

Studies in Ephesians - Part 2

by William MacDonald

The transforming power of God is the ability to change a person from a state of death to life, from heathenism to the heavenly, and from law work to light work.

Duration: 43:02

Scripture: Ephesians 2:8-9, Ephesians 2:11-13, Ephesians 2:20, Hebrews 2:1-4

Topics: "Studies"

Description

In this sermon on Hebrews chapter 2, the preacher emphasizes the importance of paying close attention to the word of God. He highlights the consequences of neglecting the message spoken by angels, which refers to the giving of the Ten Commandments. The preacher then discusses the transforming power of God, explaining how He moves from a focus on the law to a focus on life. The sermon also explores the concept of distance to nearness, illustrating how through Christ, Gentiles who were once far off are now brought near to God. The preacher concludes by emphasizing the authenticity of the message preached by the early witnesses, which was confirmed through miraculous signs and wonders.

Transcript

to Ephesians chapter 2, the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. And since we already discussed a portion of it on Lord's Day evening, I think we'll just begin our reading tonight with verse 11, although we're going to review the whole chapter also. Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 11.

Wherefore, remember that ye, being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcised by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hand, that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ, for he is our peace who has made both one and has broken down the little wall of partition between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments containing ordinances, for to make in himself a flame one new man, so may he keep. And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby, and came and spake peace to you which were afar off than to them that were nigh, for through him we both have access by one spirit unto the Father.

Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself

being the chief cornerstone in whom all the buildings fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are built together for an habitation of God through the spirit. Now, we mentioned at the close of the meeting last night that the subject of this chapter is the transforming power of God, and so we're just going to write that on the blackboard at this time. This is letter D, letter D, the transforming power of God, chapter D. And we suggested at the close of the meeting last night that in this chapter you have a series of contrasts that the chapter describes what grace does with a man, how grace goes down into the very depths and picks up a man and puts him in the very heights.

So, we're going to suggest some of the things from which grace transforms a man, and to which grace transforms him. So, we'll just put here, he transforms from . . . and what did we say last night, the first one was? Anybody? Yes, from death to life. He transforms, first of all, from death to life.

And we see in verse 1, you have to be quickened, and of course there the word quickened means to bring to life. It isn't the same word as we use today meaning fast or speed, but it means to bring to life. You have to be given life who were dead in trespasses and in sin.

And of course, that verse teaches that before a man is saved, as far as God is concerned, he's dead. It doesn't mean he's physically dead, he's far from it. It doesn't mean his spirit is dead.

But it means that as far as any worship to God, or any service to God, or any thoughts concerning God are concerned, the man is dead. And in redemption, in salvation, Christ takes those who are spiritually dead and gives them new life. Now, I wonder, does anybody see what the second transformation is? The second great transformation? Well, I'd like to suggest that the second one is in verses 2 through 7, and you have quite a marked contrast there, and it is this.

From heathenism to the heavenly. Now, let's see if that isn't what the passage says. It says, "...wherein in times past we walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience, among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of others." That's what the Ephesians were in chapter 2, and Paul says, "...we," that is, we Jews, weren't any different.

That's what we were too, chapter 3, verse 3. But then he says, "...but God who was rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ by gracious grace, hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." And so, we will write down the second great transformation is from heathenism to the heavenly. Verses 2 through 7. Verses 2 through 7 from heathenism to the heavenly. Now, there's an interesting thing in this chapter.

You have the lowest point in human experience described in verses 2 and 3. How low can a man get? Well, there you have it in verses 2 and 3, and then you have the highest point in Christian experience in verse 7. Now, there's an interesting thing also in the geography of our country. The highest spot in our country is Mount Whitney, the top of Mount Whitney. The lowest spot in the country is not very far away.

It's Death Valley, just a few miles away, and so I would suggest to you that you have Death Valley here in verses 1 through 3, and then you have spiritual Mount Whitney in verse 6. Now, it's nothing short of miraculous to think of the great God of the universe swooping down, sending his son to Calvary to pick up ungodly sinners from Death Valley, and to take them and keep them with Christ in the heaviness. Nothing

short of wonderful. Some years ago, there was a man living in Chicago named Mel Trotter.

How low can a man get? Now, just think of Mel Trotter. Mel Trotter was an inveterate drunkard, so everything he had, had a lovely wife at home who broke her heart. God tried to teach the Mel Trotter time and time again, but he was without avail.

