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

Brick by Brick, Part 1
Scripture: Romans 12:9
Code: 45-93

INTRODUCTION

A. Reactions of Conviction and Confidence

Romans 12 contains very practical instructions that the Lord can use in our lives as we respond in obedience to them. They are listed one after another, beginning in verse 9 and continuing through verse 21. There are more than twenty separate exhortations in those verses. If you feel convicted about them in your life, that's because the Spirit of God has made a direct hit. Some of them will not cause you to sense conviction and that's probably because they are being properly manifested in your life. I believe that if you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and are walking in the Spirit, the elements of verses 9-21 will be true of your life. I myself have experienced conviction over some and not others. Therefore, I have mixed reactions as I study them and preach about them: On the one hand I am convicted, and on the other I am confident about what I see God doing in my life. The latter is very comforting. So, don't expect to receive only condemnation. I think you will find some reassurance in this passage as well. I think you're going to say to yourself, "I see God at work in me. He has changed my life from what is natural to what is supernatural!" That kind of response should make this study of Romans 12 a very gratifying experience.

B. Requirements of Christian Living

A. L. Huxley, the English novelist and critic, said, "It doesn't take much of a man to be a Christian--it just takes all of him. " Henry Drummond, a Scottish pastor and friend of evangelist D. L. Moody, said, "The entrance fee to God's Kingdom is nothing; the annual dues are everything. " The Christian life is the consummate way of living. It is a life-style that encompasses every facet of our lives. When Jesus said that we must come through a narrow gate to enter heaven, that's precisely what He meant. Christian living is very defined. Paradoxically, it doesn't have any latitude in one sense, yet in another, it has great freedom; we are free to do what is right and to honor God. But we are confined in that we must do whatever He commands. We could say that Romans 12:9-21 is New Testament law. It's a law that we are free to fulfill. And in that freedom of obedience we find our blessing. Ephesians 2:10 tells us that we were "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. " Paul says that we were created to manifest the fruits of righteousness.

The principles for living the Christian life in Romans 12 are general in that they touch all areas of life. Yet, they're also specific because they must be applied in each incident of life. This list of principles is not comprehensive; there are other divine requirements for Christian living that aren't listed here. But this is a wonderful sampling of things that should be true of the Christian's life.

Now, Christian living is not mystical. It is not some kind of elusive mentality that can't be applied to everyday life; it is quite practical. It is a matter of thinking, speaking, and acting.

C. Responsibilities in Context

This list of practical exhortations comes at a very essential part of the book of Romans. Most people think that the major part of Romans is over by chapter 12, but it isn't. They see chapters 1- 11, which deal with the doctrine of salvation; 12:1-2, which deal with commitment; and 12:3-8, which deal with spiritual gifts, as the heart of the book. However, I believe the heart of the book begins in verse 9. The intent of this epistle was to call believers to live a certain way. The first 11 chapters were simply the foundation for that way of living. It was Paul's way of saying, "I've given you eleven chapters of what God has done to make this possible; now dedicate your life to Him (12:1-2), use your gifts to the fullest extent (12:3-8), and begin to live like this (12:9 ff.). " The last few chapters are really the message of Romans.

Verses 9-21 is a difficult section to outline. It appears in the form of an ever-expanding circle: For example, verse 9 is personal--It starts with me. It talks about the quality of my love. It also mentions hating what is evil, while holding tightly to what is good. That's a personal commitment. Then the circle begins to widen in verses 10-13: "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love . . . " (v. 10). It goes on to talk about preferring one another and being zealous in our service to the Lord. So the circle widens to include others, yet it also reaches back to speak of things in our individual lives, such as "rejoicing in hope; [being] patient in tribulation; continuing diligent in prayer" (v. 12). The circle of responsibility gets a little wider, but doesn't lose sight of me. In the third circle of verses 14-16, we go beyond the family of God to embrace all people in general: blessing them when they persecute us, rejoicing and weeping together with them, and considering them as equals and not as inferiors. The flip side of the latter injunction speaks of personal pride, so again we find that as the circle enlarges to embrace a new category of people, it still reaches back to the previous ones. The final and widest circle is in verses 17-21. It encompasses even those who are personal enemies, and tells how we are to respond to them: We are not to retaliate with evil or seek revenge. And again the wider circle of responsibility reaches back to touch attitudes in our own hearts that determine the way we live, such as learning to "live peaceably with all men" (v. 18).

