

***Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians:
"Its Major Themes Reviewed, Part 2"***

- ***Review, Part 1: Some fundamentals were always underlying Paul's ministry:***

Some fundamentals always underly Paul's ministry as all his letters make clear:

- ***The Fundamentals of Ones Testimony, and That of the Lord God***

- ***The Testimony of the Apostle:***

2 Cor. 1:1-7

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:

2 Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

6 And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

7 And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.

- ***This is so deep, so powerful, so marvelous a description of the bond between Paul and these Corinthians whom, if we knew it well, we might wonder whether the original bond formed when Paul was in Corinth and this church was being assembled had been broken forever by sin and rebellion aided always by believing what the false teachers had been sharing with them. But no, the bond formed in Christ remained! Praise God.***

- *The Testimony of the Corinthian believers:*

2 Cor. 7:4-6, 9-10

4 Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.

5 For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.

6 Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus;

...

9 Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.

10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

- *The opening of this letter focused powerfully on the comfort of God for believers and that theme continues in this letter. Here it is the testimony of the Corinthians that is in focus. Such words should comfort us always as well. For God is working and without his working in us we should be indeed most miserable. The divinely worked balance between Paul's testimony and its response in the Corinthians is marvelous to behold! Praise God for his gift!*

- *The Testimony of the Lord God:*

1 Cor. 2:1-5

1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

3 And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.

4 And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

5 That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

- *The testimony of the Lord God in its full grandeur and glory is magnificent to behold. But we see it here revealed in these words chosen so perfectly by the Holy Spirit of God. Every word here is without rival and needs commentary — another time perhaps.*

But the greatest question anyone can ask is this: What is the Lord doing? And as I always have said, if we don't ask questions we will never receive answers. We see here in verses 1 through 10 of chapter 2 of Paul's first letter what he was doing in Corinth through his chosen servant, Paul and how that work was accomplished through those words spoken by Paul before sinners of the Gentiles living in Corinth. We know Paul often reminded the Corinthians of that work for we see it everywhere also in this letter. But the next chapter, chapter 3 reveals far more about that inestimable working, a working that continues today as the words of grace are heralded before sinners:

2 Cor. 3:1-3

1 Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?

2 Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:

3 Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

- ***The rest of the chapter says so much, so very much more about how that working in the hearts of men is accomplished, but we need to go on, to the next theme. But the fundamental theme of Testimony, of Paul's, of the Corinthian believers, and of the Lord God working it all out in the hearts of his elect children, is precious indeed — and so very encouraging.***

- ***The Fundamentals of Personal Relationships***

- ***Paul's great confidence in the Corinthian believers and his ongoing love for them all and many, very personal, statements of the bond between them in Christ fill the letter. One that stands out for me is in chapter 1:***

2 Cor. 1:14 As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.

- ***So, as it is so clearly written here, Paul, though he was apostle of the Gentiles, he nevertheless rejoiced TOGETHER WITH the Corinthians. When we think of all that means, and it is astounding to consider, we see how perfectly constructed that bond of personal relationship***

was between the apostle and these eternally saved sinners in Corinth, so recently captured by the power of grace and delivered from the corruption of Greek culture and religion.

- ***The Fundamentals of Paul's Plan Regarding the Soon Visit to Corinth:***
 - *The apostle must of course connect with those to whom he is writing and to do that he needs to lay a foundation for this letter's content:*
 - *The issue of the upcoming visit's timing (two factors or more!):*
 - *The specific issue of the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem and the essence of grace giving is also defined in this letter like in no other with his own freely given ministry without regards as their example:*
 - *You will recall the Corinthians had promised before and the response of the Macedonians to that was a willing heart to give. But they had failed to do so. Paul here in this letter in chapters 8 and 9 explains in detail how that should be remedied, by performing the offering collection with no longer any delays:*

2 Cor. 8:1-12

1 Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;

2 How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

3 For to *their* power, I bear record, yea, and beyond *their* power *they* were willing of themselves;

4 Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and *take upon us* the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

5 And *this they did*, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

6 Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also.

7 Therefore, as ye abound in every *thing*, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and *in* all diligence, and *in* your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.

8 I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

- *Such words. They demand that our minds and hearts expand fully to receive them, don't they? And they are so encouraging. The whole essence of grace giving is revealed here in these short sentences and no more is needed. The phrasing is critically important: "ye abound in everything"; "ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ"; "though he was rich"; "yet for your sakes he became poor"; "that ye through his poverty might be rich".*

And more in application follows: "therefore perform the doing of it"; "that as there was a readiness to will"; "so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have"; "... not according to that he hath not."

- *Many giving programs in organized religion go so contrary to these principles that they deserve no comment here and will get none. And there is more to follow of these blessed words, never to be forgotten, for they ring true to the heart of the message of God's abundant grace:*

2 Cor. 9:7-8

7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

That says it all, doesn't it? "God is able ... to make all grace abound ... that ye always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." Five absolutes. Enough? Never enough. His grace is ALWAYS SUFFICIENT! So no more excuses and no more delays!

