

Luke 6

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of Christ's victory and the celebration of the first day of the week, while also highlighting the need for Christians to respond to persecution with love and kindness.

Scripture: Matthew 11:28, Luke 6:5, Hebrews 4:9

Topics: "Sabbath", "Grace and Faith"

Description

John Nelson Darby discusses the significance of the Sabbath in relation to Jesus' authority and the transition from Jewish law to grace. He emphasizes that Jesus, as the Lord of the Sabbath, has the right to redefine its meaning, highlighting that true rest is found in Him rather than in legalistic observance. The sermon illustrates how Jesus' actions and teachings reveal God's grace, particularly towards the Gentiles, and how faith, humility, and love are central to the new covenant. Darby also contrasts the blessings of those who follow Christ with the fate of those who reject Him, underscoring the importance of recognizing Jesus' divine authority and grace.

Transcript

Here we have a most weighty thing spoken of - the sabbath. It is a question that often agitates the minds of men, and it was then specially important as closing Jewish relations. And this, it will be borne in mind, was just where the Lord had morally arrived at the close of the preceding chapter. The rights of His person and His grace, now becoming more rejected by the religionists, of Israel, reach out beyond the narrow bounds of that proud people. God thereon, by degrees, intimates the coming purpose of His mercy; His salvation in due time shall be sent unto the Gentiles, and they will hear if the Jew judges himself unworthy of everlasting life. God will have His own joy of saving souls somewhere.

65 Now it is very evident that the incident of the cornfield (v 1-5), "on the second sabbath after the first," thoroughly falls in with the object of the Spirit in hand. "The Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath." His person entitles Him to supremacy over that which was the sign of the covenant of the law. In the next case (v. 6-10) He asserts the right to do good on the sabbath-days, as His adversaries on the same day shew their disposition to destroy.

The sabbath, in any real sense, man had entirely lost; indeed he had never entered into God's thoughts of rest. It was His rest, and had not sin spoiled all, man should have enjoyed that which was the result not of his own, but of God's labour. This is the proper character of that rest which belongs to man distinctively; but sin having come in, the necessity has arisen that God should work afresh, if man is ever to share the

rest of God (Heb. 4). Meanwhile Christ has appeared and finished the work which God gave Him to do. Hence, we who believe, find rest in Christ, as does God Himself. In Him, by virtue of the accomplished and accepted work of redemption, we have our sabbath spiritually.

The day was set apart and hallowed from the beginning (Gen. 2). Afterwards it came in, first in grace to Israel, marked by the cessation of the manna, and a double portion to provide for that holy day (Ex. 16): and, secondly, as a part of the law of Sinai, and incorporated with every new and special dealing of Jehovah (chap. 20). (See also chap. 31:13, 14; 33:14; 34:21; and 35:2.) It was a memorial thenceforward of the deliverance out of Egypt (Deut. 5:15). Accordingly, the prophets expressly treat it as a sign of Israel's separation from all other nations unto God, and God's covenant with them (Ezek. 20:12-20; 22:8; 23:38; 44:24; Isa. 56, 58; Jer. 17:21-27.) But then, in the past, Israel, a sinful people, had the sabbath as a legal ordinance, and consequently are condemned by it as by all else.

66 Where is this covenant with Israel? All gone because of their iniquity. Hence they were thrown into the hands of the Gentiles, and became slaves. "Behold we are servants this day; and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it; and it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us, because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle at their pleasure, and we are in great distress" (Neh. 9:36, 37). If they had a temple after the captivity, it was only at the mercy of their Persian masters. The outward emblem lingered on, no doubt, and was especially made much to dishonour Him, of whom and whose work it was so significant; but where was its reality when Jesus was on earth? Alas! He lies in the grave all the day which His murderers kept as a day holy to Jehovah ("for that sabbath was a high day!"): awful testimony to the Jews of their position. Their own Messiah slain by His own people: such was the truth which that sabbath-day uttered to him who had ears to hear. Israel never had the rest of God. If Joshua had given them rest, etc. (Heb. 4). There remaineth therefore a rest. They must own Jesus first.

