

# Declining Christian Standards

by Major Ian Thomas

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*Major Ian Thomas emphasizes the importance of maintaining Christian standards amidst a declining moral landscape by living out one's faith in the world while being transformed by the Holy Spirit.*

**Duration:** 48:03

**Scripture:** Colossians 3:15

**Topics:** "Christian"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of Christians living differently from the world. He highlights the brokenness, immorality, and dishonesty that exist in society and calls Christians to stand out as representatives of God's kingdom. The preacher mentions the impact of Christians showing love and care to young people who may feel neglected by others. He also discusses the idea of living a life of law and liberty, where believers seek to do God's will and receive His approval. The sermon concludes with the reminder that although the world may not have changed throughout history, Christians are still called to be a light in the midst of darkness.

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## Transcript

Will you take your New Testaments please and turn to John's Gospel, Chapter 17. And in this wonderful chapter, our Lord speaks his closing words, his last great prayer, before he left the world. He's about to leave that little group of men he loved so much.

He's deeply concerned about their relationship to the world in which he's leaving them. And many of you I know love this prayer and many of you would almost know it by heart. John 17, these words spake Jesus and lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come.

Glorify thy son, that thy son also may glorify thee. He spent 33 years in the world. Leaving that unseen world of his father's presence, he stooped here and lived a life amongst us.

The word was made flesh. And now at the age of 33, he's going out to die, knowing that he is going to return to his father's house. And he looks into the face of men of the same stuffing and stamina that you are made of.

He's going to leave them in this world. Now look down please to verse 6. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world. Thine they were, and thou gavest them me, and they have

kept thy word.

You gave those men out of the world to me. And I think we should start here. I don't care what dispensation it is.

I don't care what period it is in the 6,000 years of human history. In Adam's fallen race, in all ages, God has given men to himself. He's touched a heart here.

He's called a life there. He said, this is my friend. This is my servant.

And we as Christians today are men and women that God has given to Christ out of the world. And that is why there is always the call of separation to a Christian. The world where the God of this world, Satan, rules and reigns.

The world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. That world that gives Jesus Christ no place, we've come out of. And we should take our place outside that world.

I remember when I faced this as a young fellow in business. I remember hearing the illustration and it made me chuckle and I tried it and proved it. I was told if you got one of those big washing bins that your grandmothers used to use on washing day with handles on either side, you know, up to their eyes in soap suds before all the modern machinery came.

And if you put that big thing down on the ground, this big tin bath, and you stepped into the middle of it and you caught hold of the two handles and tried to lift the bath, do you think you could do it? Now you just imagine. You go and try it. Get granny's old bath from the basement somewhere and put it on the floor and step into the middle of it and catch hold of the handles and try and lift that big tin bath with you standing in the middle of it.

You can't do it. It's impossible. You say, what should you do? Get out of it.

Come out and be separate. And the moment you're on the outside, you've got the point of leverage and you can lift it. And you will never help the world until you get out of it.

I have called you out of the world. And then our lovely Lord in his wonderful practical way goes on in the prayer, verse 11. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world.

I come to thee, Holy Father, keep through thine own name those which thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are. You notice the preposition has changed. It's not out of the world now, that's the Christian's calling.

It is in the world, the Christian's circumstances. You've got to live your life in this world. You were born in it.

You'll spend all your days here till your days are done. You've got to rub shoulders with your neighbors. You've got to live in the town and the village where your daily calling puts you.

And he said, I'm leaving those that I have called out of the world to myself. I'm leaving them in the world. We can never, never shut ourselves up and say we won't live in the world.

We've got to, we're expected to. The wonder of our calling is that in the world we can display our lovely Lord to others and they will see such a tremendous difference because we are out of the world and yet

living in the world. Now look down the chapter to verse 14.

And I have given them thy word and the world hath hated them because they are not of the world even as I am not of the world. Here the word has changed from out of the world to in the world to not of the world. And of course this is the Christian's character.

His calling is out of the world. His circumstances are in the world. His character is not of the world.

And when these three things are seen nearly always it leads to verse 18. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. The Christian's commission.

