

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Christian Certainties, Part 2

Scripture: 1 John 5:14-17

Code: 62-41

Well 1 John chapter 5 is the lesson for us again tonight as we come toward the ending, come in for a landing on 1 John, finally. First John chapter 5 and verses 13 through 21 is essentially the summary, the conclusion, the postscript, if you will, to the whole epistle. And in this section, John focuses on Christian certainties, Christian certainties, things of which we are absolutely sure. And, of course, as true Christians, committed to biblical truth and biblical authority, we base our lives on what Scripture says. We base our lives, time and eternity, on what God has written.

You will remember at the beginning of Luke's gospel, chapter 1 verse 4, Luke records that he wrote both his gospel and the book of Acts so that you might know the exact truth. And that is not only true of Luke in Acts, but that's true of all of Scripture. This is the exact truth. We live on certainties in a world of uncertainty. In some ways we are against the grain. We are an intolerable group in an age of tolerance. They tolerate almost anything but those who live by absolutes. But Christianity is based on absolutes and we sort of set that up last week, so I won't go into it again except to comment, and just that briefly on it.

It was months ago that I gave you a simple paradigm to frame this idea of living on absolutes. There is a way to understand that, just five simple words that showed up in a little book I wrote called *Why One Way*. First of all, we believe in objectivity. That means we believe the truth is outside of us rather than inside of us. That would be subjectivity. We believe in God's truth which is outside of us. John 17:17, "Thy Word is truth." We have a document, an authoritative document, not from men, committees, councils, uniquely spiritual, insightful men but we have a book written by God, written down through human instruments, but authored by God. It contains the truth outside of us, apart from us. We come to it bringing nothing but a need to know and obey it.

In addition to objectivity is the word "rationality." That objective truth, that book, is intelligible. It is not mystical. It does not have hidden secret meanings. It is not encrypted, or encoded only to be unlocked by the elevated super-minded, irreligious elite. It is objective and it is rational. That is it yields its meaning to the mind that approaches it reasonably.

Thirdly is the word veracity, from objectivity and rationality we get veracity which is truth. Understanding that this is the source outside of us in which the truth lies, we approach it using our rational minds, that is we interpret it in a normal rational fashion, not in some mystical manner, and it yields veracity. "Thy Word is truth." It's called the Word of truth.

A fourth term that describes this paradigm is authority...authority. If indeed, and this is true, this book understood accurately yields the truth from God, then it bears authority. Then it is binding in all that it affirms.

And that leads to the fifth word in the paradigm, incompatibility...incompatibility. That is to say anything that contradicts it is wrong. Herein is the paradigm of living in an absolute environment of truth. The truth is outside of us written in one book. It is understood by normal, rational means. It yields the truth of God which then becomes binding because God is the sovereign and is therefore incompatible with any other view of anything that contradicts it. That is virtually intolerable in our time. To say that this is right and anything that contradicts it is wrong is intolerable. That's how it is. We live in a realm of absolutes and a realm of certainties and all the absolutes and all the certainties come from God's holy Word and nowhere else. Outside of the Word of God, the written Word of God, Genesis to Revelation, you cannot be sure of anything. A lot of people today are trying to listen for the voice of God, or get a prophecy from God, or a word of knowledge, or a word of wisdom, or have the Lord speak to them somehow. There is no way to be certain about any such pursuit or any supposed experience that comes as a result of that pursuit. The only thing we know for absolute certain is that the Bible is true. And what it affirms is certain. The purpose of John in writing this epistle is to create certainty in our minds, the minds of true Christians, certainty about Christ, certainty about salvation and certainty about all that God has promised. That's why, as I promised you last week, the word "know" appears 39 times in this epistle. You know...you know...we know...we know. Seven times in these last verses. This whole epistle is about knowing things for certain. And he sums up his letter with five wonderful certainties and they really are a summation of what he's been saying through the whole epistle.

