

Reading on Philippians 3

by John Nelson Darby

Redemption through Christ puts Christians on a new footing, giving them a new nature, creation, and relationship with God.

Scripture: Philippians 3:8

Topics: "New Creation", "Redemption"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Philippians 3, emphasizing the transformative power of redemption that elevates Christians to a new standing before God, distinct from their earthly existence. He highlights that through the cross, believers are not only forgiven but also brought into a new creation, where the old man is put away and a new life in Christ begins. Darby stresses the importance of worshiping God in spirit, as all human standings have been rendered obsolete by Christ's work. He warns against the dangers of relying on the flesh and earthly things, urging believers to focus on their heavenly calling and the righteousness that comes from faith in Christ. Ultimately, he encourages Christians to live in the light of their new identity and to pursue a life that reflects their acceptance in Christ.

Transcript

This chapter forms a kind of parenthesis, an important one, too, and full of matter, as Paul's parentheses always are. Redemption puts Christians upon a wonderfully new footing. It takes them out of man's place as such altogether, though they are still down here, and it puts them before God in a new condition and state as the result of that redemption. True, they await the adoption, the redemption of the body; they groan, being burdened as long as they are here; but the more we look into it, the more we shall see that the cross is the passage out of one state into another, as well as the putting away of sins. I speak, of course, of Christians.

We have been brought to God according to the efficacy of God's working, connected with our being quickened, and with the full character of our being risen with Christ. It is a new state as well as a new life, for we have passed the Red Sea.

The expression, "Worship God in the spirit," has led me to this. As in John 4, "Ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." All human standing with God is gone. Jerusalem was a standing with God, but man could never make anything of it; yet it was there, though to no purpose as regards the state man was in. Its very character was manifest in that the veil was there, and man could not see God. But redemption rends the veil and puts man right into God's presence, so that now, through the

cross, we have passed into the light that is on God's side of the cross; and there we worship in spirit.

Circumcision leads to this. As in Colossians, we are buried and risen again, putting off the body of the flesh (not, the sins of), through death; this is true circumcision. We are the circumcision, if we have really put off our place, that is, the old man. All is gone.

He says "concision," treating the Jewish thing with contempt. We have no confidence in the flesh; he does not say, wickedness, but flesh, and that which he here calls "flesh" is religious flesh, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, etc. He will not call it circumcision. This is a great thing to get hold of. In Corinthians, it goes a great deal further, for besides the new creature, we have there a new creation, which means that the old thing has been dealt with; now all is of God. Of course, we are of God, but this is as belonging to the new creation; He has created us again in Christ Jesus.

210 We find, then, these two things: a new nature (and creature, too, in that sense), and a wholly new scene to which we belong now. It is not this world, but a new creation; Corinthians includes all this.

Christ had a place in the old creation, that is to say, He came into it in grace, but, when there, men would not have Him. Had He been received, He would have been, so to speak, the keystone of the arch of an impossible bridge. But now that He has risen, He has become the centre of the new creation. Just as Adam became the head of a race after he sinned, so Christ has become Head of a race after He has risen. The new creation is founded on Christ's death.

The result for us is that of our complete acceptance before God upon this new ground, standing, and state; and then comes the question of the practical effect of this upon us.

"All things of God"! Well then, God has, of course, no fault to find with me. But then again, if I am of God, I have nothing more to do with this world. Every Christian would own that he must have a new life; but I do not think it is always realised by us that Christ has died to this creation, and that He has begun another one.

Not merely am I renewed in mind with a new nature; but I have passed through the Red Sea, and I do not belong to Egypt at all. Our bodies do, of course, left here as they are, but I am speaking now of our place in Christ.

This is why the apostle declaims against the enemies of the cross of Christ, those who mind earthly things, because the cross of Christ has passed its sentence upon everything on earth. The world is crucified to me, and I to it.

If I had obtained righteousness under the old system, it would have been of man, but of course I could not thus obtain it. Under that system the law was a perfect rule for man.

But Christ having wrought the work that has glorified God, if in Him we had not a place in the new creation, God would not be righteous, for then Christ would not reap the fruit of the travail of His soul. Under law, man could only give man's righteousness, but now it is God's righteousness by faith, and, if by faith, it is not in myself, though afterwards there will be no doubt the fruits of righteousness.