We are sent with a new life to represent our living Lord and with his beauty and strength display him to the world in which we have to live our lives. Now this one thought in closing. Do you know the world hasn't changed? In the days of Cain and Abel when there were only a matter of a few people in the world.

In the days when any of these Old Testament characters like Daniel and Ezekiel and Jeremiah and Zechariah stood for God. In the days when they had only thousands or a few millions around them it was the same world. Today there are billions in the world.

Today the standards in Christendom, Christianized countries are rapidly dropping. Some of us who have lived amongst real pagans and heathen. And the heathens have watched our lives.

They've never heard the name of Jesus. They know nothing of the Christian standards of life. They expect to see a difference when a Christian comes amongst them.

A difference in speech. A difference in conduct. A difference in ways.

New standards are introduced. But in loved America today you live in a land that's been swept by the gospel. And Christian standards have been raised by your grandparents.

They died for their faith. Their way of living. But all these things are being torn to shreds today.

And they say it doesn't matter. We don't want the control of those Christian standards. You're living in a land of broken homes.

Of immorality. Of dishonesty in business. And where does the Christian stand? Called out of the world, he has to live his life in the world.

But he is not of the world. And we should be commissioned men to stand by our very lives and conduct to show that tremendous difference. That we are not in the kingdom of darkness.

That the God of this world does not reign over our lives. We are in the kingdom of God's dear son. And he is supreme Lord.

And it's what he wants and wills that will operate in our lives. Bless you. And all the people said amen.

And I think that's all I need to say. And sit down. Because the subject has been adequately covered already.

I was just thinking when Mr. Wildish was speaking that in London today, shall I put it this way, at the beginning of the century in London, a city which is now a population of about ten and a half million or

eleven million people, eleven, eighty-five percent at the beginning of this century, eighty-five percent of the people went to a place of worship with some degree of regularity. Today, less than four percent, including Roman Catholics. That's a tremendous landslide.

It's a country, of course, as you know, where, like America, which we've known, two wars. And all this has contributed to a declining standard. But the real background reason is that hell and heaven are no longer real to the vast majority of people today.

And I'm not so in touch now with the States as I was, but vast crowds of young people, teenagers and early twenties in Britain today, they've had no parents to pray for them. They've had no home that has afforded them any shelter or security. Their father or mother have been watching TV or out working or out at the show or bingo.

And youngsters have just run mad. And, of course, the trend, the drift, is infected into the standards of Christian living. But God hasn't one standard for one generation and one for another.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. And as Mr. Wildish has said, we are responsible as Christians to raise the standard. Now, the Christian life is a life of law.

Oh, yes, I know that it's all of grace, and we receive the Lord Jesus as Savior by faith alone. But there are regulations, there are rules. You want to find them? Well, you look in the Sermon on the Mount.

You'll find them there. The rules lay down for the standard of life to be lived by anybody in whose heart the King has come and Jesus is enthroned. And everybody in the kingdom, a believer, there's the standard.

And God never changes it, an impossible standard. But we haven't to achieve it, we haven't to attain it. We have to let the Holy Spirit live his life in us.

He is the only one who can live it, and he is at our disposal. So, the Christian standard remains the same. It's a life of law, but it's a life of liberty.

Not license, not to do what you like, anything, any old hell, but a life of liberty, liberty to do the will of God. And all these youngsters today who are living regardless and of no moral standard of life, they're not basically happy. There's a desperate sense of frustration and emptiness.

We've had most interesting experiences recently in what we call coffee bar evangelism with crowds of these young people. I don't know whether you have them here, fellows with long hair and pointed shoes and all sorts like that. And they've come in and I've never known a bigger thrill in my life than to see the way they listen to the truth when it's put forward to them in language they can understand.

And they're eager to know. And they're always wondering why it is we bother about them. Nobody else seems to care.

But the fact they've found some Christians who love has made it all the difference. It's a life of law. It's a life of liberty, liberty from frustration to do the will of God, and it's a life of love, the love of Christ dwelling in our hearts day by day.