Now last week we looked at the first one. We know we have eternal life. Look at verse 13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you may know that you have eternal life." Simply rephrasing that, we know we have eternal life because of what has been written. You don't know you have eternal life because of some experience, you know it because of what has been written. And John adds this epistle to the revealed body of truth that promises to those who believe in Christ that they will live forever in the heaven of God's preparation. This we know, we have eternal life if we believe in the name of the Son of God.

Now tonight we come to the second thing we know. We considered the first one last week. The second thing we know is this, we know God answers our prayers. We know God answers our prayers. We are waiting for eternal life. We are waiting for eternal life to unfold. We are waiting for the entrance into that eternal life. Verse 11 of this same chapter says, "God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son, he who has the Son has the life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life." This is true, we have the life but we have not yet entered into the full experience of that life. We possess the life of God within us but the full expression of it waits the glorious manifestation

of the sons of God after we leave this world, after we die and enter in to the eternal presence of God. We know we have that eternal life. Not will have but have. And we await the entrance into its fullness.

In the meantime, we have needs. In the meantime, we have problems, we have struggles, we have concerns, we have issues to deal with. And so in the meantime we know God answers our prayers. What a wonderful transition that is. Verse 14, "And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us and if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him." Here again is the word "know." We have a confidence that whatever it is we ask according to His will, He hears. And we know this that if He hears we know He will answer. We know we have eternal life. But before the full expression of that in the life to come, we have all these needs, all these concerns, all these issues, struggles, battles, temptations and at the same time we know God answers our prayers. This is the confidence. The term "confidence" literally means freedom of speech. We feel a freedom to go before the Lord on any issue and freely, boldly ask. We're even instructed in Scripture to come boldly to the throne of God to seek what we need. Our confidence then is not only in the life to come, our confidence is in the here and now that we have access to God. We're not yet in His presence, we're not yet in the heaven of heavens. We haven't yet entered into our eternal inheritance which is laid up for us. But we now have access to all of God's resources through the means of prayer. And that's why John says, "And this is the assurance, this is the confidence." Literally, this is the boldness by which we enter His presence and freely request whatever we need.

I love that little phrase in verse 14 "this is the confidence which we have before Him." It actually means "in His direction, toward Him." Or even better, "In His presence." We are confident enough as believers to go right into the presence of the eternal God and boldly and freely ask for what we need. And if we ask, verse 14, anything, that should be underlined, I think, anything according to His will, He hears us. And hearing here means more than listening and knowing the request, it's...it's positive hearing, it's a hearing that's going to dispatch the right answer. If we ask anything according to His will, we have a blank check, literally. That blank check is His will. Anything on the bank of His will we can request. And verse 15, "If we know He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the request which we've asked from Him."

Hearing is answering for God. No limits, blank check, just one qualifier, "according to His will." What an astounding confidence this is that while we wait for the full redemption of the body, while we wait for the next life, while we wait to receive all that God has prepared for them that love Him, we have the confidence that in the meantime our prayers will be answered.

Go back, for a minute, to chapter 3 verse 21, we'll try to enrich this idea. This is a very similar statement, that's why I said this section at the end is really a summary of things in the earlier parts of the epistle. Verse 21, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God." In other words, if our hearts are right, our conscience is clear, we have confidence to go before God,

then verse 22, "And whatever we ask we receive from Him." Here's another qualifier. "Because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another just as He commanded us." So if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, if you keep His commandments, love the brothers which follows salvation, you can ask whatever you want and you will receive it. You have confidence or assurance before God that you will receive what you ask.

In John chapter 15, this way back in the gospel of John, same author, a similar statement is made by our Lord Himself. Not by the apostle John, though recorded by John, John 15:7 records the words of Jesus, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it shall be done for you." Here's this same blank check, "Ask whatever you wish and it shall be done for you if you abide in Me," that is if you share My life and My truth. Verse 16, "You did not choose Me, I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit shall remain that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give it to you." It's just an amazing assortment of statements. Whatever you ask, if you believe in Christ, if you abide in Christ, if His Word abides in you and that defines a believer, if the truth of your condition spiritually is manifest in obedience toward Christ and love toward others, you ask whatever you wish with the caveat that it is according to His will and, of course, you wouldn't want to ask anything other than that, would you?