But then the blow fell. Their baby died, and everybody thought, well, this will tell the story. This will straighten Mel Trotter out.

He'll be a different man. And so Mel Trotter did. He tried to reform, and yet the power of sin and Satan was too great for him.

And while that precious little baby's body was lying in the casket, the urge for liquor took hold of Mel Trotter. He didn't have the money to buy it, and he took the seeds off his baby's feet and sold them for liquor. How low can a man get for any of this? And after that, he's walking down the streets of Chicago, and he's on his way down to Lake Michigan to throw himself in and commit suicide.

And on his way down, he passes the Pacific Garden Mission. He hears the gospel hymns coming up, and he receives an invitation to come in. When he goes into the Pacific Garden Mission, he's converted to Christ.

Mel Trotter, from that day forth, went teaching the marvelous grace of God. The mission is named in Grand Rapids today after him, the Mel Trotter mission for men who are lost in degradation and sin. And here's a wonderful grace of God to be saved, just like Mel Trotter.

But isn't that what you have here in Ephesians? These Ephesians were that type of people. They were lost in idolatry and in heathen immorality. They were as low as you could get, as it were, and false as aren't we all.

And there, the Lord Jesus sits down and says, I'm going to take those people and give them new life, and keep them with myself, give them a heavenly position with myself. Verse 7, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his heightened sword up through Christ Jesus. Now, this is an interesting verse, and I'd like to direct your attention to it particularly.

Verse 7, when we get to heaven will we have perfect knowledge? The answer is no. I know that a lot of us have the feeling that the minute that the Lord Jesus comes and takes Christians home to heaven, or the minute we die and go home to heaven, then we'll know everything. And I suppose folks base that on the verse, we shall know even as we are known.

But all that verse teaches is that we'll recognize one another in heaven, but we will not have perfect knowledge in heaven. If we did, we would be God. Only God has perfect knowledge.

But instead of that, this verse teaches that there's going to be progress in heaven. You and I who are Christians are going to go on learning more and more in heaven. What are we going to learn? Well, throughout eternity, God is going to be revealing to us the riches of his kindness in his grace, the riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

What does it mean? Well, it means that beginning at the time we get home to heaven, and ever afterward, God is going to be unrolling to us the great drama of Calvary, and telling us all that it meant to him, and all

that it meant to the Lord Jesus Christ, to erect that cross on that rugged hill, and for him to die there for us. So to me, that gives a very exalted view of heaven. I don't care for this idea of heaven where you just go home and strum a harp throughout earth, but there's going to be progress in heaven, and we're going to go on and learn and learn and learn the riches of his grace in his kindness.

Now, how long will it take for God to tell us what Calvary means? It'll take a long time. Just how long is it? It's a subject that will never be exhausted. You know, we read even in the Gospels that if all the things the Lord Jesus did were written in a book, the world itself wouldn't contain the book.

And certainly that's true of Calvary. Just think of the riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. And I have no doubt that throughout all eternity that we'll be rehearsing that grace.

Those of us who are male prodders will be telling of all the Savior did for us. Now, this should give us great incentive. If I don't have perfect knowledge when I get to heaven, what knowledge will I have? Well, I'd like to suggest this to you, that what you learn about the Bible down here is what you take to heaven with you.

You won't take any material things. You won't take any money. You won't take any clothing.

You won't take any food. We take that for granted. And a lot of the things we spend our little lives down here learning won't do us a bit of good in heaven.

For instance, I might know how to fix a Model T Ford, but I don't expect to use that information in heaven, and I don't expect there to be Model T Fords in heaven. But anything I learn about this scripture will go with me to heaven, because forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

Now, that should give us the greatest incentive to study the Word of God, shouldn't it? Just remember, it's your initial investment, and I'd like to suggest to your consideration tonight that your enjoyment of heaven will be proportionate to your knowledge of the Lord down here. Some are going to enjoy heaven more than others. If a man has wasted his life down here and goes home to heaven, he'll be saved, yet as by science.

But those who come to know the Lord Jesus experimentally down here, who come to walk with him, and to really have their roots deep in God, will certainly enjoy heaven more than those who have littered their little lives with Well, just think of that when you come to this verse, that in the ages to come, he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. How very lovely. For by grace are ye saved.

And do you know, in the original language of the New Testament, this reads just a little differently. It says, for by grace have ye been saved. And I'll tell you why I emphasize that, because it's an act, not a process.