Just one practical word before I stop. You want to know, perhaps, how do I know when it's wrong or right to do this or to do that? You look in the Bible in vain for rules. The Bible doesn't say thou shalt not do this, thou shalt not do that.

The Bible lays down principles. And as you apply the principles, you can, day by day, know the answer to a particular problem. The principles in Colossians 3, 15 and 16, I give them to you.

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also you are called in one body, and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever you do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father and the Father by him.

These are three basic principles for matters that are doubtful. When you don't know how to act or what to do or what not to do, one, let the peace of God rule. Let the peace of God act as umpire.

You know there's a big difference between peace with God and the peace of God. You have peace with God being justified by faith at conversion. That's the end of an enmity.

But you may live for years as a Christian and know nothing of the peace of God. Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blessed, finding, as he promised, perfect peace and rest. And when you know that as a Christian, that's a precious possession.

Now let that peace act as umpire. If you make a decision which is going to disturb that peace, it can't be right. That cannot be God's purpose for you.

Let the peace of God rule. Let the word of God dwell in you richly, in all wisdom. And you notice how the verse goes on, singing and admonishing one another, psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts the Lord.

Another test. Anything that makes the word of God die out, anything that takes the lilt, the song out of your life, the joy that is yours because you're a Christian, anything that's going to take that from you, that can't be right. Tested by that principle.

Does it cause your Bible to grow stale? Does it cause the inward joy of the Lord, which is your strength, to leave you? Then drop it like a hot brick. And thirdly, whatever you do, do in the name of the Lord Jesus. Can you ask his blessing upon it? Can you expect him to bless it? Can you know that in doing that thing you have his smile? Then that's all right.

But if you can't, don't touch it. Three practical tests, if you're uncertain in any situation what to do. Apply the principle, and I believe in any situation you'll know the answer.

Thank you. Well, there's certainly little need for me to add to what has already been said by our two brethren. That's why, of course, I was so happy when they were called upon to speak first.

But inherent in the subject, as announced by our chairman, is the possibility of a false premise. The declining Christian standards in a godless society. And almost subconsciously, at the back of your mind, you are relating those declining Christian standards to the godless society, as though the godless society was responsible for the declining Christian standards.

But, of course, that's an entirely false premise. Because nowhere in the Bible, anywhere, are Christian standards ever related to a godless society. We never take our Christian standards from our environment.

As our brother Harold Wildish has already mentioned, the world hasn't changed. I suppose society in the United States, or society in the British Isles, is certainly no better, but probably no worse. Than on the Amazon, or in the heart of Africa, or in India.

But when a missionary goes to India, or Pakistan, or China, or Africa, or the South America, does he say, well, of course, when I get to this land, I've got to look out and evaluate the local society and its standards, so that I can draw some relevant standards for the Christian, in terms of his behavior. He doesn't do that. Christian behavior has absolutely nothing to do with the godless society in which we live.

But I think, by and large, the problem of the declining Christian standards within a godless society derives from the fact that, by and large, we have tended over the years to reduce Christianity to a pattern of behavior that we all too often do relate to the society in which we live, instead of recognizing that the Christian life derives from a principle of life. If we are to be taken out of the world, and not of the world, though still in the world, it will only be as we obey the injunction that is given to us in the twelfth chapter of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans. Romans chapter 12, verse 2, be not conformed to this world, but be transformed.

And that transformation, as you will remember from the eighth chapter of this epistle, is to conform us to the image of God's Son, God-likeness. So we are to be transformed in order that we might be conformed. We are born conformed to the world, in it and of it.

But we are to be transformed from conformity to the world to conformity to Christ. But how is it to take place? By the renewing of our minds. There's got to be a radical change of attitude.

And I think that if we lament the declining standards of Christians in this godless society, we haven't got to examine or blame the society in which we live, we've got to re-examine the gospel we preach. What kind of a gospel is it that we are preaching? What kind of a Christianity is it to which we invite men and women and boys and girls to adhere? In this same epistle, the eighth chapter, we're told in the first verse, there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. But the characteristic of one who is in Christ Jesus is that there has been introduced a radical change of principle that now governs his behavior patterns.