211 Righteousness of God is revealed; it is an object which is before me, and I believe in it. This righteousness has been displayed to faith in the setting of Christ at God's right hand, where it is now publicly testified, and from whence we have the administration of it; and thus our Lord speaks "of

righteousness, because I go to my Father." Clearly, therefore, it is outside of man, for it is Christ's work thus actually owned by God. Then the Holy Ghost comes down and says, 'True, that all are sinners, but all is settled.' Therefore, the apostle does not here talk about 'having my sins,' but, setting aside the old system, he speaks of "not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law."

He had done with the question of his own righteousness, and with the whole thing upon which this rested. Outwardly "blameless" he might have been, but now he is in another place altogether through the work accomplished on the cross. And Christ, of God, is made unto us, wisdom and righteousness, etc.

Thus we learn that the question of our standing with God is entirely settled. If Christ is made righteousness of God to us, 'well then,' I say, 'all is settled for me now according to God's own mind.'

And this links us with what is heavenly, because Christ is there. He has deserved the glory as man. Righteousness is connected with the finished work of Christ, and this brings in life, and then we go practically from life to righteousness. Looked at as "in Christ," we begin from His work, and we go on to life. Christ accomplished the work before He became the Head of a new race.

By obtaining life, I learn next my place in this righteousness of God; I am sanctified unto the blood of sprinkling.

When I am quickened, I am brought into the value of a work already done. But if a person is looking back or within to see if he is quickened, he will never find peace. When brought to that estimate of the flesh, whereby he sees the whole system as rotten, and condemned, and done with ("now the judgment of this world"), then he no longer looks at it with reference to his standing with God. With such a one it is now all Christ. Then there is no cloud upon the light of God's countenance, because it is God's satisfaction with His work.

212 It makes it most distinct when I see Adam as head of his race, after he had sinned, and Christ as Head of a new race after He had accomplished His work. The question of life and responsibility, and of the incompatibility between the two has been settled at the cross. Arminianism and Calvinism, i.e., the tree of grace and the tree of man's responsibility, are both found in Paradise, nor can we reconcile these two things in man, except it be in Christ.

The law took up this same question, and made responsibility to be the ground of life: "This do, and thou shalt live"; there again we have life and responsibility put together, but responsibility comes first as testing man.

Well, Christ then comes and charges Himself with both the responsibility and the failure, and He settles the whole question so that life now comes first.

It would have been all right, in one sense, had Adam eaten of the tree of life, but this was not to be.

But, by taking us out of the whole former condition, Christ becomes our life.

Redemption has taken us out of the place in which we were responsible, I speak now as to our standing before God. By redemption, this question has been settled perfectly and for ever.

Every intelligent creature, such as angels and all else, is, of course, responsible as set in that position. So when we have to say to God through Christ, we are in a place of responsibility to glorify God according to

the perfect law of liberty. We have to show out this life of Jesus in this mortal body, because we have got the life. Condemnation is for sinners who are in a lost state. If a man is judged, he is judged for his works; but, besides this, he is in a lost state.

It all goes together, though, as a matter of fact, man is lost to begin with. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." Redemption takes me out of that state; I am delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. And this blessing we have in our poor bodies here; burdened and groaning we may be truly; but we have been brought to the full and thorough conviction that the old man is an evil thing, and that we have been redeemed out of it. Still, we need to have our senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

213 An angel delights to serve like Christ, not as perfectly, of course, but it is his nature so to do; and as regards the new man abstractedly, we delight also to do His will. Along with this, there may be with us a great deal of darkness, a will that has to be broken; there is much for us to learn, and much to humble us in ourselves. And oh! how very soon this shews itself, if we are not watchful.

Nothing but the sense of the presence of God can keep us in self-judgment; we may be ever so sincere, but self is not judged except in the presence of God.

We may not be always conscious of it, whilst seeking to do the right thing; but let something turn up, and we find flesh is still alive!

But when the presence of God is realised, the practical state of the soul is totally different; there is then a sense of dependence, and of lowliness, and of nothingness which we only learn in God's presence.