Some people would say, oh yes, by grace are you being saved. Well, that isn't what it teaches. It says, by grace have ye been saved.

The Ephesians could look back to a time in each of their lives when they, by a definite act of faith, accepted Jesus Christ and were saved. It wasn't a process that was still going on called, by grace have ye been saved. Truth says in that, not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.

Now, here we have another contrast, and that is the contrast, that would be number three. The grace of God transformed men from law work to light work. Now, I'll just write that down.

Law work to light work versus faith to faith. Now, you have law work mentioned in verse eight, that not of yourselves. Verse nine, not of works lest any man should boast.

When we use the expression law work, we mean work that man performs, such as keeping the ten commandments, in an effort to attain favor with God. And all the world tonight is in one of two camps. They're either trying to be saved by doom, or they're being saved, or they're saved by proxy.

There are really only two religions in the world that Dr. Einstein has so capably pointed out. It's either doing or done. You're either trying to earn or merit or work for salvation, or you're resting in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And, law work, our work performed in an effort to win God's smile. And, this chapter sits about the not of works, not of that kind of work lest any man should boast. But then we have light work down in verse ten, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good work which God hath foreordained that he should walk in vain.

Now, God doesn't save us by law work, but he does save us through light work. The moment a person trusts the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, he begins those light works. The hardest thing to get men and women to realize today is that God isn't looking for good men whom he may approve.

God isn't looking for moral, righteous men whom he may pat on the back. God is looking for ungodly sinners who know themselves to be such, to whom he may give salvation as a free gift. You try to tell it to men, and they just will not hear you.

Well, that's the third contrast, the transforming power of God. He transforms from law work to life work. Then we have the next comparison in verses eleven through thirteen, and that is from distance to nearness.

Verses eleven through thirteen, from distance to nearness. Verses eleven through thirteen. Now, we'll just read those verses so they'll be fresh in our mind.

It says, Wherefore remember that ye being in times past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcised by that which is called circumcision in the flesh made by hand, that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope in without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. Now, it's hard for us to get the feel of this passage today for this reason.

In the Old Testament, the Jews were God's chosen people. They were the people who held the place of privilege, shall we say. They held a place of external privilege with God.

The fact they were God's chosen people didn't save them, but it certainly put them in a place of privilege as far as being saved was concerned. Now, that condition doesn't prevail today. The Jewish people today are a despised people, unfortunately.

Scattered throughout the earth, and men ridicule them, and men hate and despise them, and of course the Jews feel it's heinous. But in the day when the Apostle Paul was writing, that wasn't the case. The Jews, and from him back in history, as I say, held a place of privilege with God.

For instance, the word of God was given to the Jewish people. The Old Testament, every book in the Old Testament was written by a Jew, and the oracles of God were given to the Jewish people. And the promises of God were made to the Jewish people.

God made certain promises to Abraham. God made certain promises to David. God made certain promises to Solomon.

And they were all made to Jews. All the great covenants that God made in the Old Testament were made with the Jewish people. Now, the Gentile was in a far-off place as far as that is concerned.

He was in a place of distance. He was living a life of hedonism, and the Jews spoke of the Gentiles as dogs. That's just the way they thought, sort of.

Now, how did that situation arise? How did that distinction between Jew and Gentile ever arise? Well, that distinction was established by the law, believe it or not. Yes, indeed it was. It was established by the law.

The law was given to the Jewish people, and it did make provision for Gentiles who also wanted to come, but it was primarily Jewish in character. Now, we're going to see that the Lord Jesus Christ, in his coming, broke down that new law of partition between Jew and Gentile, which was a very real partition. He broke it down.

He abolished the enmity which the law set up, so that he might work out a wonderful program in this day. Now, let us look at these verses in the light of that, word for word. Wherefore remember that ye, now Paul is writing as a Jew here to Gentiles, and that's why he uses the word ye.

It's very helpful, as I said before, to watch your pronouns in Paul's writing, because they are significant. Wherefore remember that ye Gentiles, ye Ephesians, being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, that is, you were born into the world of Gentile parents, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision of the flesh made by hand. Now, circumcision was the initiatory rite of Judaism.

It was the ordinance, the ritual, which introduced the child into Judaism. And so those who were Jews were known as the circumcision, and they spoke of those who were not Jews as the uncircumcision. And you'll remember back to the time of Samson, I think it was, or David, was it David who spoke of Goliath as that uncircumcised Philistine? Well, that was just the way they felt.

