and shame'—not the public glory in which every eye shall see Him. Nothing less than that meets His desire for us. How truly even now our hearts can say that He is worthy? (Bible Treasury). "For thou lovest me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). This is mentioned as the reason why the Father had given Him this glory. And how it supplies us with a standard for measurement—the glory which has been conferred upon our blessed Savior is commensurate with the everlasting love which the Father had for Him! What a glory must it be! And O the privilege, the honor, the bliss of beholding it. How this should make us yearn for the time when we shall gaze upon His resplendent glory! "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee; but I have known thee" (John 17:25). It is not easy to determine the precise relation which the last two verses of John 17 bear to the preceding ones. If their words be attentively considered, they will be seen to express no desire and to ask for no blessing, nor do they contain any plea to enforce the previous petitions. With Mr. Manton we are inclined to say, "It is a part of Christ's supplication; He had made His will and testament, and now allegeth the equity of it." Thus we understand the "O righteous Father" here to have a double force. First, God is not only merciful, but just, in glorifying the elect; His grace reigns through righteousness (Rom. 5:21). It expressed the Savior's confidence in the justice of the Father that He would do all things well. "He was asking for what He was entitled to according to the stipulation of the eternal covenant. Justice required that His requests should be granted." (Mr. John Brown). The words "O

righteous Father" are also to be connected with what follows—"the world hath not known thee." This is very solemn. Christ not only left the world without His intercession, but He turned it over to the justice of the Father. Not only did Divine righteousness bestow heavenly glory on the elect, but Divine righteousness refuses to bestow it on the unbelieving world. "The world hath not known thee." therein lies their guilt—"Because that which may be known of God is manifest to them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:19, 20). "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee; but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me." "The Lord draws the line definitely between the world and His own, and makes it turn not on rejecting Himself but on ignoring His Father. Here, therefore, it is a question of judgment in result, however grace may tarry and entreat; and therefore He says, 'Righteous Father,' not 'Holy Father,' as in John 17:11 where He asks Him to keep those in His name, as He had done whilst with them. Now He sets forth not the lawlessness of the world, not its murderous hatred of Himself or of His disciples, nor yet of the grace and truth revealed in the Gospel, nor of the corruptions of Christianity and the church, which we are sure lay naked and open before His all-seeing eyes, but that on the one side the world knew not the Father, and on the other that the Son did, as the disciples that the Father sent the Son: words simply and briefly said, but how solemn in Lord here linking us with Himself—"I have known... these character and issues!" (Bible Treasury). How blessed to see the have known? "And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26). Here the Lord briefly sums up what He had done and would still do for His disciples—make known the Father unto them. He returns at the end to what He had said at the first, see verse 6. The I "will declare it" is not to be limited; true, Christ is now, by the Spirit, revealing the Father, but He will continue so to do throughout eternity. Then He states why He is the Declarer of the Father's name "that [in order that] the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." "Where Christ is known as the Father's sent One, the deepest blessing and the highest privileges are even now given, and not merely what awaits the saints at Christ's coming. If ever there was one capable of estimating another, it was the Son in respect of the Father; and His name, the expression of what He was, with equal competency He made known to us. He had done it on earth to the disciples; He would do so from heaven whither He was going; and this that He might give them and us, the consciousness of the same love of the Father which rested ever on Himself here below. As if to cut off the not unnatural hesitation of the disciples He added the blessed guarantee of His own being in them, their life. For they could understand that, if they lived of His life, and could be somehow as He before the Father, the Father might love them as Him. This is just what He does give and secure by identification with them, or rather as He puts it, 'and I in them.' Christ is all and in all." (Bible Treasury). "And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." How striking to note that love, not eternal life, or faith, or even glory, is the last word here: "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). But let it be particularly observed that the love of the Father dwelleth in us only through the mediation of the Son, hence the final words, "and I in them," cf. John 17:23. Again, how blessed the conjunction here: Christ in us, the love of the Father in us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5)! Suitable close was this. The section began with, "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1), and it closes with "that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them!" In the genial warmth and glorious radiance of that love shall we bask throughout eternity. The following questions are to prepare the student for our next lesson:— 1. What type was fulfilled in verse 1? 2. What is suggested by the "garden," verse 1? 3. Why is there no reference here to

His agony? 4. What made them fall to the ground, verse 6? 5. Why did Christ repeat His question, verse 7? 6. In what character did Christ speak at the end of verse 8? 7. What important practical truth is exemplified in verse 11?

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