In John 14 verse 13 Jesus put it this way. "And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do that the Father may be glorified in the Son." If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. I mean, the extent of this is staggering. It's absolutely staggering. And it isn't just in one place, as you've already noticed. If you ask Me anything in My name, that little phrase is the equivalent to His will. It's the equivalent. In My name is consistent with who I am. To refer to His name is to refer to all that He is and all that He does. To say that I'm praying in Jesus name doesn't mean at the end of my prayer I say, "In Jesus name, amen," and that sort of makes everything qualify. That isn't it. Praying in Jesus' name is not a little statement you put at the end. If you do put it at the end and it's fine to do that, I often do that, in fact most of the time do that, but for me that's not some kind of little sort of guarantee statement that makes whatever I ask for sort of an obligation. But it's rather a way of saying if this is consistent with who You are, if it is consistent with what You will to do.

In John 16:23 and 24, "And in that day you will ask Me no question, truly, truly I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name...He will give it to you if it's consistent with who I am and what I desire to do." The name of Christ embodies all that He is. Verse 24, "Until now you've asked for nothing in My name, ask and you'll receive that your joy may be made full." Earlier He said that the Father may be glorified in the Son. Now He says that your joy may be full, ask anything in My name according to My will so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. In other words, when God answers the prayer and puts Him on display, puts the Son on display, and they thus receive glory. And here He adds, "When God answers prayers according to His will, it gives you full joy."

James understood this principle and approached it from the negative side. He says, "You do not have because you do not...what?...ask." You do not have because you do not ask. Or, he says, "You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives." What is the one motive for what you ask? According to Your will. If this will put the Father on display, if this will glorify the Son, if this is for my spiritual benefit, if this is consistent with who Jesus Christ is and what He's doing, that is the qualifying principle. But you can see this is not something isolated. This is something that is literally replete in the New Testament. It reminds me of Psalm 37:4, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He'll give you the desires of your heart." If you're delighting in the Lord, if your delight is in Him, He'll plant the desires for the things that glorify Him in your heart and those will be the things you pray for and those will be the things He'll answer.

We pray then in His name, fully identified with Him. We pray in His will, seeking only that which would glorify the Father and produce true spiritual joy. Now that is a very generous promise, isn't it? Especially when you remember the Bible says, "Pray without ceasing." So unceasingly we bring our requests to God with thanksgiving, never anxious about anything, prayerful about everything. Prayer then becomes the means by which the believer receives what God wants to give him. Prayer becomes the means by which we align ourselves with His will. There are times when we don't know His will so we say, "Whatever You will, Lord, if it's Your will, if it's Your will, if it's Your will, if it's Your will." We always pray that. So we know this truth, I'm not going to belabor the point. We know that God grants our request for the things that are in His will and you have a blank check to go into His presence.

Now John has a, I suppose a strange way of emphasizing the extent of this certainty. I mean, it's just so wonderful. You know, the world is filled with people who pray to God and most all of them pray to God in crises, but they don't have any guarantee that He's going to hear and answer. And I can tell them that if they don't know God and they don't believe in the Lord Jesus Christ which is the only way to know God, God is under no obligation to answer their prayers. Does God ever answer the prayer of an unregenerate person? He will answer the prayer of confession and faith in Christ, the sinner's prayer for salvation, mercy, forgiveness and grace. Sure. But does God ever answer just the general prayers of non-believers? The answer to that question He may choose to, He's not obligated to. He may choose to, He can do whatever He wants whenever He wants to do it, and it may suit His purpose to hear some petition from an unbeliever, but He's under no obligation to answer. And therefore there is no certainty that can be given to a non-believer that God will hear anything that he ever says, that he ever prays.

That's sad when you think about that, isn't it? All the people in all the false religions of the world, all the people in the false systems of Christianity in the world who endlessly, endlessly, endlessly offer up prayers that God has no obligation to answer whatever.

