

The Gospel Shaped Heart

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of aligning right thinking with right feeling for God, where logic serves love, reasoning serves rejoicing in Christ, and doctrine serves delight. The mind is shaped by the gospel to serve objective reality, all truth, and heart-awakening regeneration. The heart is shaped to be freed from guilt, filled with joy, and ultimately satisfied with God Himself. The goal is to have a mind that knows God truly and a heart that loves Him duly, resulting in white-hot affections for God.

Scripture: Philippians 1:20, 2 Corinthians 1:24, Hebrews 13:17, Matthew 15:8, 2 Corinthians 9:7, Philippians 4:4, Psalms 37:4, Psalms 32:11, Philippians 1:23

Topics: "Aligning Mind and Heart", "Joy in God"

Description

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Transcript

So, to sum it up again, right thinking, I'm arguing, is the servant of right feeling for God and logic exists for love, reasoning about Christ or the kingdom or the cross exists for rejoicing in Christ and the cross, doctrine exists for delight, reflection about God is meant to serve affection for God, the head is meant to serve the heart, knowing truth is meant to be the basis of admiring truth. And for that to happen, for the mind to function rightly in the service of the right explosion of the heart with white hot affections for God, the gospel has to shape them both. So we saw that the mind is shaped by the gospel in that the gospel turns the mind into a servant of objective reality, doesn't create reality, it serves reality because the gospel describes objective reality.

Secondly, the gospel shapes the mind by making it the servant of all truth, even self-incriminating truth that you don't have to run from anymore or use your mind to distort reality, to conceal it from yourself because God has solved the self-incrimination a better way than deceit and therefore you're free to say it all and see it all even if it hurts because that hurt can't kill you anymore. And third, it shapes the mind by making the mind a servant of heart-awakening regeneration so that the dynamics of 1 Peter 1.23, through the living and abiding word, the gospel, you are born anew, that is born unto a heart that sees Him for who He is and savors Him for who He is, thus the gospel articulated with the mind and the mouth becomes the

instrument of awakening in the power of the Holy Spirit and it does that not just at the beginning but all the way along, over and over again as just in the last hour. Now, how does the gospel shape the heart? Each speaker so far, Tim, last night, Don, both at the beginning said we need to say what the gospel is and it's interesting how each of them said it a little more fully.

Tim, it's news and just a little bit and then unpacked the gospel-shaped life and Don, a little more as far as the specifics of the cross and its dynamics go and now I'm going to take a whack at it because for me to ask how the gospel shapes the heart, I need to say more about the specifics than has been said. So in my effort to define the gospel which is not everything, I think that's one of the most important sentences you said, Don, that the minute you begin to say everything is a gospel, you begin to lose the gospel. I like that sentence, that's an important sentence in our day.

So here's my effort to describe the massive gospel that is not everything. It's got six elements to it. Number one, it is a plan.

According to the Scriptures, Christ died for our sins. It's been planned, it's old. From before the foundation of the world, He chose us in Christ for holiness and predestined us for adoption.

So this is not a sudden development as a result of the fall. This is a plan. If you take the plan away, there's no gospel.

Number two, it's an event in history. Christ died. Number three, it's an achievement through that event, propitiation by substitution, J.I. Packer's three-word summary of the gospel.

Christ's death in that moment did something between us and God, namely, He propitiated the wrath of God for all the elect. He dealt with it decisively in history. That's not done again at mass or in our conversion.

And, fourthly, it's a free offer for faith. I asked Don one time, must we say that salvation is by faith apart from works, is part of the gospel? And he said, yes, it must be, because if you offered the achievement of the cross for you to be worked for, there'd be no good news. The gospel includes, it's free, receive it, believe it.

So that's the fourth aspect of the gospel, Romans 3.28, we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Number five, that achievement is then by the power of the Holy Spirit in an act of conversion applied to you, and the effect is forgiveness of sins and justification and eternal life. Acts 10.43, everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.

You believe you're forgiven. The event's achievement is applied through faith to you now, and you enjoy the effects of that achievement called forgiveness, and a declaration of your righteousness before God and an inheritance that is secured of eternal life. Now in my experience, that's where the description of the gospel usually ends for many preachers, and I wrote a whole book to say it shouldn't end there called God is the Gospel.

