

Pilgrim's Progress

by Ernest C. Reisinger

The gospel is a message that is relevant in all ages and is the power of God unto salvation, but it is often misunderstood and requires a deep understanding of its meaning and significance.

Duration: 37:47

Scripture: Luke 4:16

Topics: "Moral Law", "The Gospel"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding the moral law and its role in revealing the breach between God and humanity. He highlights how people often create their own moral codes to justify their actions and avoid feeling guilty. The preacher also shares an anecdote about a group of Christian students who were unable to provide a concise and unified definition of the gospel. He concludes by emphasizing the need to understand the true nature of the gospel as good news and glad tidings.

Transcript

I thought of that verse in 2nd Corinthians when it says, For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. That's a wonderful word, grace, grace. If you have your Bibles here, and those of you who are listening to the radio, you'll take your Bible now, and turn to the epistle to, the first epistle of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians, the church at Thessalonica, chapter 2, and I want to read the first 12 verses.

And I think I'll read my text first, and then read it in context. But before we do either, let us bow to the God of the book, and ask him to send his spirit to assist us to speak, and to hear in our hearts the word of truth. Let us pray.

Oh Holy Father, righteous Father, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the revelation of thy words. We thank you for the full expression of that revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. We thank you, Lord, that if we hide it in our heart, it's a means that you provided that we might not sin against thee.

We thank you, Lord, that thy word is the means that thou hast ordained for our sanctification, for our Savior prayed, Sanctify them through thy truth. Thy word is truth. And we come today, Lord, to be instructed, to seek a more holy walk with thee, to be corrected, to be convicted, and to be helped by your

truth and by your spirit.

Therefore, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we ask thee to send that spirit. We would remember to pray for those today who have needs of our prayers, particularly we think of our dear friend, Amelia Collis, and her husband. We commend them to thee, to thy grace, to thy care.

Through Christ our Redeemer we pray. Amen. The text, or at least part of the text, is found in the fourth verse, where Paul reminds us of our trust.

And he says, But as we are allowed of God or approved of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God which trieth or proveth our hearts. Let me read these twelve verses, because Paul, three times, uses the word gospel. And that's what I want to talk about today.

But let me first read this portion from God's holy word. For you yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain. But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as you know at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention, that is, amid much opposition.

For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor of guile. But as we are allowed or approved of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God which proveth or trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words.

Flattery gets you nowhere. As you know, Paul said, nor a cloak of covenants, God as witness, nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, neither yet of others, when we might have been burdensome as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children.

So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and travail, for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses.

And God also, how wholly and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe. And as ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father does his children, that you may walk worthy of God, the whole purpose is that you may walk worthy of God who has called you unto his kingdom and glory. One of my burdens, and not only mine, but I suppose the burden of everyone who's serious about the Bible and about his call to preach the Bible and witness the truth of Christ, one of my burdens is a revival of true religion that will affect personal conduct, that will affect true piety in the home, that will affect social and moral standards and practices in the community.

That's a revival, and that's my burden. But along with that burden, there is a deep conviction that if that revival ever comes again, if there's ever a revival of true religion, it will begin by a recovery of the gospel of the grace of God. I say a recovery of the gospel of the grace of God, because I believe that our message needs to be recovered.

It will not come, I have no more confidence that it will come by some new method or more religious machinery or more religious mechanics or more conventions or congresses or symposiums or conferences on methods of how to take the gospel. It is my deep conviction that we need to examine that message that we call the gospel. What is the gospel? What is its present relevant value? Is there any present relevant value to that message we call the gospel? And I want to spend this week, and if I don't

get finished today, I'm going to stop where the clock gets at the right place.

And if I don't get to the period where it's meant to be, I'm going to take up right there next week. So I'm not going to rush through these tremendous burdens and convictions on my soul and that of many others. So I want to spend a little time because I believe that the gospel is relevant and is meant to be believed and received by individuals, and I believe it's as applicable in 1975 as it was in 1475, and I trust that I'll be able to show its relevance to all persons in all ages.

First, let me just call your attention to a few of the biblical references to the Word, the Word itself, how it comes to us in the Bible. We learn from the Bible the gospel is something to be preached. It's a message.

In Mark 1, verse 14, it says that Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel. So whatever it was that Jesus preached, it was the gospel. Whatever he preached, it was the gospel.

When John the Baptist was in prison, John heard about the works of Jesus and what Jesus was doing, but he was in prison. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, Are you Israel's long-expected Messiah, or shall we look for another? Jesus sent John's disciples back to him, and among other things that he told them to tell John in answer to his question was, Tell John that the poor have their gospel preached to them. So whatever it was, it was relevant and good for the poor.