A matter comes before a man in his service as a Christian, and he sets about to judge it; he seeks to do this thoroughly according to God's mind; but self gets set in motion, and then it is detected whether he has been with God about it.

Ques. I suppose you would say that a Jew never was in God's presence?

Not as a principle, and therefore the Jew never could judge himself; one could never find in him, for instance, a consciousness of the two natures; conscience of sins truly, and we read that "I was shapen in iniquity," for without a sense of this, in some degree or other, there never could have been any saints at all. But if quickened, they walked on the earth with piety in their lives, and they had blessed revelations of God on the earth.

So Abraham talks with God, and God comes down to his tent door, and sits at table with him, but it is to him as on the earth; so in the cloud at the door of the tabernacle, God talks with Moses, but that is not taking Abraham and Moses up into heavenly places.

I have no doubt they looked forward in hope, but there was no dwelling of God with man until redemption had been brought in, not even in figure. God never dwelt with Adam; neither did He dwell with Abraham, nor with Moses; after He had brought Israel out of Egypt, then He speaks of dwelling among them, and we see in this the fruits of redemption, though in an earthly way, of course.

214 So now He redeems us, and then dwells with us.

Ques. Except as He sanctified the seventh day, one never finds even holiness in Genesis?

No.

Ques. But surely Abraham is in heaven?

Oh, yes; I believe Abraham to be in heaven, of course, but, in speaking of the revelations and instructions of God, we do not find God dwelling with man until redemption comes in.

Ques. There seems to be a difficulty with some as to the character of God's dwelling now in the Church as a whole; they think it is limited to those who are members of the body of Christ. Can you help such?

It is quite true as to the individual, but God does dwell in the Church. As for mere professors being there, it would be a denial of the apostasy to limit His dwelling to the body of Christ. Strictly speaking, God does not dwell in the body; the body is looked at as united to Christ on high, and each individual believer, as having the Holy Ghost, is in the body of Christ. We are members of Christ's body. That is as down here, on the earth; but then there is another thing: "Builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." But suppose false brethren creep in, as in Jude, no one could say that the Holy Ghost had ceased to dwell in the assembly because false ones had come in.

I do not speak of the Holy Ghost dwelling in any particular local assembly at all.

The moment I speak of Christians as members of the body of Christ, I speak of them individually, and I have lost the idea of "house."

Ques. But at the first, was it not the same?

Yes; it was set up all right at the first, but it had not then become like a "great house." Though, remember, the great house in 2 Timothy is only a comparison.

But when false brethren were brought in unawares, the Holy Ghost did not leave in consequence; nor does He go, until the time of judgment comes.

The Shekinah was in the temple until the time of the captivity at Babylon, but not afterwards.

We see how the prophet Ezekiel saw them weeping for Tammuz; then, worse still, he saw them worshipping the sun; through the hole dug in the wall he saw the images portrayed, and he found things getting only worse and worse. Could God spare such a nation? So He goes up with the cherubim and leaves the nation altogether. Now, God has not done that, as yet, with the Church. The Church has departed from Him, but He has not executed judgment upon it, and therefore blessing still continues under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

215 But towards the close of Paul's ministry, the present state was fast developing. I was struck, lately, in noticing how all the catholic epistles, as they are called, speak of the evil as already come in.

And where evil is, God must come to judge it. Even the epistle to the Hebrews is no exception. But what struck me, was the universality of this in the catholic epistles.

Suppose we had only received instructions for a good state of the Church, we should not know what to do nowadays. It is just the not seeing the provision that has been made which leads, of course, to the confusion of the present time.

But God is working, I trust, amid the present state of distraction in the Church. Yet at such a time it is, that all sorts of false things are set up, sometimes by man's wit, and sometimes by Satan. And honest souls are trying to satisfy themselves with utter worldliness; consciences are troubled about it, and saying we must have a higher life, and so on, and very earnest souls some of these are.

Ques. Would you object to speak of the present place of profession as the house of God?