He walks no longer after the flesh. He walks after the spirit. 4 verse 3, 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 and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law.

And I'm so glad that Dr. Redpath reminded us that the Christian is not relieved from the obligation of fulfilling the law. Rather, as a redeemed sinner now re-inhabited by the Holy Spirit, it is to the end that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not now after the flesh, controlled by that satanic principle, that Adamic principle of satanic origin, but we walk now after the spirit. As redeemed sinners, we have come to be inhabited by God himself in the person of the Holy Spirit, who is there to discipline us according to the absolute standards of God that are not relative, do not change with each succeeding generation or decade, have absolutely nothing whatever to do with the godless society in which we live.

It is God's absolute standard of righteousness that has been interpreted to us by the law. And you and I are redeemed in the blood of Jesus that inhabited by the Holy Spirit. He might give us the power to be what the blood of Jesus has given us the right to become, children of God who bear again the image of God.

Because the Holy Spirit is establishing within us not comparative standards, but absolute standards, God's standards, the law, that these standards, all its demands upon us in righteousness might be fulfilled. It was to these standards, of course, the Lord Jesus himself in the sinlessness of his humanity conformed, for he was without sin and sin is the transgression of the law. So that Romans 10, verse 4 tells us that the Lord Jesus was the end of the law for righteousness.

The last word in righteousness. And because you and I may be clothed with that righteousness, which was his that satisfied completely the law, God can accept us in this kind of righteousness because it satisfies the absoluteness of God's righteousness. We are made in him the righteousness of God that completely satisfies every demand that God's law makes upon a man.

That on the basis of this imputed righteousness, we might enjoy experientially that imparted righteousness that is made possible because the Holy Spirit in us fulfills that law. So the righteousness demanded by the law will be fulfilled in us again only insofar as we recognize it is the Holy Spirit by whom we are to walk, who is going to exercise sovereign jurisdiction. He is the one who is going to lead us, educate us, rebuke us for they that are led, disciplined, brought up, educated by the Holy Spirit.

They are the sons of God. And when we are led by the Spirit of God, when we walk after the Spirit, then the righteousness of the law, which is absolute, will be fulfilled in us. And one last reference, then, that you'll find in the second chapter of the epistle to the Philippians, such a standard which is as absolute as God himself is only possible when God himself is allowed to be in business.

And that is why Paul says at the end of verse 12, much more in my absence, without me behind you with a big stick, no longer having the necessity that I superimpose upon you some external pattern to which you seek to adhere, much more in my absence, work out your own salvation. Because it is God himself by his Holy Spirit who works in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. And his good pleasure is absolute in righteousness.

To the end, verse 15, that you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke. Where? In a monastery? Carefully segregated from the wicked world around you? No. It says right in the midst of a crooked and a perverse nation.

Please don't blame the crooked and perverse nation if your standard has fallen hopelessly short of the standard that God demands. For here, Paul says, because it is God himself in you, working in and through you, both to will and to do of his own good pleasure, right in the midst of a nation of crooks, right in the midst of a nation of perverts, you can be kept blameless, without rebuke, harmless, among whom you shine as lights in the world. So let us not take refuge because we have a bad conscience in a wicked world and blame it.

Let us examine our understanding of the truth of the gospel we preach, that Jesus Christ not only died for us, he rose again by his indwelling Holy Spirit to live in us, that his life through us might fulfill the demands of the law and righteousness as once his life clothed with his humanity then satisfied the demands of the law in righteousness upon him. Then we will be holy even as he is holy and his holiness is absolute and never under any circumstances comparative. I'm sure you want to thank each one of these three men for the very fine presentation.

Now we want to give you an opportunity to write very quickly any question that you have. We have to be of necessity very general in the opening part, but we want to answer some of your questions. So if you'll write

them down quickly and then pass them to the inside aisles, we'll have the ushers come and collect them and then we'll start in as quickly as we can to read off some of your questions.

So write them down on that little white card if you have one and pass them in. Looks like they've answered every one of them. This is addressed to Dr. Redpath, so we'll begin with him.