In Luke chapter 4, we have a record of our Lord returning to his hometown, as it were, the area of Nazareth, where he was brought up. And as his custom was, he went to church. I wish it was all your customs to go to church.

The Bible said he went to the synagogue. And when he stood up to read, he read from the prophet Isaiah. And the portion that he read was how that God had anointed him with the Spirit to preach the gospel.

At the end of Matthew and Mark, particularly, we have our Lord's mandate, his last words to his church, his mandate to his church. And it's this. I quote Jesus, Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel.

Therefore we can see clearly that whatever the church's main duty is, among other duties, whatever its main duty is, it's to teach and to preach the gospel. And not only that, it says to every creature. Now when our Lord went back to heaven, where he sits on a throne this very hour, what did his followers do? Well, his followers did what he told them to do.

And so we open up that sacred history in the New Testament, the book of Acts, where we see the history of the early beginnings of the apostles' work immediately after our Lord went back to heaven. And what do we find? We find, and I quote, they preached the gospel in many villages. Another place I find these words.

The Lord called us to preach the gospel. So whatever it is that they preached, whatever it is that they were called and commanded to preach, it was the gospel. Our Lord's chiefest apostle, that great apostle Paul, said in writing to the Romans, to the epistle, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

And he gives his reason. For it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentiles. And whatever it is, therefore, according to Paul, it had power.

And whatever it is, he was not ashamed of it. We find him writing to the church at Corinth, where he said, Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel. And on another occasion, he said, Woe is me if I

preach not the gospel.

And every preacher ought to say that. Woe is me if I preach not the gospel. If I give you book reviews, if I tickle your ears, if I just use some kind of super-psychiatry to make you feel better and not preach the gospel, woe is me if I preach not the gospel.

Surely we see, and I only touched a few of these references to the word itself, the New Testament is literally pregnant with the word gospel. And surely we see the prominent place the word occupies in the Bible. Not only that, we ought to see the prominent place the word occupies in the history of the Christian church.

It's a basic word. It's a fundamental word. And to not understand what the gospel is, is to be a stranger to true religion.

Now, the word gospel is used in many ways. And that's one of the reasons it makes it a difficult word. In its larger sense, or in its general sense, it's used as the good news about Christ, his person, his work, about the kingdom of God, about salvation, the teachings of Christ and his apostles, is sometimes referred to as the gospel.

That's in its general and large use. The Christian faith is sometimes referred to in still a larger use as the gospel. The writings of the first four books of the New Testament are called the gospel of Matthew, the gospel of Mark, Luke, and John.

They're called the gospel. Reading a portion from one of the four gospels in the more liturgical churches, if you read it at the left side of the altar, it's called the altar side of the gospel. And whatever they read from there, they said, well, the minister read the gospel this morning.

So it's used in that sense. Because even that place itself is called the altar side of the gospel. But I don't want to use the word in a general sense.

That's too often why we misunderstand the real essence of the word itself. I want to use it in its more specific sense. What specifically is the gospel? Oh, yes, it's a message.

You say, well, that's too simple a question to ask a Christian congregation. Well, I just asked all our Sunday school teachers what the gospel was, and I didn't get the same answer from any one of them. Now, they weren't all wrong in what they said.

They all were getting towards it or had some relation to the gospel. But not one of them had the same answer. I just asked them just now.

You say, well, it's too simple a question. Let me suggest, if you think it's a simple question, you ask the next ten church members you meet, what is the gospel? And you'll see if you get ten of the same answers. Now, if it's so simple, and it's so important, of paramount importance, then they ought to have something like the same answer.

I'm talking about specifically, not that general use of the gospel that I referred to a moment ago. And you'll soon discover the great ignorance of this fundamental question that's really the heart. It's the bottom.

It's the base of all that we're meant to do. Well, what would you say if some sincere inquirer asked you this morning, Mrs. Jones or Mary or Tom, what is the gospel? What would you say? My dear, I am convinced

by experience that the average church member not only doesn't know what it means by definition, but they have not experienced its power and its benefits and its blessings. Let me support that assertion by two experiences.

I was the president of a constructions company for 20 years before I preached all that time too, but before I gave myself altogether to preaching and serving the Lord in another capacity. Once years ago, I had my office far back from the reception office as I could get it. Every professional man and every businessman knows that that's a good idea.

Keep away from the front desk as far as you can and have the secretary and the receptionist trained to keep people away from you or you'll never get anything done but entertain people. So this particular receptionist was well instructed about to keep people away from me that I didn't want to see. So I remember this day, she called me and she said, Boss, she said there are three women here and they insist on seeing you.