It is not called the house of God in 2 Timothy, yet that is its place of responsibility, whatever may be its place of profession; responsibility rests upon it, because of the presence of the Holy Ghost. It is contemplated as God's building, in 1 Corinthians; but, although built in part of wood, hay, and stubble, the building still belongs to God. Just as I may say, that is my house, though I may have a bad bricklayer working upon it among the rest.

Ques. Is it not doctrine that is there spoken of?

Yes, in 1 Corinthians it is, but then people brought it in. It has nothing to do with our works.

When the profession is cast off, the apostasy will go further. This is the true character of apostasy. The principle of it is already at work, though it will not come to its head until the true Church has gone. The mystery of iniquity began to work in Paul's time; and it is still working, and will do so until Christ comes.

216 As long as people thought the pope was antichrist, they called Romanism the apostasy.

Ques. "As ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists"?

Yes, "antichrists," i.e., the spirit of the thing is already there, but it has not yet come fully out.

The professing Church not being yet apostate, anybody who cuts himself off from the Church is apostate, properly speaking, for it is now a thing that can be apostatised from.

Ques. In what light do you regard Swedenborgianism?

Well, it is not Christianity at all; it is difficult to speak of such a thing. God will judge about it.

Ques. What as to Mormonism?

I suppose they called themselves Christians once. Their doctrine is this, that, supposing the people are married for all eternity, and have children all through eternity, and supposing the world that they are in gets too full, they, by faith, create another world, and he who so creates, is the god of the world he creates; and he packs off part of his children there; and so they believe that the One whom we call God and Father, is One who has created this world, and packed us off into it.

It is somewhat difficult to call that apostasy, though there may be individuals among them who were once professing to be Christians, but who have apostatised. What I have just said, I have from some of their own writings in my possession.

Professing to call Jesus, Lord, is the great thing that characterises Christianity.

Ques. What is, "partakers of the Holy Ghost"?

It refers to the Holy Ghost now present in power, without having anything to do with being born again.

Ques. What of Bishop Colenso?

Well, is he not denying the testimony of the Word of God? And that is bare infidelity.

Individuals may be apostate at any time. As long as the Church remains, there is a professing thing on the earth that is not apostate. Laodicea is therefore called by the name church, though it will be afterwards spued out of His mouth.

In Philippians, we get more the individual running: "This one thing I do."

217 Ques. What would be, "being made conformable unto his death"?

The apostle was looking to be killed; he carried, in spirit, the sentence of death in himself.

Ques. Does it, then, refer to martyrdom?

Yes. "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus" was, with the apostle, the taking up the "sentence"; but in the next verse, "delivered unto death," it was God doing this with him. We have the two things in Corinthians; he was "bearing about," and then, he was "delivered unto death"; this latter is because we cannot always be trusted to do the thing honestly.

The apostle really was, as much as any one, always holding himself dead; but the being delivered unto death, was God dealing with him for his good, but he required God's hand to hold him fast.

Ques. How far can Christians now take that up?

Everybody must answer for his own conscience. I do not know who could say that absolutely: "always," is a very awkward word. If one does not hold that he is dead to the world, he is not really on Christian ground at all. It is a difficult thing to say, 'my flesh never budes,' but I speak of the Christian principle of life. Paul says, "Death worketh in us, but life in you." 'I am so completely dead, that Paul never appears to you Corinthians, but only Christ; death works in me, but life, Christ's life, in you.' Wonderful practical state Paul was in!

Take again this epistle. Sin, as to experience, is never once mentioned in it; but we have the experience of a man walking in the power of the Spirit of God, and with salvation, too, always before him, running the race towards the prize; even justification was before him, as he says, "that I may . . . be found in him." At the end of the race he will find everything. Yet he could not have been running the race if Christ had not laid hold on him. Salvation, here, is final deliverance in glory. It is this that puts down perfection, for he had seen Christ in glory, and knew that he should be like Him. I would not thank you for your perfection, if you are looking to be as Adam was in the garden of Eden. I am looking to be like Christ. As one said in France, 'They are looking to be perfects, but we look to be pluperfects.' Perfection is seen in this: Christ had laid hold on Paul, and he had set out running to reach Christ actually in glory. It is the calling above, not on high, that is, up in the heavenly glory; and he contrasts this with the path of death in minding earthly things. It is by having the heart set on the end, that the realisation of it is found on the way. Like a light at the far end of a dark passage, every step you take towards the light brings you both nearer to it, and also into more of its power, and the lighter it becomes.