So, even though Paul is selecting some random things, he apparently has an enlarging circle of thought in mind each time. I think that's the best way to organize the flow of these verses. Let's begin

with the first circle, which we will call . . .

I. DUTIES TOWARD OURSELVES (v. 9)

Paul gives us three personal attitudes that are prerequisites for the way we are to live: "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. " Verse 9 needs little explanation because its so easy to understand. However, let's examine each attitude for the sake of reinforcing them.

A. Loving Without Hypocrisy (v. 9a)

"Let love be without hypocrisy. "

1. Declared

a. 1 Corinthians 13:13

The greatest element in the life of a Christian is love. Paul says, "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. "

b. Romans 13:8

Paul says, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law" (cf. v. 10).

c. Luke 10:27

Our Lord said to a lawyer who asked how to inherit eternal life, ". . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. "

d. Galatians 5:22

Since love is the supreme element of Christian living, we're not surprised that Paul begins there. Highlighting its importance, he lists love as the first fruit of the Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace . . . . " Everything begins with love. The starting point of the Christian experience is love.

e. John 13:34-35

Jesus said to His disciples, ". . . love one another . . . . By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples . . . . "

f. Philippians 1:9

Paul wrote to the Philippians, saying, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more . . . . "

g. 2 Corinthians 6:4-7

Describing his ministry, Paul said that he continued on "in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities [in great need], in distresses, in stripes [whippings], in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings [being on guard for his life], in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand . . . . " One key ingredient to Paul's ministry was pure love, or in the words of Romans 12:9, "love . . . without hypocrisy"--genuine love.

h. 1 Peter 1:22-23

Peter says, "Seeing that ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit . . . . " In other words, "Seeing that you are redeemed, this should be the result: ". . . [You should have] unfeigned love of the brethren, [and] see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently, being born again . . . . " The word "fervently" is ekten^os in the Greek text. It is used of a muscle that is stretching to its absolute limit. In effect, Peter says, "Stretch yourself to the limit by showing your love to one another since you have been born again. " The first basic practical duty of a Christian is love.

i. 1 Peter 4:8

"And above all things, have fervent [ekten^e] love among yourselves; for love shall cover the multitude of sins. " Love has a way of throwing a blanket over someone's faults.

2. Described

The kind of love that we see in the epistles of Peter and Paul is not a superficial love, but a genuine deep love. D. L. Moody used to say, "There are a lot of people who talk cream, but live skim milk. " What Paul is talking about in Romans 12:9 is not that skim-milk kind of love; he is referring to love that is cleansed of self-fulfillment and self-aggrandizement. We are to love in a pure way for the sake of Christ. Incidentally, to describe this kind of unique love, the New Testament used the Greek word agap^e and invested it with a new dimension of meaning previously unknown in the world. It did not use the word for familial love (storg^e), sexual love (eros), or affectionate love (phile^o); it utilized a different word to describe the kind of love that only God can author.

I can remember hearing people say when I was a kid, "We love so-and-so in the Lord. " That used to mean "I personally can't stand them, but I'm under spiritual obligation to love them. " It made me think that you could squirt someone you didn't especially like with a divine antiseptic. That's not what Paul is talking about. Christian love reaches out and meets needs, as the following verses show:

a. John 13:34

Jesus said, ". . . love one another; as I have loved you . . . . " He had just demonstrated His love by washing His disciples' filthy feet. They had a need--He met that need. That kind of love humbly comes down to the level of someone's need.

The Worst Sin

There's probably no sin worse than hypocrisy. Judas was the greatest sinner who ever lived because of the profound depth of his hypocrisy. That sin is the ugliest sin of all, because it feigns affection when it is actually filled with hate. No vice is more destructive than hypocrisy. On the other hand, no virtue is more wonderful than love. Hypocritical love is such an inconsistent combination that commentator John Murray says, "If love is the sum of virtue and hypocrisy the epitome of vice, what a contradiction to bring these together!" (The Epistle to the Romans, vol. 2 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co. , 1965], p. 128).

The kind of genuine love that meets needs, which Christians are commanded to express, is further outlined for us in . . .

b. 1 John 3:14, 18

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death" (v. 14). We can know that we've been saved when there's evidence of love in our hearts for God's people. Then the test of fervent love comes in verse 18: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. " Genuine love will manifest itself not in sentimentalism, but by deeds of kindness.