All the prayers about family, health, children, jobs, crises, all the prayers about needs, all the prayers about life and death matters, all the prayers that go up and go up and go up, all the prayers that go up at events from political events to athletic events, all the prayers that go up day after day in various venues and various times and places and some official and some unofficial by all the unregenerate of the world and God is under no obligation ever to answer any of them. But when a believer prays in the name of Christ, and according to His will, God has obligated Himself to answer. This is a Christian certainty...a Christian certainty.

We have a national day of prayer when we call the nation to prayer. Calling believers to prayer makes sense, calling unbelievers to prayer is futile. I wish I could say that God was under some obligation if enough people prayed to do something, but He's not. You say, "Well, are you sure about that?" The Bible says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." He's under no obligation.

So the truth is clear and it's expansive. Anything according to His will, He hears us. And we know that hearing is answering. If He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the request which we've asked of Him, not will have but have. Now as I said, John illustrates the extent of this in a very strange way. Look at verse 16, and there are some who look at this passage and wonder how in the world this verse got here. "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death. I do not say he should make request for this. All unrighteousness is sin, but there is a sin not leading to death."

Doesn't that seem strange? What's all that about? How did that get in here?

I'll tell you how that got in here, he is simply saying He'll answer all your prayers, all your prayers consistent with His name and consistent with His will, except one. And that's if you're praying for somebody who has committed sin leading to death. In other words, the final decision has already been made by God as to the future of that person and there's not going to be a change. But apart from that, now get the context, that's only the exception, that's not the point. The point is you can ask for anything, know He hears...if you know He hears, you know He answers and the exception to that...by the way, is if the final decision has already been made about the future of that person and it's death and therefore all your prayers in regard to that person have no possibility of being heard and answered. As I said, it's such a strange way to approach it.

But at the same time, if you look at it on the positive side, he's saying that this is such a grand certainty and such an expansive privilege that only in the most extreme case where there is already a final determination about the destiny of that person and it is that they're going to die, so what's the point of praying for any circumstances about their life. If that's already been determined, then that prayer isn't going to be answered. At the end of verse 16, "I do not say that you should make request

for this." Now what is the sin unto death? "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask God and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death."

You can pray for a person who has fallen into sin, a brother who has fallen into sin and if it's not a sin by God's determination that leads to death, then God will hear that prayer and God will answer that prayer and God will give life to that individual if it's not a sin leading to death. There is a sin, literally in the Greek, there is a sin to death. I do not say he should make request for this which is another way of saying, "Don't expect anything to change if the person has committed the sin to death."

Now what is it? What is the sin that leads to death? Well, there are two possibilities, just two. This refers to the sin of a non-Christian that leads to eternal death. What is the sin of a non-Christian that leads to eternal death? Final rejection of Christ, right? So if it's talking about a non-Christian, one who pretends to be a brother, pretends to be a believer, and you see sin in that person's life, and you pray for that person to be rescued and recovered out of that sin and brought back and restored, perhaps you don't even realize this person is not a true believer, but in the eyes of God this person has finally fully apostatized, turned from the truth, willfully and ultimately if this is that final rejection, like Hebrews 6 that can never be restored again, if this is that trampling under foot the blood of the covenant, if this is that 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us because they were not of us," if this is that final rejection of Christ, that final step of apostasy, then I do not say he should make request for this."

He's not commanding us, "Don't pray for those people," because we don't know who they are. All John is saying is there's really not going to be a point in praying. I'm just trying to tell you because some of you people are going to go out, you're going to see somebody who is a so-called brother, you're going to say, "Okay, I know it's God's will that that person not be in sin," right? So I'm going to pray according to God's will that they be delivered from sin, that they be brought back into the fold, that they be restored to the fellowship. And I know that God wants them clean, I know the Lord wants them back in the fellowship of His church and I'm going to pray that that will happen and then that person dies never really repenting and I'm going to go back to this promise in John's gospel and this promise in 1 John and I'm going to say, "Wait a minute, I prayed according to Your will and You didn't answer. In fact, the person didn't come back, the person died." And you're going to need this verse which says basically, there are going to be those cases where you prayed and there was no restoration because they had sinned a sin of rejecting, even though they were so-called brothers.