What should be the Christian's attitude toward ecumenical evangelism? That's a little bit out of our area of our consideration tonight, but you want me to answer that? I'm not sure what Somebody's wanted to get me in trouble. I don't think that the two words evangelical and ecumenical are essentially antagonistic. The greatest thing about Keswick is that it is ecumenical, all one in Christ.

It is evangelical ecumenicity for which I believe the New Testament sets the pattern. I think that in evangelism today, there is such a thing as cooperation without compromise with all those who love the Lord, who are born again by the Spirit of God, sharing the life together of Christ by the Holy Spirit, regardless of denominational label. Thank you.

Mr. Wildish, would you answer this next question, please, sir? Will the world accept a person who lives by the Christian standards? In other words, will he not be rejected by the world as Jesus was? I think any Christian who lives to the standards revealed in the word of God and knows that the Jesus wants him to live a certain kind of life must expect to be misunderstood by the world. We are following in the steps of our master, and as they misunderstood him and set traps for his feet and again and again brought false positions to him, so we must expect the same. But the wonder of his life is this, that we can be more than conquerors through him.

And again and again, even the ungodly, who face the same sorrows, the same battles, the same disappointments, the same problems in life that we do, can see in the child of God that they are criticizing or misunderstanding something that makes them say, well, I haven't got that. And there comes very often in that person, I wish I had it. And oh, what a wonderful opportunity it is for us to by life and lip present them to the not it or that, but the glorious person that makes the Christian life.

I think that as advertisements of Christ, we may often be criticized, but if we advertise him well and the strength and the beauty of the Lord is seen in our lives, sooner or later, even those who are in the enemy camp in the kingdom of darkness will say, my word, I wish I had the real thing like that. In my own life, I have seen again and again when I have gone back from the moment of a person's conversion that God has been using through the long years, a mother's life and prayers, a neighbor's example, some quiet Christian who has been in God's hand, often abused and misunderstood. But there comes the moment when they say, I want what they have.

And so often the evangelist gets the credit of winning a soul for Christ and is only the last link in a chain. And each link in the chain is so important. Right from the very beginning, the Christian life speaks to the ungodly and they say, if that's the true thing and I see it there, there comes a moment when they want it.

Thank you very much. The next question I'll address to Major Thomas, to what extent should a Christian parent presume to require this Christian standard for children, that is teenagers. And is there scripture backing this up? I believe that children in a home respect a standard that is set and insisted upon by their parents.

I believe that it is something that demands wisdom. I believe that we should not be overbearing, not overpossessive so far as our children are concerned. But I believe that for very earliest days of understanding in a child's life, it should be made abundantly clear by both parents that what they say goes without argument.

And when that battle has been won by the age of three, you won't have too much trouble until they're in the early twenties. And they're off your hands anyway. And by then, very often they're in the hands of the Lord Jesus.

I believe that we have to be not uninterested, but spiritually disinterested in our children in the sense that we are prepared to put them into Christ's hands and stand back and say, thank you, that he is able to deal with their problems, and they have many, but they will respect the standard that you set and upon which you insist. That's a very inadequate answer in a short time, but it reflects very briefly the philosophy of life that has been applied by my wife and I in our own home. And suffice it to say for our own personal satisfaction, our three sons have grown up to know and love the Lord Jesus.

From the earliest days, they've known that we have standards upon which we insist, and there is no argument. But we've had the loveliest relationship. I'm not quite sure yet about my fourth son.

I haven't seen any real deep evidences of conviction. He's just 17 months old, but I'm trusting that he may do as well as the others. The question is, how do you in your own mind relate teaching with experience, and how do they rate in importance? Well, there is such a thing as the objective teaching of the word of God, of doctrine, sound exposition of doctrine.

But I don't think that anybody who teaches the Bible without applying the Bible to personal experience does it justice. Nor do I think that anyone can lead any person into any doctrine or understanding of doctrine which he hasn't learned in his own experience. Therefore, as they say in Scotland, it's better felt than telt.