218 It is often asked, if, "conformable unto his death," is present or future; the question is a mistake, for Paul was looking on to the end, and he was characterised by it. It is wonderful to see how the apostle

realised this. He says, "I have suffered the loss of all things, and do [not did] count them," etc.

When at first we tasted the blessing of salvation and redemption in our hearts, what was the world to us? It was all nothing; just trees, and fields, and roads, that was all.

We are apt to get back gradually into natural associations; but it was not so with Paul. He was maintained in the effect that the first revelation of Christ had produced upon his soul. Really, when we are first converted, the world is like a parcel of gewgaws, not cared for by us at all. Men are but big children. A child likes its little carriage, to draw about with a doll in it and a lady likes a carriage drawn about with herself inside, dressed up like a doll. We know how present things do affect the mind, but it shews how quickly the mind gets off its object. We need power so that Christ may dwell in the inner man. And then there is the practical gaining of strength day by day. The fact that the world is judged, though believed in by us, yet often it is not practically judged in our lives; but, through grace, this gradually becomes true to us in detail.

When a certain breaking down of self takes place in a man's life, it produces a total change in him, but afterwards he has to learn it all in detail.

There is a complete change. He has accepted death really, by faith, and so he says, "the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world"; but then he has to watch against details and judge them; and if they start up again, then he must deal with them still more severely.

Of course, all this is after the eye of faith has been directed to the cross of Christ. It is a great mercy when, at starting, the Christian makes, by grace, a clean cut with the world. If my heart is not full of Christ, outward things will produce their impression. If I am not full of Him, 'Oh,' I shall think, 'what a beautiful picture!' That shews there is a vacant space left in my heart for such a thing to come in. The world is like Samson's hair, the roots of which, in a certain sense, still remain. Or else, it is like the twigs of willow in the ground, which will sooner or later begin to grow again. If we are firm, the world will become, of course, only more adverse; it will not tolerate, nor even bear with decided Christianity. A Christian, who gets into the world, is not happy anywhere, for there is nothing in the world that can satisfy him, and then, when he gets among his fellow-Christians, his conscience reproves him. He does not grow, nor does he get the enjoyment of the things that are in the word of God, and which are really his own.

219 A clean cut with the world is very often distinct from having the sentence of death written in ourselves.

Suppose anyone, before finding peace, goes through excessive exercises, so that the world becomes, so to speak, torn into shreds, directly such a one gets peace, the whole thing is settled. But now, when a full gospel is preached, and conviction brought in, a soul has oftentimes to go through the death of the flesh afterwards. Sometimes a person gets forgiveness and peace before he learns the killing power of the law. If he keeps close to Christ, he will find out what the flesh is; but in one way or the other he has to learn, just as much as if he had never been forgiven, that in himself, that is, in his flesh, dwelleth no good thing. In keeping close to God, he apprehends with God what he is. But if he does not do so, he will have to learn it with the devil. Saul was in such a state, that for three days he neither ate nor drank. I do not doubt it was with him deep exercise of soul; but there is, of course, no prescription as to time.

Romans 3 gives us forgiveness as to our sins; then afterwards, in chapter 7, we find out that in ourselves dwelleth no good thing. There I arrive, experimentally, at the root of self, and then it becomes a question not of forgiveness, but of deliverance. I do not believe we are really delivered from its power, until we have

judged the flesh as a perfectly bad thing.

Nowadays, a great deal of current Christianity is characterised by knowing Christ after the flesh.

I remember when I was converted, all the Christians I met, were like people outside, and trusting they would be right when they got in, instead of being already inside.

220 But now that full forgiveness is preached, it often happens that people know forgiveness, and yet they have not learnt themselves.

Doubtless Paul had not fully attained, but one thing he did, and in that we see the energy of Christian life in him.

Ques. "As many as be perfect." Who are they?