Now there's another possibility. That is that he's actually talking about a Christian, that he's talking about a Christian, a real Christian, not just a professing brother but a real brother who is sinning a sin unto death. You say, "Well what in the world is that? It wouldn't be apostasy, it wouldn't be a final rejection of Jesus Christ. It wouldn't be denouncing the gospel, it wouldn't be trouncing underfoot the blood of the covenant and counting it an unholy thing. It wouldn't be falling away in Hebrews 6 and being unable to be renewed again to repentance because they're true believers. They didn't

apostatize, they didn't reject the faith, they didn't reject Christ, they didn't reject the gospel, this isn't their final rejection and thus they're headed for eternal death. This isn't eternal death here we're talking about." No, the second possibility is that he's talking about a Christian, a true brother who commits a sin for which God takes his life. Could that happen? Yes it could happen. Did it ever happen? Yes it did happen. It happened in the Corinthian church. There are some pretty severe sins for which God doesn't take a life. You remember 1 Corinthians chapter 5 there was a man who committed adultery with his father's wife, probably his step-mother, incest. And that man wasn't killed, he was just told...they were told to put him out of the church, right? Cause a little leaven leavens the lump. Put him out of the church, turn him over to Satan that he'll learn not to blaspheme. There are some pretty serious sins that don't produce death. Yet on the other hand, 1 Corinthians 11 says there were some people who came to the Lord's table and they came with such shallowness with such hypocrisy and superficiality and not an honest and heartfelt dealing with their sin that they abused the Lord's table and Paul says, "Because of this some of you have died." God slew some people.

There was Ananias and Sapphira, remember that in Acts 5? God took their lives because they publicly lied to the Holy Spirit in front of the whole church. It could be desecration of the Lord's table. It could be a lie in front of the whole church for which the Lord takes a life.

You say, "Well, what sin is it? What sin is it?" It's any sin that the Lord determines is enough for Him to take a believer out. It's not any one sin. It's not stated as a single sin. It's that sin at that time in that place that compromises the church and the testimony of Christ to the degree that He actually removes that believer.

You say, "Well, that's not punishment for the believer." No, it's protection for the church. It's protection for the integrity and purity of the gospel and the witness of the church. You say, "Well, which is it? Is it a so-called brother committing apostasy for which our prayers are pointless because God has already determined they're going into eternal death because their unbelief is fixed? Or is it a believer who is a true brother who has committed a sin which so has scandalized the church, or which the Lord in His determination understands harms the testimony of the church, compromises the integrity, the purity, the holiness of the church and the Lord determines He's had enough and the church would be better off if they were removed? Which is it?" And my answer is probably both. I don't have any way to determine which. Both are true. Which one John has in mind, he doesn't make clear. But I know this, there is a time when people fully and finally reject the gospel. Hebrews 6, "They can never be again renewed to repentance." So-called brothers in the church professing Christ and yet living lives of sin and they pass a point and people are still praying and praying that they'll come back and come back and they never come back. And then they go into eternal death. They don't necessarily die physically, but they never come back and somebody says, "You know, I know it's Your will that they come back, I know it's not Your will that they're in sin, and why don't You hear and answer this prayer according to Your will?" And John is saying, "Here's what you need to know, there are going to be those people who've reached the permanent point of eternal death and there is no point in your prayers for them,

just understand that."

On the other hand, there are believers who have engaged themselves in whatever sin to such a degree that the Lord determines in His sovereignty they are better off in heaven and the church is better off without them, compromising its testimony. And so he says when those happen, I'm simply telling you, and I love the way this is stated at the end of verse 16, "I do not say that he should make request for this." He doesn't command us not to pray for these people, we don't know who they are. He just says, "I can't tell you that you should make requests on behalf of people like that," which is another way of saying, "Don't expect the outcome you might otherwise expect."