And in your heart, you must have life, the life of God, the life of the Spirit of God, who himself interprets the word of God, and therefore the two are constantly related the one to the other. That's a rather inadequate answer, I'm afraid, but perhaps it's sufficient in the short time available. Mr. Wildish, we'll address this one to you.

Must one be a full-time minister of the word to be out of the world? Does a layman working in the world have to compromise to succeed? I feel sure that someone who has the real calling of God upon their lives and gives their whole time to the service of God and is relieved largely of the experience of having to earn a commercial living, I believe that that person has a very special responsibility to so stand before the world as a man and woman of God, that there's no reproach. I do believe that in great offices and corporations, in the markets, in the everyday rub of life, that many of God's dear children are brought into situations that the man of God in his pastor's study knows nothing about. And that's why it's very, very good for some of the whole-time pastors and preachers to have a few years in business before they go out into the ministry.

I think a few years in business is almost as good a training as the prolonged theological training that they get, for very, very often they don't understand, unless they've been in that rubbing world, in the commercial world of today, what it demands. Even in an office, a joke moving round the staff, even in an office when some little gambling thing is put on, a little party when people are called and they serve cocktails, again and again many of God's dear children are embarrassed and they wonder how far they

can go and where they can draw the line. And I'm inclined to think in answer to this question, must one be a full-time minister of the word to be out of the world? Does a layman working in the world have to compromise to succeed? I would answer and say that layman in the world, if they will honor the Lord, can be pretty sure that he will fulfill his promise, them that honor me, I will honor.

May I say to any of the young people here that when you are facing temptation and when the standards of the world are brought to bear upon you, take some great verse in the Bible and apply it and prove it. I like Proverbs 1 10. Do you know what it is? When sinners entice thee, consent thou not.

Now this is the way to deal with sinners, when they entice thee, look into their face and with the best smile you can put on say, uh, no thank you very much. And when they persist and say, oh come on, don't be a square, come on, don't be a killjoy, you just let the smile wither a little and raise your voice a little and say, no thank you. And when they still persist, lose your smile and come out with a, no thank you.

And they won't bother you again. You see, drifting gets you nowhere. And it's wise to take your stand on a standard of principle.

And if you honor the Lord, he will surely honor you. This question will address to Major Thomas. How do you get rid of a hot temper? The answer is very simple.

Get rid of it. We're all temperamentally different and I'm very glad we are. Life would be terribly dull if we were all precisely the same.

But of course, a hot temper, and I understand by this question, losing your temper, becoming irritable, saying unkind things, saying the unnecessary thing, or even the necessary thing, but in an unkind way, is lack of self-control. And there is only one person to whom we can look at any time in any situation to be adequate. It is the Lord Jesus himself.

And if you're cognizant of the fact that you are of that kind of temperament that very easily goes off the deep end, flies off the handle, then you've got to practice the presence of the Lord Jesus in a very special sense in this particular area of your life. And where you see the green light, where you see the red light begin to flicker, that you're approaching a situation or you're just about to encounter somebody. And you're fully aware that this somebody always rubs you up the wrong way.

Then remember this, your attitude has got to be to the Lord Jesus. Dear Lord, thank you for what you are in me. I know that apart from what you are in me in this situation, I am nothing, have nothing, I can do nothing.

I don't ask you to give me patience. I don't ask you to give me victory. I thank you, Lord Jesus, that I, that self that this old, inflammable sin nature makes of me, was crucified with you when you died.

I don't understand it, but you've told me that it's true, and I'm going to reckon upon the fact. But wonderful, dear Lord, not only did I die with you, but you've risen to live in me. So thank you for your patience.

Thank you for your reaction to this situation. Thank you for your reaction to this person. And dear Lord, when I go downstairs and those kids are screaming, thank you.

I don't know how it'll work out, but just thank you, Lord. I can't, but you can. That's all I need to know.

Thank you. Let's go. I don't know any other way than that.

No rules or regulations, just a person who is what he is, where he is, Christ in you. Never less than adequate at any time. Take him at his word and let him get into business, and you'll be amazed how wonderfully competent he is, even to handle you.

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