But the rejected Jesus was Son of man, and the Son of man was Lord of the sabbath (v. 5) - a truth of the utmost gravity, to be asserted with all strength. Those who confound the Lord's day with the sabbath are in danger of forgetting this. It was the very point here in controversy with the Jews who maintained that the sabbath was superior to the Lord. But He shews that another new principle had come in, which wholly overleaped the old, and that to remain in the old was to have no deliverance. For there is no possibility for a lustful creature to be under a commandment that condemns lust, without being condemned. Grace, however, has entered through a rejected Christ, and now there is rest for us who believe - not for those who are on the ground of law.

This is the reason why Christians keep the first day of the week, and not the seventh or sabbath day. The rest was acquired by the power of Christ's redemption, and the first day, when He arose from the dead, was that which proclaimed it to faith, spite of man's guilt and ruin. The seventh day will be the rest of man on earth; the first day celebrates Christ's taking us in Him to heaven. Then was life from the dead, life more abundantly, liberty from the law and every consequence of sin - in a word, the victory of grace. The Christian therefore has the first day distinctively, because it belongs to and witnesses of the perfected work of Christ, and consequently introduces heavenly rest. The first day is in contrast with the seventh, which appertained to the round of man's labour in nature and of the Jew's under the law, in which Adam and Israel utterly broke down. It is the Lord's day emphatically, and thus testifies of the triumph of Christ's word and the glory of His person - not the day which guilty unbelief would have perverted into the proof and means of His inferiority. It is positive, direct blessing to him who owns and honours it - not because it is the close of legal toil, but the commencement of Christian hope - the resurrection-day when we begin

our spiritual life; and look on for what will crown so precious a pledge.

67 Here, however, the grand thing is the maintenance of the rights and the authority of the Son of man. You never can, according to God, raise up the title of the sabbath against the Lord of the sabbath.

Verses 3-5. What did David, the anointed of the Lord, when Saul persecuted him and sought his life? Was it of God, then, to uphold the ritual and so starve the man after His heart? No; the foundations were out of course, and everything became common in Israel when the chosen king was thus iniquitously rejected. But a greater One, and a graver sin, were now in their midst. The Son indeed, but the Root of David, God Himself was there; He who instituted the sabbath, its Lord, was there in the person of the Son of man.

Verses 6-10. But if God was there, would He deny His own goodness or restrain His power in presence of human misery, because "the scribes and Pharisees watched him whether he would heal on the sabbath-day?" Divine love must act and heal the withered hand, even if wretched man should seek to find therein an accusation. And they were filled with madness and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus (v. 11); but Jesus in those days retired to a mountain to pray. He drew near to God, to commune with Him what He was to do for them (v. 12). His was the activity of grace - of love displaying itself holily and mightily in the midst of evil.

68 Verses 13-16. "And when it was day he called his disciples," etc. In this call He proves that He was the only One who could empower others to bear this testimony also: and yet here, as in all that passed before, He is the lowly dependent One - perfect man, as well as God. He was in perfect unbroken communion with His God and Father, though Himself God manifest in the flesh. How blessedly near us this brings Him, though so infinitely above us! What He did, we should aim at, whatever our measure and our little sphere. In Him we see man perfect in that place of power wherein He came.

He knew whom He chose. He knew that one of them had a devil, but He sent them out. Twelve He chose specially, whom also He called apostles, "sent ones." It was an important and significant word, as quite a distinct thing from both law and promises. No one was sent out by law. Now God is active; He is sending His Son, and the Son is sending out apostles. The love of God is active in gathering souls. This first sent One is a man, really and truly. God's work of His grace must be done by His Son: not by angels, but by His own Son, as the Man Christ Jesus, and He sends men out from Himself. The gathering point is Man - Himself of course. To Man God has committed all things. While it must be God who shews grace, the Son of man it is who comes on the mission of love, and sends out men to men.