Because, why would you want to be forgiven? And you can answer that question in a very God-belittling way, and a very God-exalting way. If I said, of course I want to be forgiven, I hate having a guilty conscience. That's a bad answer.

Has nothing to do with God. When my wife is angry at me because I have sinned against her, some ugly word maybe, when I get up in the morning and see something that didn't get done I want it done, and I speak harshly, which a husband is not supposed to do, and she's hurt and angry and I'm guilty, I need her forgiveness. Why? Why would I want that? Because as she stands at the sink, her back manifestly to me, I want her to turn around and I want her to face me, I want to be able to look into her eyes again and have it be really good.

That's what forgiveness is for with God. And if you don't cherish your justification and your forgiveness and your eternal life because they get you God, you need to deal with Him more deeply. 1 Peter 3.18, Christ suffered once for sinners, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God.

That's the end of the Gospel. So my sixth element in the Gospel is what Christ purchases for us most ultimately is God, the gift of Himself, all that God is for us in Christ. My point here is that when that sixth element Gospel penetrates like a sword by the power of the Spirit into the fallen and sinful and hard human heart, it recreates it, shapes it in distinct ways and I'll just mention three.

One, it frees that heart from the misery of guilt and all the affections that surround it and ruin life. Guilt is taken away and the heart is no longer shaped by this inner thing called guilt around which it's constantly fitting itself and miserably adapting and now that guilt is gone. And number two, it is fitted for a whole range of new affections, not guilt anymore but the fruit of the Holy Spirit, love, joy, peace and so on.

So the heart is now, the Holy Spirit has moved in and He now, He has a shape, a love shape, a peace shape, a joy shape and the heart begins to be shaped, fitted for these affections, not the old angry, hateful, guilty affections and the Holy Spirit is breeding a whole new range of emotions and affections. And third, that heart is shaped by being fulfilled with what is ultimately valuable, namely God Himself. This heart is now satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus.

That is its new, sweet, beautiful shape. It is a heart satisfied by all that God is for us in Jesus. So those three things, freed from guilt, fitted for joy, fulfilled with God is the new shape of the Christian heart.

When 1 Peter 3.18 says, He died once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, it doesn't mean that He might bring our hearts to God to be bored. Bring our hearts to God to be moderately interested. Bring our hearts to God to be analyzed, known.

That's not what He means. He means bring your heart to God to be shaped by white-hot affection for God. Your heart hasn't arrived fully at the blood-bought destiny of it until it is passionate for God, loving God, delighting in God, satisfied with God, treasuring God above all things.

That's the end of the gospel and the final shape of the gospel-shaped heart. So the gospel shapes the mind and the gospel shapes the heart by giving the mind the capacity to know God and giving the heart the capacity to enjoy God. The mind is shaped to see God.

The heart is shaped to savor. That's what the gospel reclaims. You were given a mind to know Him truly and you were given a heart to love Him duly.

And when the gospel does its shaping work, the mind is free to do its right thinking about God and the heart is free to feel its white-hot affections for God. That's what the gospel does to the mind and the heart. So I return to my point.

You have a mind and you have a heart and the heart, when rightly served by the mind, is full of white-hot affection for God. Redeemed thinking about God exists for redeemed feeling for God. And gospel-shaped reasoning is for the sake of gospel-shaped rejoicing.

Now, there's a cluster of clarifying questions that I ask myself. It might be helpful for you to hear me try to answer. Four clarifying questions about that and then four closing pastoral implications of that.

Question number one. What do you mean by the word affections? You keep using it. It's not quite the way I have heard it used.

It's like 18th century use, yes, but you don't know about that. So what do I mean by affection? I mean things like joy, fear, gratitude, desire, hate, anger, tender-heartedness, peace, loneliness, sorrow, regret, shame, hope, etc. We call them emotions.

But we need some clarity here because the connotation surrounding these words may be different than what I intend. When I think of the Holy Spirit awakening affections, I think of spiritual affections. And spiritual affections are affections that have been awakened by the work of the Holy Spirit in accordance with truth.