I said, can't they see Mr. Coleman or so and so and so? No, they must see you. Now what three women want in a construction office that some little bit after 8 o'clock in the morning is more than I could tell and I was kind of intrigued myself. So I went down to the front office.

I never say send them up, you can't get rid of them. You go there and then when you want to leave you say I must go back to my office and they go. That's the way you do that.

So anyhow, I go down to the office and here was these three nice looking, clean, young women. And you know what they wanted me to do? They wanted me to buy a cookbook. And I soon realized in a very short time that I was duty bound to buy a cookbook.

And there was no question about that. And the reason they wanted to see me is because they were from the church and they were selling this cookbook to make money and they heard that I was religious and I was a sure touch. So they were going to sell a cookbook.

And I thought well, since I'm duty bound to buy this book I might as well ask a few questions. So I said ladies, what are you going to do with the money? They said well, we're going to give it to the church. It's for the church.

I said well what's the church going to do with it? Well they weren't quite sure. And I thought well I'll help you out a little bit. I said well it would be a good idea if they used it to preach the gospel.

Oh yes, that's it, that's it. And then I kind of got in trouble because I asked these three women well tell me what is the gospel? Now here are three women and I submit to you that they were serious or they wouldn't have been pounding the streets to raise money for the church. Here were three women in my office and this is the answer they gave me because I went back to my desk and I wanted to keep it for the record, for my own record.

One woman said it's the golden rule. The second woman said it's a symbol of Christ and the third woman said it's the Ten Commandments. And I'd like to add your answer to that question on this piece of paper that I have in front of me.

And you wouldn't think that this was so foolish after all. That's not the gospel. And here were women from the church.

They weren't from the YMCA or some club or the country club. They were from the church and they had no idea that they could express in words what the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ really was. You say well that's a unique case.

No it's not. I was speaking at the University of Delaware to the InterVarsity, Christian InterVarsity Fellowship and one night, one of the meetings, I think I spoke to them three times on this particular visit and one of the nights we had some time to spare and we were sitting around in a large circle and we had I think 15 minutes to kill for some unknown reason. So I said let's go around the room and ask each person to give in a concise, succinct form what is the gospel.

And I did this with the cream of the Christian students at the University of Delaware and when we finished around the circle there was not two answers that was the same. I'm talking about specifically. I don't mean that they were far out beat answers.

They had something to do with the gospel. They had some relationship to it and some part of it. But it was not an answer what is the gospel.

Well, many would be able to say oh it's good news, it's glad tidings. Yes, but what is the good news? What specifically is the good news? What specifically is the glad tidings? Well I hear somebody else say a little closer to it well it's the good news how Christ died for our sins and rose for our justification. Well that's getting closer.

But if a person does not know who Christ is and I say to them Christ died for your sins or died for our sins and rose for our justification if he doesn't know who Christ is or why he died that's not good news to him. If you think that's good news try it on the next ten people you meet out at church. Say hey buddy, I've got some good news for you.

Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification. And you see if he thinks it's good news he'll think you ought to have your head examined and you'll have a few bricks less than a full load. That's what he'll think.

Let me give you an example. I have, my closest fishing buddy is not here he's back in the north. And he's not a Christian, he's not a professing Christian he's been a board member of a church and he's been on building committees at churches but he makes no profession to be a Christian.

Now you know, he doesn't know why Christ died he told me he thought Christ died because he was a sinner. Now that's a fact, that's not fictitious. That's what a man told me.

I heard it with my own two ears. Here's a man who'd been on the board of a church telling me that he thought Christ died because he was a sinner. Suppose I went down, let me illustrate it again.

Suppose I went down in the heart of New York City and I went to some of my dear Jewish friends and I got all their little children together now remember they're Jewish they never heard about Jesus and I say to these little boys and girls Boys and girls, I want to tell you the best news that ever came to earth. I want to tell you the good news. I want to tell you the glad tidings.

Listen, listen to me now. Once upon a time, some wicked men took an innocent man called Jesus to the brow of a hill and there they put nails in his hands nails in his feet, a spear in his side Isn't that wonderful? Now you know they'd look at me like there was something wrong with me. Listen my friends, and you'll see

what I'm getting at and I don't want you to miss it.

The good news about Christ's death and his resurrection is only good as it's related to some other facts and without the other facts the cross and the blood of Christ is nothing more than a gory story not fit to be told to children. Apart from the related facts there's some bad news that men need to hear and then this what I'm talking about might be good news but it's not good news to that man on the street. He doesn't receive it as good news.