Verses 17-19. Whatever He attracts by, He gathers round Himself to worship, surrounds Himself with them, and then comes down and stands in the plain. The great multitude are attracted by His miracles and their wants, coming to hear and be healed. The company of the disciples were an inner circle. "The whole multitude sought to touch him." It is not said that they were converted, which is another thing; but living power went out of Him, healing their bodily misery and delivering from the power of Satan.

Verse 20, etc. He now lifts up His eyes on His disciples and speaks to them, not as in Matthew 5, etc., giving them the developed principles of the kingdom; but distinguishing those before Him as the remnant. Hence it is "ye" here. He puts seal and stamp on those actually gathered round Himself. They are to be like Him. He is at once their centre and their pattern. He was God, but the fulness of the Holy Ghost dwelt in Him as man also; and so He could say, "I do always those things which please him." So should it be with those around Him.

69 Verses 20-26. "Blessed [are] ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed [are] ye that hunger now; for ye shall be filled. Blessed [are] ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye when men shall hate you," etc. These words of the Saviour give the contrast of those He pronounces blessed with all that are in ease in this world. Those who, if in this life only they had hope in Christ, would be of all men the most miserable, are the only happy few; they are severed from all others, and put in relationship with Him the source of blessing, to be blessed. If you can make yourselves happy and comfortable in this world which has rejected Jesus, count not on His blessing.

It is the poor, the despised with Jesus, who shall have the kingdom. He says, if we may so speak, "I am distinguishing you" (for there is no enunciation of abstract principles, as in the beginning of Matthew 5, but a speaking to the hearts of those gathered around Him). "I am come as the centre of power and active love. There is but one sole place of blessing on earth. With Me you are blessed." Others may be gay and cheerful where Christ has no place; but it is a time when a true spiritual soul can get no good save with Christ. It is a definite distinction of, and address to, the disciples who attached themselves to Him. This is made clear in verse 22, where the persecution for righteousness, which Matthew carefully records, is omitted. Here it is only a question of suffering "for the Son of man's sake."

In the midst of a world of misery and selfishness there came One who displayed not law nor judgment, but grace. But the light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. Like the adder that hears nothing, the world goes on as deaf as it is blind. No; you who are "full," now Jesus has no charm for you; but you, disciples, are weeping now - the sorrow and the sin of man distress your spirit: you shall rejoice. When God has His way, you, who cannot be satisfied with the husks, shall be filled. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. You have your portion with Christ here, you shall have it with Christ in heaven. You suffer with the suffering One, you shall have glory with the glorified One. But the others! - they shall have what they seek. For the full there shall be a famine by-and-by, for they have lost God. If you can laugh in such a world as this, you shall weep when God's time for blessing comes. They are of the world, and the world loves its own. "So did their fathers to the false prophets." Are the times altered? Is Christ's character changed? It is not a whit more agreeable to the flesh. And if you can find your joy, ease, and pleasure in the world, Christ could not, and you have not His Spirit. He that will be its friend is the enemy of God. Can the disciples of Jesus be merry and gay in a world which has sin wrapped up in it? There is communion with Jesus, joy in the Spirit, while patient in tribulation; but this is quite another thing. It is a serious joy, though very real and blessed.

70 From verse 27 He shews what must be the conduct of the disciples as such. They were to manifest God, to be the unfolding of what was displayed in Him. Grace which was in Him in fulness and perfection should be reproduced in them, sadly as we all fail in this - the principle of our path. "Love your enemies," etc. God loved us when we were His enemies, and we have now to shew practically what God is. Verse 29 brings us into entirely human circumstances, patiently learning in them: or, as in 1 Peter 2, doing well, suffering for it, and taking it patiently. This may seem poor comfort. But Jesus did so, and love must so manifest itself in an evil world. The time comes when God will judge, instead of bearing long as now; but now, at whatever cost to self, shew love as Christ did. Flesh can love for love (v. 32, 33), but the disciples of Christ are called to imitate God, and walk in love. "Love ye your enemies, and do good and lend, hoping for nothing again, and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for he is kind to the unthankful and to the evil."