Dr. Barnhouse, the great Bible teacher at the Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, said, "True love must leave the stage and walk the paths of real life" (Commentary on Romans, vol. 4, God's Covenants, God's Discipline, God's Glory [Grand Rapids: Eermans Pub. Co. , 1964], p. 60). The antithesis of that kind of love is found in Luke 22:48, where Jesus looked Judas in the eye and said, "Do you betray Me with a kiss of love?" The supreme Christian duty is to live a life of non-hypocritical, truthful love, which manifests itself in sacrificial service to those who have needs.

c. Luke 10:29-37

After the Lord had stated the principle of loving your neighbor as yourself, He was asked, ". . . And who is my neighbor?" (v. 29). Jesus then told a story about a man lying in the road, who had been robbed and wounded by thieves while on his way to Jericho. The point of the story is that whoever is lying in your path with a need is the "neighbor" you need to show your love to.

d. 1 Corinthians 12:31--13:3

The Apostle Paul recognized that the Corinthians were not lacking any spiritual gift (1:7). After he described the spiritual gifts in chapter 12 and explained how they are to operate, he said, ". . . yet show I unto you a more excellent way" (v. 31). That phrase opened his monumental description of love in chapter 13: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding bronze, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing" (vv. 1-3). Everything without love equals nothing.

So, priority is given to love. It must begin in your relationships with your family, your friends, your church, and all the other people in your circle of influence. Christians will demonstrate the genuineness of their Christianity by the genuineness of their love. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Jn. 13:35). If you don't think the world is looking for love, listen to the songs on the radio. You will hear a steady stream of people crying out for meaningful love. But it can't be found on a human level--at least not in the dimension they're looking for. We have the greatest gift to offer the world when we offer them love.

B. Hating What Is Evil (v. 9b)

". . . Abhor [hate] that which is evil . . . "

1. Explained

That command logically follows the first one: If you love God with all your heart and love your neighbor and fellow Christians, you're going to hate what is evil because evil stains the fellowship. How can I say I love you and tolerate the sin that destroys our relationship? Sin is a disastrous invasion into a love relationship. So anyone who truly loves God and others has to hate evil. Psalm 97:10 says, "Ye who love the LORD, hate evil. . . . " Loving God and participating in evil are absolutely opposed to each other because God is holy and therefore cannot tolerate sin (Hab. 1:13).

2. Exemplified

Sin is the antithesis of God's holy nature. One of the most distinctive definitions of God's character comes in Isaiah's announcement that God is ". . . Holy, holy, holy . . . " (Isa. 6:3). Holy means that God is "separated from sin"--He is utterly unlike us because He is absolutely without sin. Consequently, He cannot tolerate evil. Therefore, one who truly loves God has to hate evil.

Since "abhor" is a present tense imperative, verse 9 can be paraphrased: "Be constantly hating that which is evil. " Evil isn't something we can tolerate at any level. We must hate it with a passion. There can be no truce struck with evil. We must constantly hate everything that is evil.

3. Exhorted

a. Proverbs 9:10

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. " The flip side of that is Proverbs 8:13: "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride, and arrogance, and the evil way and the perverse mouth, do I hate. " Do you hate those things? Or have you grown accustom to people's perverse language? Do you tolerate their evil life-styles? Do you find yourself comfortable in the presence of someone whose life is characterized by perverse speech, pride, and arrogance?

b. Jude 20-23

"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith . . . keep yourselves in the love of God [by living a life of holiness] . . . . And of some have compassion . . . And others save others with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. " The word for "garment" (Gk. chit^on) refers to the undergarment, which was worn next to the skin. In this context, it symbolizes all that touches fleshly human desires. Jude is saying that when you go into the world to reach someone for Christ, you must have a healthy fear of things that have been defiled by the world's ungodly system. You must carefully rescue individuals headed for hell, lest you get burned in the process. That's a very serious warning.

Apparently, there was one man who traveled with the Apostle Paul who wasn't able to deal with this issue. His name was Demas. Although he associated with Paul--an exceptional man--he forsook him because he "loved this present world . . . " (2 Tim. 4:10). He couldn't be an effective missionary because when he got too close to the world's system, it enticed him to follow it. Instead of Demas changing the world, it changed him. So, we hate sin because we know how destructive it can be.