Not just any old affections or emotions, but affections that are spiritual, of the Spirit, born of the Spirit, conformed to the truth that the Spirit reveals to the mind. That's the kind of affections I want to have and that's the kind that the gospel-shaped heart is meant to be full of, which means that it's different from bodily sensations. This is important.

None, none of the affections I care about ultimately are bodily. Fluttering eyelashes, sweaty palms, shaky knees, hits of the stomach drops, fast pulse. None of that is what I'm talking about.

And the reason I know that what I am talking about exists distinct from that, even though in this body they are never separate from that, and thus easily confused with that, is that I will have these affections when I am dead and my body is decaying in the ground. And I know that because of Philippians 1.23. To die is to be with Christ, which is far better. Better.

I will love Him more. He will be my greater delight and my body will not be there to have a fast pulse. I know it also to be distinct from the bodily motions because God has these affections and He has no body.

Hosea 11.8 My compassion grows warm and tender. Jeremiah 4.8 The fierce anger of the Lord. Ephesians 4.30 Don't grieve the Holy Spirit.

Zephaniah 3.17 God rejoices over you with loud shouts. And He has no body and therefore these affections that I'm talking about that are the goal of your heart and the thing that the rightly exercised mind is serving are not bodily sensations. This is why we must be so careful with gifts of music and art because the world knows these things produce emotions and they are not spiritual in and of themselves because they are not spiritual.

The mind and the flesh and the mind and the spirit are not the same and the mind and the flesh can have very high emotions with very beautiful art and that is not what I'm interested in at all until the miracle happens when that very music by the touch of the Holy Spirit combines with God's truth and a kind of, as C.S. Lewis would call, transposition or incarnation can awaken in me spiritual affections for God. Very delicate. This would be worth a whole conference someday.

So that's my answer to my first clarifying question. What do you mean by the affections? They are emotions but they're not bodily emotions and when they count, that is, when they are coming from a gospel-shaped heart and serving to honor God, they are spiritual affections both in their negative dimensions of proper anger and positive dimensions of joy and delight. They honor God because they're born of His Spirit rooted in His truth and serving His glory.

That's question number one. Question number two. Say again, why do you make the affections of the heart ultimate as the goal and the right use of the mind a subordinate servant of that instead of the other way around or side by side? Why do you do that? That was last night's message.

But just two other observations that might shed a little more light on it. Jesus said, John 8, 32, you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. What does that mean? In the context, free from sinning.

You serve sin. He who does sin is a slave of sin. Two verses later.

He's thinking freedom from sin. You know the truth, and the truth rightly known by the gospel-shaped mind is a sin-destroying, freedom-giving power in the mind. Question.

What is sin? Sin is not an act of the body. The body has no moral standing. The body is just stuff.

The acts of the body become sin by having motives, drives, orientations on God or the world. And therefore, when He says you will know the truth and the truth will free you from the power of sin, He means something deep inside is getting changed by knowing this truth. You stop loving the world.

Don't love the world or the things that are in the world. Love God. That's what starts to happen.

So I take Him to mean right knowing is serving right affections. That's what I take Jesus to mean. Here's another illustration.

Psalms 100. Let me do this with my hands, okay? This hand over here is the affection hand. And this hand over here is the knowledge and the mind and the reflection hand.

Alright? Serve the Lord with gladness. Come into His presence with singing. Make a joyful noise to the Lord.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come into His presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God. It is He that made us and we are His. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise.

Give thanks to Him and bless His name for the Lord is good. His faithfulness endures forever to all generations. Do you get that? Rejoice.

No. Be thankful. No.

That's the way it works. These are ground clauses over here. These are high affections and gladness and thanksgiving and praise over here.

That's what life is ultimately for. And this serves that. That's the structure of the Psalms over and over again.

So my answer to this second question is that the reason for saying that we have a mind and we have a heart and the mind rightly exercises a servant of the heart's affections is because I find that to be the structure of biblical thought. And it makes sense and that will come clear perhaps as we keep moving. Number three.

You haven't even made any attempt Piper to show why maybe action or behavior should be in that order as the goal. But maybe the mind is meant to serve the affections so that they will give birth to fruit in behavior and that's the ultimate goal of life. Why don't you go there? Because it says out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks and speaking is an action.