What a blessed character of God comes out here! It is not righteousness, though surely there was that; but in the world where God had to do with the unthankful and evil, He shews grace. For the angels He has not grace, but love: but Christ in this world of sin is grace (that is, love to those who deserve it not). "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." It is not "with" but "as your Father." As He loves His enemies, so do you; He is merciful, be ye also merciful. In all this, God's character is displayed - perfect love in a world of sinners. It must cost us something; it cost the life of Christ. His love was a stream, which, if it met with hindrances in its way, only went on flowing over, and leaving them behind till it reached the cross.

71 Verse 37. This is not certain things required in order to get life, but the result of certain conduct shewn. "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged," etc. As though He had said, You will find the consequences of your conduct as Christ did. He took the lowest place, but He has got the highest now. He humbled Himself; "wherefore God also hath highly exalted him," etc. He came not to judge, and now "all judgment is committed to the Son." Thus we not only have the display of grace, but divine character meeting its consequences. It is a question of government - of walking with the Lord; it must cost a great deal in the path, but in the end it will be "full measure, pressed down," etc. There will be God's blessing too in the way; though self is mortified. Grace will abound according to God's way.

Verse 39. See the contrast of those who are utter blindness, and the blind leading the blind. You must let them alone; leave them to go on their own way; but you have to take your place with Me; and the disciple is not above his master, but you shall be as your Master. If your Master suffers, you suffer; if it has cost your Master much, it may cost you much. If Christ teaches you, it is to make you possess the divine learning that He has Himself. And see what a place He gives us! When He gives, what does He give? The very same that He has Himself. "As he is, so are we in this world." "Not as the world giveth," which, if it gives a little, reserves the chief for itself; but as though He said, "I am putting you in the very same learning that is in My nature: the grace that I have you are to have." But people do not like to do those things that Jesus did.

Why is there so much argument about that one passage, "resist not evil"? It is because you like to resist evil. Your will is touched, your conscience is reached; for it is given you as matter-of-fact exhortation; but you do not like it, and you will rid of it if you can. These things are given as tests for the conscience; they judge the eye, not the path only. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." The object is wrong, if you have not light for the step. There may be difficulties in going up a steep hill, but if the object before you is clear, you get over them as quickly as you can. This is what is meant by the expression, "This one thing I do," Phil. 3:13. It is having one object, and the mind intent on accomplishing it. If it is so with you, there will be sure to be light in the path - light, not for ten years hence, but for this one step that is before you, and then for the next. It was said to Moses, "Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward"; and when they were out in the wilderness, the pillar was given to be their constant guide. So with us; we are called out to go after Christ on the principle of obedience, and this puts us into connection with Him in the revelation of His will, not giving us to see all the path onwards. A man may see a wall, and say, "I cannot go that way: there is a wall," while, if he but takes a single step, he will find that there is a path all down by the side of the wall.

72 Verse 44. "Every tree is known by his own fruit." Not only bearing fruit, but fruit that Christ produces should be ours. There is fruit that an upright nature produces, such as that of the young man who came to Jesus, but this was not divine fruit - "its own fruit"; and where Christ is the root and the stock, it is Christian fruit, that is, fruit that will remain (John 15:16). Two men may go together up to a certain point, and then

some test for Christ comes; one goes on with Him, and the other turns aside. "Its own fruit" - fruit shews itself, springs of itself. There will not be the question of, What harm in this or that? What harm in being rich? as a person once asked me. If it shuts you out of heaven, is there any harm in that? Oh, I did not think of that! But the secret is, that you like the things. The evil is not the things themselves dug out of the earth, but the love in the heart for them. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." An impatient word betrays the heart. A blow I may restrain and yet utter the word.