Shocked by Sin

One writer said, "Our only security against sin is to be shocked by it. " When we stop being shocked by sin, we are no longer secure against its invasion into our consciousness. In the society we live in, it's hard to be shocked by any sin because we've become so accustomed to it. But we are to hate sin--that is Scripture's word to us.

c. 1 Thessalonians 5:22

"Abstain from all appearance of evil. " That verse doesn't refer to something that only appears to be evil but really isn't; it means that as soon as evil even appears you had better get out! Don't stick around. When you hear a perverse mouth or see evil behavior--get out. As soon as it appears, be gone. Don't sit around long enough to figure out whether it's evil. If there's any doubt, be on your way.

d. Hebrews 1:8-9

The writer of Hebrews interprets Psalm 45:5-7 as the Father addressing the Son: "But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore, God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows. " Jesus was exalted above all because He has a pure love of righteousness and a pure hatred of evil. Every Christian needs to see the infinite beauty of holiness and the infinite blight of sin.

How do we identify what is evil?

It's not too hard to figure out what is evil because Scripture clearly identifies what God hates. For example, Proverbs 6 gives us good insight: "These six things doth the LORD hate; yea, seven are an abomination unto Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations [schemes], feet that are swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (vv. 16-19). Those are some of the things the Lord hates. There are other things, however, for that list is not comprehensive.

Isaiah 1 identifies something else that God hates. Condemning the spiritual adultery of Judah and Jerusalem, the Lord says, "When ye come to appear before Me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread My courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot bear; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hateth; they are a trouble unto Me; I am weary of

bearing them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil" (vv. 12-16). God hates false religion. It's not hard to discover what God hates.

Anyone who wants to live the Christian life should begin by constantly hating evil in every form--whether it is fully developed or just beginning to appear. Christians are to avoid doing anything that could be mistaken to be evil.

It saddens me to know that in our society, people are entertained by evil. No one who merely fears the consequences of evil is truly obedient to the command to hate it. A truly good man passionately hates evil because of what it is, not because of what he'll get if he practices it. He hates evil because God hates it. People who hate evil only because of its negative consequences do so out of very immature and selfish motives. A believer should hate evil because he loves holiness.

C. Clinging to What Is Good (v. 9c)

". . . cling to that which is good. "

The word "cling" (Gk. kolla^o) means "to cleave" or "to stick with glue. " It's the same word used to speak of a marriage bond. In this context, it means to stick to what is good--don't ever leave it. The "good" (Gk. agathos) we are to be bonded to is not what is good in appearance, but what is inherently good. Both the Old and New Testaments both tell us how we can cling to the good:

1. The Support of Scripture

a. Psalm 1:1-2

"Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful" (v. 1). Notice the progression of evil: First you walk; then you stop to see what's going on. Pretty soon you've taken your seat. But the man who is blessed doesn't participate in any of those stages. Verse 2 says that "his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in His law doth he meditate day and night. "

b. Philippians 4:8

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. " The key is to dwell on positive things. That's how you cleave to what is good.

2. The Struggle Against Sin

In Romans 7, Paul examines the struggle against sin from the perspective of a believer. He says, "For that which I do, I understand not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I" (v. 15). Have you found that true in your life? Maybe there is a sin that you hate, but you engage in it anyway. Your hatred of performing that sin is evidence of true spiritual life: A true Christian hates evil and loves righteousness. Spiritual life isn't determined by merely professing to believe in Christ at some point in your life. The proof of your salvation is your love of righteousness and hatred of sin, even though you might still do evil things. In verse 17 Paul says, ". . . it is no more I that do [the things that I hate], but sin that dwelleth in me. " Consequently, he says, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (v. 24).

I think every one of us as Christians can identify with that struggle. You love righteousness and the things of God. Yet, you might have a bitter attitude, and be critical and unkind. Or, maybe you expose your mind to ungodly desires and practices. Possibly you have struggled with pride or indifference, and say to yourself, "I hate doing such-and-such! Why do I do that?" So you say with Paul in frustration, "It is because of sin that dwells in me--it's not what I really desire. Who will get me out of this mess?"

Hopefully, in the midst of such struggles, you yield yourself to the Holy Spirit so that He might cause you to live righteously. At the same time, you long for the day when you will be free from the sinful desires of the flesh and go to be with the Lord. In Romans 8, Paul expresses that hope for the day when we will be redeemed, not only in soul, but in body as well (vv. 18-25). From 1 Corinthians 15 we know that we will be like Christ "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality" (v. 54).