And there are many other such texts about fruits of behavior coming out of the heart of affection for God. And haven't we even heard you say that love for people in its practical expression is the overflow of joy in God that meets the needs of others. So where's behavior in this little duo of messages? My answer to the reason I do not say that the ultimate goal is behavior is because what makes action of the body this thing right here that kind of thing what makes action of the body an honor to Christ is the affections that drive it.

Without them it is nothing. Matthew 15.8 This people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me in vain do they worship me. They mean zero.

So if I walked into a room and I saw people doing worship doing it singing and saying all the right things and I knew their heart was far from me I would not have the least interest in that. I would not call that the achievement of any of God's goals in salvation. And so the behaviors the singing of the song the praying of the prayer the preaching of the sermon in and of its raw physical self is nothing.

But when it is animated by indwelt by when it becomes the incarnation of an affection then it has beauty and is part of this final goal because it's one in the same with that white hot expression of affection. Here's another illustration. If I speak with the tongues of men of angels but have not love I'm nothing.

If I speak in tongues if I understand all mysteries and have all faith so as to move a mountain and have not love I'm nothing. If I give away all I have and deliver my body to be burned and have not love nothing. So I just don't get excited about behaviors in and of themselves.

If you see somebody laying his life down that might be a good thing it might not be a good thing. If you see somebody giving away all of his money to the poor that might be a good thing it might not be a good thing. God has to enter in here.

And how you feel about God why are you doing this? What does it have to do with God? It might be sheer idolatry of the poor. So I'm just not into behaviors as the goal. I'm into God and how you are passionately engaged with Him and if I see your behavior as expressing that then I will see that hole and love it and worship Him with you for it.

Here's another one. This is just text showing you why I don't go that direction. This is 2 Corinthians 9 7 and 8 He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly.

He who sows bountifully will reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion because the Lord loves a cheerful giver. I say to my people I don't want your money! I want your cheer in your money.

But if I have to choose keep your money because God says look this writing of Jack's business it's nothing! I want your heart! And if I have your heart you'll let it in appropriate ways. So what is decisive in establishing a virtue that the body performs is what the heart is doing when the body is doing. And that's why I say with or without a body we are hearts and minds and the mind will serve the heart to have white heart affection and that's what now question number 4 I'm about to give the answer what does all that have to do with the glory of God? You have a mind which when it's shaped by the gospel is thinking rightly and serving the gospel shaped heart which is now being filled with kindling of truth for the sake of the flame of white heart affection as the fire of the Holy Spirit falls glory of God God I keep saying white heart affection for God and if you just wonder why do you keep using that phrase? Because it's as far from lukewarm as I can get and you're going to be spit out if you're lukewarm and I don't want you you're not playing here that's one of the most scary statements in the bible you are lukewarm and I will spit you out of my mouth that's scary so I'm pushing white heart now what does it have what does that language have to do with the glory of God and I have tried in everything I've preached and written to defend this sentence God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him now if that's a true statement God is most glorified in you when you're white heart satisfied in him then for the sake of his glory you will care about being satisfied in him because if you're not satisfied in him you belittle him you glorify what you're satisfied by that's my answer to the question but is it biblical and last Sunday I preached on this text let me give you a 3 minute summary of a 55 minute sermon Philippians 1 20 I preached on this sermon when I came to Bethlehem and when I candidated in February 1980 it's a very precious text to me it's right at the heartbeat of my life my eager expectation and hope this is Philippians 1 20 my eager expectation and hope is that now as always with full courage Christ might be magnified magnified in my body whether by life or by death for to me to live and to die is gain now the logic of that break between verse 20 and 21 for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain is the key to all my Christian hedonism I want Christ to be magnified Paul says that's my heartbeat that's my life I want Christ in my bodily life whether I'm living whether I'm dying I want him to look really great that's what he says and then he gives the explanatory unpacking for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain so Christ will look great if my living is Christ and Christ will look great in my dying if my dying is gain and if we wanted to unpack the living pair we'd go to chapter 3 verse 8 I count everything as lost for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord so when he says my life to live is Christ he means I count everything less valuable than Christ and all my life is devoted to showing how supremely valuable Jesus is that's the way you make him look good choose him over everything over and over again he's cherished and loved and delighted in he's satisfying more than all the temptations of life he looks really good in your life when he's that valuable for the death half I want him to be magnified in my dying for to me to die is gain gain because verse 23 more of Christ go to be with Christ so if you're dying and you see everything that life has offered you going away won't have my wife anymore no kids anymore no dreamed marriage no dreamed retirement all the physical bodily pleasures they're going I'm lying there in a few minutes I'll be gone and all I get is Jesus and you smile to all those standing around your bed and you say gain gain gain you make Jesus look really good that's the way it works from which I infer if you want to magnify Christ in your life which is what I want to do you will treasure him more than all that life can give and all that death can take and I call that Christian hidden Christ is more most magnified in you when you are supreme so my answer to my fourth question what is this heart mind white affection have to do with the glory of God that's the way you most glorify God so the mind is bent on glorifying God and it does it by serving the heart and the heart is bent on glorifying God and so it does its thing namely its affectional thing by burning with white hot affection for God so that everything else by comparison Paul says is refuse oh if New England were filled with such Christians just this many they'd smell it they would smell the aroma of Christ that way so so for closing pastoral