He wasn't a Jew, he didn't race. Who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision of the flesh made by hand? That at that time ye were, without Christ, listen to this catalog, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. An alien is a person who doesn't belong.

The person comes over here from Europe as an immigrant, he's spoken of as being an alien. Not a nice word, is it? We don't kind of like the sound of it. Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

Now let me just explain that position of privilege that we've been speaking about. Is there anything that corresponds to it today? Well, there really is. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that in the case where a man

and a woman are married and the man is unsaved, the woman is a Christian.

Paul says, the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife. Else were your children displeased, but now are they holy. Now that verse doesn't teach that the unbelieving husband is saved because he isn't saved.

And it doesn't teach that the children are saved either, because they're not saved unless they trust the Lord Jesus. But it does say, the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife. In what way is he sanctified? Well, he's set apart in a position of external privilege.

You say, what do you mean? Well, let me ask it this way. There is an unbelieving man living with a Christian wife. He sees her godly behavior.

He sees her getting down on her knees and he knows she's praying for him. Now let me ask you, from a human standpoint, is the chance of that man being saved less or greater than if he were living in a non-Christian home? Well, the chance of him being saved is greater from a human standpoint because he's in a place of privilege. He's in touch, as it were, with a real born-again Christian.

Well, that's just the way with the Jews in the Old Testament. They were in a place of privilege. They had the word of God in their hands, and they were nigh to God in that sense.

And the Gentiles weren't. The Gentiles were a far off. But notice it says in verse 13, But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes are far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Still speaking to Gentiles, ye who sometimes, that is, at one time were a far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. Now this brings us to the next contrast, and it is from enmity to peace, verses 14 through 18. I spoke of the enmity which was established by the law between Jew and Semper.

Now it says in verse 14, For he, Christ, is our peace, who hath made both one. Both there refers to Jew and Gentile, and Christ in his work on the cross makes both Jew and Gentile one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in his flesh, that is, by his death, the enmity between Jew and Gentile, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man, still making peace. Now let me express it this way.

Under the gospel, a Jew doesn't become a Gentile, and a Gentile doesn't become a Jew when he trusts Christ. In the Old Testament, really, a Gentile had to become a Jewish convert in order to draw near to God. But in the New Dispensation, under grace, a Gentile doesn't become a Jew, and a Jew doesn't become a Gentile, but both Jew and Gentile are made one in Christ.

A new man is formed, you see. And that's what this passage teaches. And a new man, of course, of which Christ is the head, the body of which Christ is the head.

For to make in himself, verse 15, of twain, that is, of the two, Jew and Gentile, one new man, still making peace. So there are three classes of people in the world today. There's the Jew, there's the Gentile, there's the Church of God.

And everybody is in one of those three classes, either a Jew by nature, a Gentile by nature, or he's a child of God by regeneration. Verse 16, and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross. He takes the greatest extremes in life, Jew and Gentile.

The greatest distinction in all the world is the distinction between a Jew and a Gentile, and Christ breaks them down in the gospel and makes one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby, and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, that is, the Gentiles, and to them that were nigh, that is, to Israel. Christ preached his peace to both. Notice first of all it says, he is our king, and he preached his peace.

All right, it says, for through him, that is, through Christ, we both, that is, both Jew and Gentile, have access by one spirit under the Father. How does a Jew draw nigh to God when he's saved? The same way a Gentile does. Does he go to Jerusalem the way he did in the Old Testament? No, he just by faith draws nigh to God through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and it's the same for Jew and Gentile alike.

Now the next contrast we have is in verse 19, and that is from foreigners to fellow citizens. Verse 19 says, Now therefore ye are no more, and here it's ye again, the Gentiles, the Ephesians, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens of the faith and of the household of God. You belong now, you're members of the family of God, just the same as we do now.

No distinction, no superiority, no inferiority anymore, all one in Christ Jesus. All right, and then our final contrast in this chapter is this. The chapter closes, In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Now this is nothing short of miraculous. The chapter opens with men being guided and dominated by Satan. Verse 2 says, Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air.

The spirit that now works within the children of disobedience. In verse 2, man is the habitation of Satan, and in verse 22, man is the habitation of God. And that's the final thing that the transforming grace of God does, from the habitation of Satan, verses 2, from the habitation of Satan, verse 2, to the habitation of God, to verse 22.