Those who understand both redemption and this resurrection. I may be forgiven as a child of Adam, and I am so, but now I am a child of God. "Perfect," as he here calls it, is a Christian dead and risen; one who is not only quickened, but who knows that the blood of Christ is the only foundation for justifying him from his sins, and further, that as dead and risen with Christ, he has got out of the old place into the new one. I have seen Christ risen, and I am going to be like Him, and that is all I now know. That is what the apostle calls "perfect." It is the same in 1 Corinthians: "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect"; and so, too, in Ephesians 4: "Unto a perfect man." You cannot talk of the body coming up to the stature of the head, but, individually, it is true. At the last, undoubtedly, all Christians will come to that state.

Ques. He says, "that I may know him"?

Just so; so I can say I have everlasting life, and yet it says the end is everlasting life. It is the same with other truths.

In verse 10, it is much the same as we have in John, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure." He does not say of such an one, that he is as pure as Christ is pure, but that he purifies himself according to that standard. He looks on to the future, and then applies it to the present state.

It is a great thing to say that I desire to be made conformable to His death, and that in everything I am running in that spirit. But how can that be said except martyrdom is before me?

It is a great deal easier for me to give up the world than to be content when the world gives me up; when we find the world lets us go with, 'Oh, he is turned saint, let him go' - that is a great deal harder to bear. Of course, if martyrdom confronted us, every Christian would rather be killed than give up Christ; but still, this is, little by little, the daily experience of the perfect Christian. It is astonishing to see where Paul really was. There is another passage in 2 Corinthians: "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause."

221 If you are not with God for yourself, you will have self there for you. It may not be from want of sincerity or devotedness (it may, of course, issue in that), but if you are not with God a great deal, you have left your sweet retreat, and you are not safe. I speak not of salvation, but as to your present state of soul. There is an immense amount of temptation connected with our service, and there are, too, perilous

times with it all.

Ques. With what do you connect the "forgetting those things which are behind"?

With this, "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee." If I were running in a race, I should not stop to see how I was getting on, or somebody else would soon out-distance me. There will be time enough to reckon up victories when I have reached the goal.

Sometimes persons are busy reckoning up their experiences; but to such I would say, 'Go and get new ones.' When the eye of faith is opened to see these revelations of God, it makes us conscious how little we are. What a scene of glory and of moral perfectness we find as we look at Christ, or even at the apostle! "The life which I now live in the flesh," he says, "I live by the faith of the Son of God." There was a great consciousness of this with the apostle, and though in his letter to the Galatians there was very little expression of his heart, yet it comes out there also. Much as he loved these Galatians, he does not salute one of them, and he closes with simply this: "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks [i.e., brands] of the Lord Jesus." Nor does he even sign his name to the epistle.

Ques. What were the "beggarly elements" that he speaks of in chapter 4:9?

They were Judaism, though the Galatians were not Jews; but that is what they were getting back to, i.e., to live in the flesh. And so, in early times, there was a constant effort to use and to improve the world. St. Augustine actually says that the drunkenness that marked their feasts might at least be sanctified by its being observed to saints, and not to devils. The "Lupercalia" were feasts at the time of the shortest day, in honour of the new energy of the sun, about to be put forth in the spring. Indeed they are observed to this day in the East Indies; all heathen observed them; so they put Christ's birth there and sanctified the time, and that is Christmas. It was done by Gregory, first in Africa, and then elsewhere. Augustine himself went to preach against getting tipsy in honour of the saints, and they nearly killed him. The forty days of Lent were not settled until the fifth century; Jerome gives the account of it. Paulinus could not get the Christians to be sober; and so he tried by means of pictures, fine arts, I and the like to set them free from their drunkenness; that is! what they call the primitive Church!

222 Ques. What about Good Friday?

That depends on the sun and moon, and they are very authentic. The full moon of the month Abib can be very well known, and then Pentecost is fixed seven weeks after. To find Christ's birth, you can only begin with Zacharias in the order of the priests in the course of Abia, and if you can reckon that through, it would put Christ's birth at a totally different time of the year. Anniversaries are part of human nature.

We have one more point to notice here; Christ is coming to change our vile bodies; not "vile," morally, for it is not an abusive term, but one which means really, "body of humiliation."

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