implications number one since gospel shape the gospel shape heart is shaped for the supreme joy of God that's what it's shaped for supreme joy in God and since God is most glorified in that heart and that mind when that joy in God is being experienced therefore your people should unremittingly pursue their joy in God even if it cost them their lives rejoice in the Lord and again I say rejoice Philippians 4 delight yourself in the Lord Psalm 37 4 be glad in the Lord Psalm 32 11 in my sermon last Sunday I got to this point and I said it changes everything this vision of what we are as human beings what God offers us in himself changes everything and I gave 11 illustrations which is what I'd like to do right now but I'm not so you can go watch that at Desiring God or listen and hear those 11 ways that this changes everything but that's my first pastoral implication it's going to have a massive effect on how you do church a massive effect on small groups a massive effect on preaching if you believe what I just said that your people should devote themselves 24 7 if you can do it in your sleep to pursuing total satisfaction in God in his presence is fullness of joy at his right hand are pleasures forevermore that's what your people want and they don't know where it's found they want full and they want forever and they're settling for half and 60 years then perish you've got in your hand full and forever and it's called God don't discourage them turn Christian life into a duty for them stoke their implication number two Hebrews chapter 13 verse 17 obey your leaders now this sounds like it's being addressed to the people without reference to any implications for the leaders but that's exactly not what's going on here it is for the people but then it is for the elders and the leaders obey your leaders submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account let them do this with joy not with groaning or that would be of no advantage to you as a pastor as I read that I say I love my people I want to be an advantage to them not a disadvantage this text says if I watch over their souls with moaning and groaning instead of with joy it is of no advantage to them so in order to love them I must be happy in the ministry which I understand to mean be happy in God overflowing in the delights of ministry even the painful ones so pastors implication number two is you don't have any option here you must pursue the fullest possible affections for God love for God delight in God treasure in God satisfaction in God because your people depend on it it will be of no advantage to them if you go about your ministry looking like you'd rather be doing something else because God hasn't satisfied your soul there are so many sick churches in this country because of sick pastors we're all sick which is really why all churches are sick and we're just more or less sick and it's good to move off the scene sooner or later so that new kinds of sicknesses can move in and avoid the kind you messed them up with for so long which I really mean that with all my heart I've not served my church well in significant ways I've served them well in some ways I'm okay with that the Lord will be my judge but tonight my replacement Jason is so much better than me in so many ways he will overcome so many dysfunctions in my church but we try right this text says your people will get an advantage from your joy and if you just go moaning and groaning and dutifully trying to be a pastor they'll get sick or they'll leave that's number two number three implication for your preaching all of your ministry 2nd Corinthians chapter 1 verse 24 right at the heart of my self understanding as a pastor not that we lord it over your faith but we are workers with you for your joy what a beautiful self understanding so this is I'm shifting from implication 2 which is the pastor's joy to his mission to come alongside his people and become a worker for their joy what if you went to every committee meeting my job tonight is to work for their joy every sermon prepared my sermon is for their joy would that flavor everything I think the key in preaching is that your job is to spread a banquet for them to eat from so that when they eat they can say that is worship and it's joy in what you just spread but you have to have the mindset I'm going to give them what will make them glad now that may involve some very hard bad painful news right we all know that but they will hear that bad news in a pastor who's got their joy on his heart because that's what the apostolic mission was not that we lord it over your faith we are workers with you for your joy final last implication will be done this is a little complicated I think