In other words, the chapter opens, man is dominated by Satan, it closes, he's indwelt by God. How does such a miracle take place? Verse 8 tells us, For by grace are ye saved through faith. Now not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

Now we skipped over a couple of verses here, we're going back to them now. Verse 20, And are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. Now the thing to note down in this verse is that those two words, apostles and prophets, refer to New Testament apostles and prophets.

Most of us, when we see that word prophets, go back in our minds to the Old Testament prophets, the major prophets and minor prophets. But these are New Testament prophets. And we're going to find more about this as we come to chapter 4, but just let me say this.

The apostles and prophets were men raised up by God in the early days of the Church. An apostle, a word simply means, as we've said, a sent one. And these were men that God raised up, sent them forth with the message of the gospel.

And they were given supernatural power. They could perform miracles to attest that the message they were preaching was a message of God. In other words, they did not have the New Testament as we have

it today.

It wasn't in existence then. It was just being written, just being formed. So when these men went forth with the message, other men might say, well, how do we know what you're preaching is true? Well, God bears witness to our message with signs and wonders and miracles of the Holy Ghost.

Now, the word prophet really means a spokesman for God, a mouthpiece for God. And in the early days of the Church, something like this could happen. Here we are gathered in a meeting like this, a man stands up, he's a prophet, and he could say, Brethren, I have a message of inspiration from God.

And the group would sit there and listen. And they would hear, if he was a true prophet of God, they would hear a message directly from God. And the scripture says, Let the prophet speak two or three, and let the others judge.

Now, if a man got up today in the meeting and said, Brethren, I have a message from God, quite distinct from what we have in the Bible, and I'd like to give it to you at this time, we'd be apt to say to him, well, you'd better sit down. We have the complete word of God today, and we won't listen to any additional message. But you see, in the early days of the Church, they didn't have the New Testament.

And this was the way the message was given to them. Now, this verse 20 of Ephesians chapter 2 tells us that the work of the apostles and the prophets was connected with the formation of the Church. Doesn't it say that? It uses the word foundation.

And are built, that is, ye are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. The only logical conclusion is that the apostles and prophets were concerned with the foundation of the Church. Now that the foundation has been laid, there's no need for the apostles and prophets anymore, and we don't believe that those gifts are with the Church today in that sense.

Now, in that connection, would you please turn to Hebrews chapter 2. Hebrews chapter 2. I'll have to begin at the first verse for the sake of connection. Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 1, really the verse I'm coming to is verse 4, but let me read from the beginning. Therefore, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, that's the law, the Ten Commandments, was given by angels. If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, every time the law was broken, there was a penalty inflicted, how shall we escape, who have received a greater message, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him? Knoweth God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will? And that verse teaches that the Lord Jesus attested the message of his early witnesses with these miraculous signs, in order to prove the authenticity of their words, of the messages that they were bringing. So we're built upon the foundation of the Apostles and New Testament prophets.

They laid the foundation. What was the message they preached? Jesus Christ, Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom all the buildings fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Now there are various words used to describe the Church in the New Testament, and you have three of them right here.

The household of God, the temple of God, and the habitation of God. And each one brings a different picture before our minds. The household of God brings a family view before us, members of the family of God, of his household.

Then the temple of God, a temple speaks of a place of worship, doesn't it? And so that presents the Church to us as the source of worship to God. God doesn't get any worship from unredeemed lips. People say, oh, I go and worship God in nature.

Do you? He doesn't receive a speck of worship from us. There's only one way to draw near to God in worship, and that's through the Lord Jesus. And so the Church on earth is the source of worship to God.

Redeemed lips chanting his praises and speaking forth the glories of his name. And then the habitation of God through the Spirit. And that brings before us the thought that the Church is indwelt by God.

Now that's perfectly marvelous. In the Old Testament God chose to dwell in the tabernacle and in the temple, but today he isn't dwelling in a building made with hands. Today God here on the earth is dwelling in vessels like these.

And how that should humble our hearts to think that the great God of the universe is dwelling in this space. The one who created this body in the first place should choose to dwell in it. Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and God dwells in the Church today.

And let me just say this, that the Church is a subject that is very precious to the heart of God. A lot of people today don't think too much about it. They say, oh now that's something you can be interested in or not.

But I'd just like to say this, if you get to the end of your journey and you haven't been interested in the Church, then you fail to be interested in what occupies a very prominent place in the affections of God and in the affections of Jesus Christ. And the thing for us as Christians is to be interested in the things that God is interested in. Now tomorrow night, Lord willing, we're going to take up the subject.

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