Verse 47. In the hearing of all the multitude the Lord speaks now about the house built upon the rock, etc. This is not a question about building upon Christ, the Rock, for the salvation of the sinner. It is the path of the saint. But where Christ's word does connect with Himself, see the result. The very thing people are called upon to do is to follow Him; and when I follow, it proves that the Master's words have taken such hold upon my soul that they have power to carry me over the difficulties. "My soul followeth hard after thee." A man's affections, heart, will, are taken and connected with Christ, instead of with himself. Is Christ sufficiently precious to make me leave all beside and follow Him, to do those things that please Him?" If a man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, but shall have the light of life." "As when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light." Keeping close to Christ, the light shines upon us. If we have to get into the light, we may be dazzled by it. Thus He has gathered round Himself in light and love, set out in those words, those whom He will have to enjoy Himself, and be as their Master, at length to be conformed to His image in glory.

73 Luke 7.

We have seen the Lord, rejected by Israel, gradually, in virtue of His person and rights, breaking out beyond the ancient limits, and gathering the remnant round Himself, the new and only just object of God, the source of a mission in grace, and the full development and exemplification of holy love in an evil world; for, whatever the principles laid down in chapter 6, they are but the expression of God's character in grace, as displayed in Christ here below.

In accordance with this, we have now (v. 1-10) the case of the centurion, and a very full and striking one it is. It is not merely an act of grace, but grace to a Gentile. Nor is this all. The principle on which the apostle rests this question is brought out. "It is of faith, that it might be by grace, that the promise might be sure to all the seed." Faith, as the great turning-point, is introduced. It was no mere theory; it was living faith, and such faith as had not been seen in Israel. Neither was there presumption, but, on the contrary, remarkable humility. He recognised the honour God had put upon His people; he sees, holds to it, owns and acts upon it, spite of their low and debased, and, in every other respect, unworthy condition. Despised and failing as they might be, he loved the Jews as God's people, and for His sake, and he had built them a synagogue. Unfeigned lowliness was his, though (yea, rather, for) his faith was far beyond those he honoured. Consequently he had a very high apprehension of the power and glory of the person of Christ as divine, reaching out beyond Jewish thoughts altogether. He does not refer to the Lord as Messiah, but recognised in Him the power of God in love. This was blessed faith, which forgets itself in the exaltation of its object. He had not seen Jesus, it would seem, but assuredly gathered from what he "heard," that diseases were nothing to Him but occasions wherein to display His absolute authority and His sovereign mercy. He was a stranger, and the Jews were God's people; must not they or their elders be the fittest to bring this wonderful person? For he confided in His mercy as well as His power, and his servant, "dear unto him," was sick and ready to die. He needed Jesus.

74 "Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself; for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof; wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee; but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed." There was surely the deepest personal respect and affection. Untaught as he might be in other things, he strongly felt the excellency of Christ's person, and here again with humility correspondent to the measure in which His glory was seen. This message of the centurion's friends admirably depicts his character and feeling. He told nothing to Jesus of his service to the Jews, spoke of nothing personal save his unworthiness, and this so consistently, that he begged Jesus not to come to his house, as unworthy to receive Him. There was in this soul the exact opposite of doing Christ an honour, by believing on Him, and far from him was the pretence of receiving Christ to set himself up; both alas! found often elsewhere. The simplicity of his heart is as apparent as his strong faith. There was none such in Israel, and yet it was in one who loved Israel. It was a lesson of grace, in every way, for the crowd that followed Jesus - for us too most surely.

Along with grace to the Gentiles came the evidence of power to raise the dead, but here it was manifested in human sympathies, in witness that God had visited His people (v. 11-17). It was the power of resurrection, a power which was yet to be shewn more gloriously, and to be the source of that which is new for man according to God - the God who raiseth the dead. It was another and wondrous proof that He is here going, in the character of His action, without the sphere of the law and its ordinances. "For the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth": what can it avail for one who is dead? "But what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh," Rom. 8:3. It was grace, indeed, and divine energy, but withal displayed in One who was touched with the feeling of our infirmities. And how astonishingly all the details bring this out! The dead man was "the only son of his mother, and she was a widow." "And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.... And he that was dead sat up and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother." How exquisitely human, and withal how unmistakably divine!