I can make it understandable if if you follow me and I hope me means the Bible here in that your heart when rightly with your mind when rightly functioning and thinking rightly about God is serving your heart throwing kindling of truth on the Holy Spirit ignited fire of affections for God when that's happening in a church that church will be protected from two pairs of errors one the pair of errors that I have in mind first comes when right thinking is cut off from that process of right affection and the first result the first error when it's cut off is dead orthodoxy you could call it intellectualism or you could call it in its pragmatic form a kind of plastic pragmatism most blatantly manifest in certain forms of the seeker movement now here's what happens when that reaction to the absence of affections in thinking resulting intellectualism and dead orthodoxy another reaction happens called anti-intellectualism charismatic excesses and that was really owing to the absence of affections and they're trying to get it back so that these two seemingly opposite errors namely intellectualism and anti-intellectualism dead orthodoxy and charismatic excesses and I'm using the word excesses because I'm not down on charismatic in its biblical form those two errors are owing to a failure to get the heart right to get it prominent to make it big and strong and joy to be prominent in the church when that's succeeding there's rich solid doctrine and theology feeding that you're not going to get as many people moving into dead orthodoxy or pragmatism or reacting over here with charismatic excesses or anti-intellectualism those two things are just not going to rise as easily that's number one, number two second pair of errors that would be spared us if we got this right separating this affectional riches from doing so the first one was we separated it from thinking and thinking became intellectualism and its reaction and then the second one is separate it from doing and what you get is legalism or Tim last night says moralism and legalism are the same for him, I'm okay with that pragmatic doing or moralistic doing liberal this is good what he did last night the liberal dimension, the conservative dimension do do do in social justice and do do do in not going to the wrong movies either one is coming in large measure from a pulling of the affections out of doing so that God is no longer there and a passion for Him and a love for Him and a satisfaction in Him has no longer reigned in the church and now the church is doing and doing and when you try to do without those affections you become a legalist or here's the reaction antinomianism emergent almost gone now but it won't ever be quite gone because it's endemic in a reaction when you see legalistic conservative strivings or legalistic liberal strivings one of the effects over here is going to be we're going to do it another way, we're just not going to have anything like that and they create everything under the sun and say doing doesn't matter, laws don't matter, rules don't matter behavior doesn't matter what matters is relationships, I've talked to these folks, they're very hard to talk to because they don't reason, I said one time no I shouldn't go there I shouldn't do that I might mess everything up, let me draw things to a summary from all this I reaffirm my point that you were created with a mind and you were created with a heart so that when the mind is rightly serving the heart the mind finds itself in its proper use of expressing a white hot affection for God, a treasuring of God above all things and that happens when the mind and the heart are shaped by the gospel the heart is shaped freed from guilt, freed from joy freed from before being fully satisfied in all that God is for us in Jesus so that he has a white hot affection for him and the gospel shaped mind is about its business day after day in your personal reading, in your conversing with other people, in your listening to preaching, the gospel shaped mind is about its business of mainly loading the fuel of truth into the furnace of the gospel shaped heart so that the flame of white hot affection for God keeps burning until we see him.

Father I pray now for the miracle, these words are relatively easy to say and what I'm talking about is a miracle a miracle of truth being ignited by the Spirit so that there is awakened spiritual affections that are not humanly possible to produce or sustain in the face of suffering and death which is where they shine most brightly and so I ask for the miracle to happen in New England in the churches represented here, in the hearts that are here Lord come baptize this region in a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit so that the

truth that is well known in this room would become incendiary in its heat and light I pray in Jesus name

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