He doesn't believe it as good news. And most of our lost church members have never felt the power of it as good news. Let me illustrate it again.

My lawyer years ago had a client. He was an old man. He was very wealthy.

And in his old age he didn't live the best kind of a life. He was another lost church member. And during his life he had done some very unethical things.

But as he got older his sins bothered him. And so he was going up to the lawyer having his will changed about every... Mr. Phil, you can appreciate this. This fellow coming in.

One of his will changed. His sins. And so the lawyer called me one day.

He said, Ernie. He says, I've got a client. He said, you know him.

I'm going to tell you his name. He says, I believe he needs what you have more than he needs what I have. Would you stop and see him? I said, sure.

So he told me his name and since then I knew he was a very prosperous business man who'd retired. So I went around to his house and he had books. He had books on peace of mind, peace of this and peace of that.

And he had all kinds of books. Norman Vincent Peale and all that business. And underneath he had the Bible.

And I said, I won't say his name now, Mr. Soto, I said, have you tried that black book underneath that pile? Oh, he had a pile of books. He had a gang of Norman Vincent Peale. Now you know, I should say something about that.

You know, to some people, Peale is appealing and Paul is appalling. And to other people, Paul is appealing and Peale is appalling. So I didn't get into all that, my views about that.

I'm in the latter group, in case you don't know where I stand on that particular thing. But I said to him, Mr. Soto, have you tried that black book to find comfort? And this is what he said. He said, oh yes, and it can get me and I'm going to stop.

I said, wonderful, you didn't read far enough. Because before it can comfort you, it does convict you and convince you that you need a comfort that this world can't give and a comfort that the world can't take away. Oh, Mr. Soto, read on and you'll find that the condemning part is only so that you recognize your need.

Now that's why it's so important that we speak of the law. Because the law, the whole Bible is law and gospel. Whether it's talking about history, whether it's talking about individuals and their hereditary background, their life, it's always in respect to the law of God or the promises of God.

All the history, all the individuals, all the biographical sketches we have in the Bible is related to the law of God or the gospel. And that's why it's important that we preach the law first. That's why it's important that men know the commandments.

Let me read them to you. And as I read the commandments in your presence this morning, I ask you to ask yourself, what do these commandments say to me? What do they say to me? I'm going to read them today because some of you haven't heard them for a while. And some of you have picked out just a few and you think, well, this one's important, I shouldn't murder, but it doesn't matter if I commit adultery.

Or some others have picked out, well, this is fine, I don't think I should steal, or I don't think I should bear false witness, but it doesn't matter if I forget all about the Sabbath and act like it doesn't exist. Let me read them for you. And ask yourself the question, what do these commandments say to me? Well, I assure you, it's not going to be good news.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. First commandment. Second, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them. For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate me. And bless God, showing mercy on thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

That's the second commandment. Third commandment. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Fourth commandment. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Now that means something.

Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt not do any work. Thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within the gates.

For six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day. Wherefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. And then the commandment that this generation knows nothing about either.

Honor thy father and mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. Thou shalt not murder. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. And then the last one that teaches us how are to interpret all the commandments, showing that the commandments are not just letter, cold letter, but that they are spiritual. To show that they go to the heart, not just the letter of the law, but the commandment that the Jews miss.

This is why they miss the Messiah, because they miss this commandment. Thou shalt not covet. That's nothing you do with your hands or your feet.

That's something you do that nobody knows anything about. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.

Thou shalt not covet his manservant nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's. Well, what does that say to you? Well, let me tell you what it says to me. It says to me, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty.

Somebody says, well, I'm not a Christian. I don't care about that. This is not addressed to Christians, specifically.

This is addressed to every creature that breathes God's air. This is the mandate of the Creator to the creature. And this is what I want you to see, and don't miss it.

Because until men see the breach in the Creator-creature relationship, they will never be interested in a redeemer relationship. Let me say it again. Until men and women and boys and girls see the breach and the consequences of the breach between the Creator and the creature, they will not be interested in a redeemer.

You see, these commandments teach us something about God. What do the commandments tell me about God? Well, the commandments are holy, and they're just and good, says Saint Paul. And if the commandments, if God's law is holy, then the God who gave the law is holy and just and good because his law stems from his nature.

And if his law is holy and just and good, then the character of God is holy and just and good. Not this sentimental God that's going to just forgive everything on any basis. God is holy and just and good.

Not this lovey-dovey sentimental God that doesn't have any justice or holiness or righteousness. So the moral law teaches us something about the Creator. The character of the Creator.