And then verse 17, "All unrighteousness is sin." Let's get this clear. John understands at this point that somebody might make more out of the sin that kills spiritually, or the sin that kills the non-Christian eternally and kills the Christian physically, the Lord just takes his life, He might make more of that as if that's sort of a mortal sin, right?, and not a venial sin. And so he says, "Let me get this straight here, folks, all unrighteousness is sin, but there is sin that doesn't lead to death." Are we all living witnesses of that? We're here. We are living proof of verse 17. In fact, we could say that's our life verse. I am living testimony, living proof. That would be a great way to witness. I can prove the Bible's true. How you going to prove the Bible's true? "All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death." I am living proof that that is a fact. There is sin of rejection among unbelievers that doesn't lead to death, right? Unbelievers are here living and breathing. There is sin of believers that doesn't lead to death, we're here and we've sinned. But in God's purpose and plan He has not seen us as requiring removal for the good of the church.

You know, that's always a touch judgment. There are times when I'd like to help the Lord to make that call. Have you ever had that thought? Lord, if there isn't a sin unto death in the case of a false prophet, what is a sin unto death? If...if desecrating the name of Jesus Christ in misrepresenting him and claiming to be an apostle of His is not the most heinous of sins, what is? That's what caused David to pray the imprecatory Psalms, remember that? "God, kill my enemies, kill my enemies, kill my enemies." David wanted to help God make that decision. And I would...I would...I admit I love the glory of Christ and the honor of God and the purity of the church and if I was God, there would be a lot more people dying. I've got...I got a fairly long list that I guess you could say you pray your way through the imprecatory Psalms.

But, you know, isn't it wonderful that all of this is blended into the mercy and grace of God and the infinite wisdom and purpose of God and it's not whimsical and it's not the way we would determine things, but it's perfect? So don't get hung up on that part of this section. Really it's only there as just a little bit of a help for when you pray for that person who claimed to be a brother and drifted away and never came back and you wonder...isn't it consistent with Your will that You would want him back? Isn't it consistent with Your will that You'd want him restored? Isn't it consistent with Your will that You want him to live a holy life?

Yes, unless that person has crossed the line into final apostasy and that is the sin that leads to eternal death and there's not going to be a positive answer to that prayer. Or unless it's the case of a believer and somebody says, "Well, wouldn't You want that believer to come back and wouldn't You want that believer to turn from sin?" Unless that believer in the determination of the Lord has reached a certain pattern of sin in which God determines their physical death is the benefit...is to the benefit of the church, there's no point praying for them. That's all in the council of God.

Set all that aside and apart from those extreme examples, know this. Whatever else you ask according to His will, He hears and if He hears, He answers. And if He answers, you have what you asked. Is that incredible? And if you don't use that opportunity to call on the Lord, then you don't take God very seriously, all the resources of heaven at your disposal.

What do we know for certain? We know we have eternal life and we know we have our prayers answered. Three more, for another time.

Father, thank You again for the enlightenment of Your Word. Thank You for its power, its refreshing, comforting, instructive work in our hearts. It's so thrilling, Lord, to have these confidences, to understand the magnanimity of Your goodness, the wideness of Your kindness and mercy, to hear that You have given us limitless access to everything according to Your will. And we know that You want for us and for all Your children what is best and so can we pray and be assured of Your answer. And, Lord, teach us that it's more than physical things, it's more than being well, or getting better, or having some temporal advantage or temporal comfort. What we're talking about here is prayers for spiritual development, spiritual growth, edification, sanctification, prayers for growth and grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Make our prayers spiritual prayers, prayers that have to do with the soul and the spirit and not so much the body cause these are the things that concern You. May we never get swept up in anything but the Kingdom and in our prayers as well as our spiritual lives seeking first the Kingdom and all the spiritual realities contained therein and leaving the food and the clothing to the Creator God who clothes the grass and the lilies, and feeds the birds and may we know that whatever happens to us physically is never the issue, except that You use it for our spiritual good. So may we pray for requests that deal with spiritual realities, knowing that You promised that if we ask anything according to Your will, You'll hear it. And it's so extensive that only in a rarest exception of an apostate or a willfully sinning believer who is better off out of the church, will our prayers not be heard and answered. Thank You for this confidence, this certainty, this privilege in Christ's name. Amen.

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