75 It is manifest that these two cases illustrate the change which the Spirit is attesting in this part of Luke. Nor is it otherwise with the scene that follows, which brings out in fact the hinge of the dispensation. The Lord bears witness to John Baptist, not John to the Lord. John sends two of his disciples, on the report of the Lord's miracles, to learn from Himself who He is. Are we surprised? He had preached and baptized in the confession of sins and in faith of the coming Messiah. But now all was changed. John was in prison, not delivered, and it was no longer a people preparing for the Lord. Was it not strange? At any rate John sought a plain answer, and well could he trust the word of One who did such mighty and holy works. But what a comment upon the marvellous change was this very inquiry! It was a sort of turning over the disciples of John to the Lord. "And in the same hour he cured many of their infirmities, and plagues, and evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way and tell John," etc. At the same time, if He receives no longer testimony from John, He bears it to him, owning John and his work. But they were owned from a higher ground where the Lord in grace and resurrection power had placed Himself; and this was based on entire rejection in and by the world, so that, though He was doing all good, still it was "blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." Hence in the very verse where the Lord recognises in the fullest way John the Baptist, He marks the change about to take place - "he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." Happy they who justified God in being baptized of John - wretched the self-righteous who rejected His counsel against themselves. Wisdom is justified of all her children. They understand the ways of God, whether in the servant or the Lord. The ways are quite different, but understood in grace. This generation alas! understands none, finds

fault with all. John is too righteous for them, Jesus is too gracious. The mourning of the one and the piping of the other are utterly distasteful. Such is man's wisdom before the ways of God. But the children of wisdom justify wisdom notwithstanding.

76 And in spite of the perverseness of men, our Lord did not stop manifesting Himself to the world. Accordingly a tale follows (v. 36-50) which shews how God's wisdom is justified by and in those who own it in Jesus. It is a tale of grace, of pure, plenary, pardoning grace, which rests not till its object is dismissed in perfect peace. Jesus is in the Pharisee's house, who failed entirely in the essential point: Simon perceived not the glory of Christ. In this the Lord meets him, and shews, in contrast with the woman "which was a sinner," the point where this Pharisee was exercising judgment to be precisely that wherein he failed. God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways. What if the despised Jesus were not a prophet only, but a Saviour of poor lost sinners? Ah, God was unknown - that was the secret. The converted soul sees the glory of the Lord as grace towards itself; he who is unconvinced, however interested humanly, judges according to his own thoughts, and therefore necessarily fails to see the glory which is not according to these thoughts. Man's judgment of the gospel must be wrong therefore; his reception of it, as grace, is alone right, and alone the way of coming to the knowledge of it.

This was, then, a direct and distinct example of God's ways. It was a forgiving of sins in grace, sovereignly and freely, to any poor sinner, manifesting and producing love in the forgiven, who loves God, because God is love, and this in respect of his sins, in Jesus the Lord. It was proper grace - the ground on which any one, a Gentile or not, would be received, and God manifested not in requirement from man (and so making man in the flesh of importance) but making God all, and His character in sovereign grace, so bringing in blessing and its blessed effect upon the heart, developing the fruits of grace in a heart restored to confidence in God by the sense of His goodness.

What a blessed picture! Goodness known not only in the act, but in Him who did it. The discernment of guilt in its gross forms by man was one thing, but the grace of God which could blot out and forgive all was quite another. It was not Christ there to judge, and to sanction Pharisees, but love to a sinner, manifesting God in this new character of grace, producing thankful holy love to God, and a blessed relationship, sovereign and beyond the reach of man. But how has God always to prove Himself right in His goodness to man! so hard is man's heart. But the Lord identifies Himself with the believer, and vindicates him against the haughty world, and this gives assurance. Perfectly regardless of comments, He applies Himself, not to unbelief, which were useless, but to those who have faith, and having communicated forgiveness, shews the soul his uprightness, that is, the right thoughts of God and self which faith has. The last word settles the whole question. The soul's love was a ground of evidence and reasoning - not, of course, the cause. "Thy faith hath saved thee, said the Lord to the woman, Go in peace." All is discharged from the conscience, and the heart finds itself infinitely and everlastingly a debtor to the continual fountain of all grace.

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