But secondly, that what I've read to you teaches us something. That teaches me something about myself. And if you're halfway honest, it'll teach you something about yourself.

It'll teach you that you're a guilty sinner, and the consequences of sin is hell and judgment. That makes the redeemer relationship something beautiful, something good news, something to be had, of course. If you're like most people, measure yourself by your own standards, you always come up weighing the proper amount.

If you're like most people that mark your own report card because you give your own examination, you always come out with A's because you're not as bad as Mary Smith, you're not as bad as John Jones, and so you're fine. You've made a little moral code. You're like the boy that had an argument with his mother about the length of the fish.

Little Johnny says, I caught a fish, Mother, and the fish was four feet long. She says, John, the fish is not four feet long. He says, Mother, I know the fish is four feet long.

She says, Johnny, I must teach you not to lie. The fish is not four feet long. Yes, it is, Mother.

And with tears in his eyes, he says, Mother, it is four feet long. She says, Johnny, how do you know? He said, I measured it, and I made my little hole, and he had a little hole, and it was four foot long. He had the feet marked off, and it was four feet.

That's the way people do with the commandments, and look for their moral conduct. That's why they don't feel guilty, because you don't feel guilty if you make your own code and then live up to it, although most people don't live up to their own even. In other words, the moral law, let me show you again, the moral law not only teaches me about the Creator and the breach between the Creator and the creature, but it tells him something about God and the creature.

And then we see that awful breach, and the law shows every man what he is and how he has acted in relationship to what God has commanded him to be and do. That's what the law tells me. It tells me how I've acted and how you've acted in respect to what God Almighty has told you to be and to do.

And that awful breach and the consequences of that breach is the bad news that men need to hear. And they will never properly or savingly be interested in the good news until they've felt the sad and awful consequences of a breach between the Creator and themselves as creatures. Now that's why the old missionaries, when they went into foreign lands, they didn't start shouting John 3.16 from the top of the trees.

And they translated their things for the heathen. The first thing they translated, John Elliot, the first missionary to the American Indians, the first thing he translated was the commandment. And this first sermon was on the law.

Why? Because he thought he would be saved by keeping the law? Of course not. He had no idea that men could be saved or justified before God by keeping the law. But he knew one thing that our generation doesn't seem to know, that it was by the law that they saw their need to be justified.

And it was by the law that they saw their need to be saved. That's why the old catechism and all prudent parents of days gone by, all the old church records including the best, they taught their children the commandment. And we live in a generation that our children don't even know the commandment.

We say, Johnny, be a good boy. He has no idea what we mean. What standard is good, Dad? That is exactly why I say we need to recover the gospel because it has its religious and other facts.

And I plead with you, every listening friend and everyone in divine presence, teach your children, teach your children the law of God and you won't have any problem if they ever see that the God, the Spirit applies the law to their heart. You won't ever have any problem about them seeing the beauty and the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul knew this.

That's why he said, and I quote, the law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. And that's why I said from this pulpit, and I hope you'll remember it and I'm going to repeat it again, and I hope you never forget this. If you forget many other things I've said, listen to me this morning.

Listen. That's why I've said that there are three great truths of the Bible that stand or fall together. You touch one and you've touched them all.

And this is why my conviction is that we need to recover the whole message. And here's the three great truths that stand or fall together. The law of God, the cross of Christ, and the righteous judgment of Almighty God.

And you say, why do I say they stand or fall together? Well, if I do away with the law of God, which we've pretty much done, then nobody knows what sin is. And if they don't know what sin is and care about sin,

who cares about the Savior? If men are not conscious of sin, who cares about the cross and what took place there? So you see, if you touch the law, you make the cross odious and useless. If you touch the cross, you have no answer to a broken law.

So you can't touch that without affecting that. Because there's no answer to our breaking the law. And if, thirdly, if you touch the righteous judgment of Almighty God, who cares about His law or His Christ? That's why I say these three great truths stand or fall together.

The law of God to make us conscious of what the Creator commands us and what we are in respect to that. The cross of Christ, which is God's only answer to a broken law. And third, we have the freedom of conscience of sin and of judgment.

This generation, the lost church members for the most part have never felt the convicting power of God's law. And therefore, they have never felt in a saving way the joy and the comfort of the blessed gospel. Well, I see I'm not going to get to the definition, but I want to give you one statement, what I'm trying to say.

One old Puritan said it like this. It is the sharp needle of the law that makes way for the scarlet thread of the gospel. And until men see and stand under that perfect searching law of God, they'll never feel the liberty and comfort of the joy of the blessed gospel.

Well, my time's gone.

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