Paul helps us to understand that we are to be people, who, in our deepest desires, hate sin--even though we occasionally do evil things. That's the best test I know of for determining if you are a Christian. When you sin, do you hate it? Is the inclination of your heart to do what is right? That is a principle Christian duty. Christians are to hate what is evil and cling to what is good. That's clearly Paul's desire in Romans 7: He wants to stick to what is good. That should be our desire too. There can be no neutrality with good and evil: You either stick to what is good, or you move to what is evil.

Reprogrammed for Righteousness

How do we know what's good? Where are good things described? They're in the Word of God. If you study the Bible, you'll find out what's good. A man said to me, "I've come to Christ, but I still have so much garbage in my mind. How do I clean it out?" I said, "You've been programmed by the world for

a long time, so your mind is full of filth. Therefore, it has to be reprogrammed-- completely cleansed. " The only way that that can be done is by "the washing of . . . the Word" (Eph. 5:26). Romans 12:2 says, "And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind . . . . " As you come away from the world and saturate yourself with the Word of God, you will have a renewed mind. Then you will be able to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (v. 2). You'll know what is good as you begin to be reprogrammed by Word of God and the divine teacher, the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Christian duty begins with a pure love, a hatred of evil, and a commitment to practicing good. So, if you sense a love for God's people and want to reach out to those who are in need, that is an indication that you're moving along the path of Christian duty. And if you can identify with the struggle of the Apostle Paul and say, "Yes, I want to cling to what is good even though I don't always do it. I too hate what is evil," then you're moving on the right path. All you need to do is keep on that path out of gratitude for what the Lord has done for you. This is what Paul is saying in Romans 12:1: "On the basis of the mercies of God, present your body to God as a living sacrifice. Start loving to your fullest capacity by the power of the Spirit, and start hating what is evil, while clinging tightly to what is good. " Don't ever let yourself be contaminated by what is evil. Live your whole life with a sense of fear, lest you get too close to evil, which will leave its destructive mark on your life.

Focusing on the Facts

1. For what reason were we created, according to Ephesians 2:10?

2. What is the one thing we are to owe men, according to Romans 13:8?

3. Cite and explain verse that shows the importance of loving others as a Christian duty.

4. Describe the fervent love that Peter and Paul had in mind. What does that kind of love do? Cite Scripture to support your answer.

5. Why is it necessary for a person who loves God to hate evil?

6. Why do you need to have a healthy fear of the world's system when reaching people for Christ?

7. Explain the principle of being shocked by sin. In our society, why is it hard to be shocked by sin?

8. How can we "abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess. 5:22)?

9. How do we identify what is evil?

10. Why does a truly good man hate evil? What would be an improper motive for hating it?

11. How can we "cling to that which is good" (v. 9)? Cite a verse from both the Old and New Testaments.

12. Describe the struggle against sin that a believer has. What should the Christian be doing in the midst of those struggles?

13. How can we be reprogrammed for righteousness?

Pondering the Principles

1. In our society, the meaning of love has developed into a subjective emotion. From a biblical perspective, true love is demonstrated in sacrificial service to those in need. Certainly it is not devoid of emotion, but it is basically an act of the will. It is not based on whether you necessarily like the person you are serving out of love. Is that kind of love characteristic of your life? If you had met the man that Jesus talked about who was lying helpless on the road to Jericho, might you have passed him by, like the priest and the Levite did (Lk. 10:30-37)? Hopefully not. That doesn't mean, however, that you must stop and help everyone change their flat tire. But it does mean that you need to be sensitive in such situations and available to help if you think that your assistance is the only help they are likely to receive. Pray that God would use your desires and abilities to meet the needs of others.

2. We have all met non-Christians who have expressed a unique serving love. Maybe your reaction has been, "How can they love like that if they don't know Christ?" Some people follow biblical principles without even knowing it. But because Christians possess the indwelling Spirit, and realize what marvelous grace we have been given, we should be more loving than nonbelievers who are generous in their expression of love. Our love has to clearly identify us as Christ's disciples (Jn. 13:35). Would someone looking at your life conclude that your love must be divinely inspired? Prayerfully meditate upon 1 Corinthians 13 and compare the quality of your love against the standard of Scripture.

3. Scripture clearly identifies the things that are evil. Although Romans 12:9 contains an injunction to hate evil, it doesn't say how that hatred should be manifested in our lives. The verse's primary intent is to encourage us to recognize and avoid evil as we concentrate on doing good. However, other verses tell us how and when we can show our hatred of evil. Look up Ephesians 5:11-13; 1 Timothy

5:20; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; and 4:2. Without being obnoxious, expose evil so that those who practice it might repent from it and pursue what is good.

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