- ***But don't miss the logic embedded here either, for the former promise of the Corinthians stimulated the Macedonians spiritually and so that promise needed to be kept for even greater reasons! Paul explains it all here in chapter 9 in these verses. See also Rom. 15:25-27 which is so relevant. Also 2 Cor. 11:7-10 is important due to Paul's boasting about freely ministering to the churches with such great contrast to the false teachers. Some other related references would include these: Gal. 6:6, 1 Cor. 9:4, and 1 Tim. 5:17-18.***
- ***The additional issue of the unrepentant believer and his current repentance accompanied by their forgiveness and acceptance back into their fellowship:***

2 Cor. 2:6-11

6 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.

7 So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.

10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ;

11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

- ***So, to conclude, Paul's visit was set for a number of reasons: 1) Many promises had been made over a period of several years regarding to collection for the saints in Jerusalem and they were a great burden on the apostle's heart, 2) the desire to boast again regarding his freely given ministry in Corinth, and 3) the issue of the unrepentant believer now hopefully received back into fellowship with no ongoing confusions. So delaying further was in his mind not an option, even though travel to Jerusalem might indeed result in his imprisonment and martyrdom. Amen.***

Our Outline Today: Part 2: Three Critical Issues in Corinth Still Dominate Today:

- ***Three Critical Issues in Corinth Still Dominate Today – Carnality***
- ***Three Critical Issues in Corinth Still Dominate Today – Compromise***
- ***Three Critical Issues in Corinth Still Dominate Today – Satanic Influence***

I. Three Critical Issues in Corinth Still Dominate Today – Carnality:

[READ] 2 Cor. 12:19-21

19 Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.

20 For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:

21 And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.

- ***Now we have reached the end of the chapter and the strongest affirmation probably anywhere of Paul apostleship. The false teachers had denied that and inserted themselves in his place in Corinth. The language is notable indeed, and the list of the works of the flesh given in Gal. 5 must be taken into account for understanding.***
- ***Now to the heart of the matter, his concerns: “For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:” These would all be the carnal manifestations of believers who were controlled by the flesh and not the spirit. But that is what would be expected as some had indeed turned against Paul and the spirit of truth and grace and were now dwelling in the realm of the flesh. The carnality of their lives as unsaved in Corinth surely was a possibility again even though they were now saved ones and also well taught by the apostle. For the world and all of its attractions was evident always around them as Corinth was one of the centers of satanic religious worship in that part of the world. There you had magnificent temples to the false gods and goddesses of the Greek pagan religion, such as Apollo, Poseidon, and Athena.***

- ***But “in Christ” the apostle knew what might be necessary in the case of continued rebellion and opposition there. His work as apostle would necessarily then be manifested...*** “And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and *that* I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.”
- ***“Itching ears” are words the apostle used in 2 Timothy to describe the many degrees of subtlety the enemy uses against us all. This warning is very strong and surely applies to us today:***

[READ] 2 Tim. 4:1-8

1 I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

4 And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith:

8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

- ***We are all aware of the progression the apostle was so concerned about in Corinth. Take note of some of the details here:***
 - ***“... the time will come”: And indeed it has been here in this world for many, many centuries, probably beginning during Paul’s own life and ministry. Was he implying through this language that it had already begun in Corinth? Perhaps.***
 - ***“Lusts”: The lusts of the flesh do have consequences when they are fulfilled.***
 - ***“Itching ears ...”: Then the attacks to the mind are straightforward and then ...***

- “Turn away their ears from the truth ... and shall be turned unto fables”: ***The truth itself is boldly and without apology the focus of the enemy. And what is put in its place, but stories and “fables”.***
- ***The progression seems to be from the lusts of the flesh which the fashions of this world promote to compromises on every side and finally to active opposition to the truth Paul taught and lived. They even turned against him as their appointed apostle!***
- ***But the promises given to those that would endure suffering for Christ are so very wonderful indeed:*** “I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” ***Are such eternal blessing awakening us?***

II. Three Critical Issues in Corinth Still Dominate Today — Compromise:

- ***Paul’s many concerns however for many who have gone astray for various reasons, including all of these and more, in general leading to rebellion against Paul and inevitably of course of rebellion from their God, and regarding the very truth itself and even the Gospel of the Grace of God. But it starts somewhere and our enemies are the world, the flesh, and the devil, according to 1 John 2:16 and James 1:13-15. The apostle focuses on this in chapter 10:***

[READ] 2 Cor. 10:7-12

7 Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.

8 For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed:

9 That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters.

10 For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.

11 Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present.

12 For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

- ***In a previous chapter here he had written of this in this way and it is directly relevant. I FIND THIS TO BE THE MOST COMPELLING OF EXHORTATIONS, INDIRECT, YES, BUT MANIFESTING GOD'S ABUNDANT GRACE IN ITS FULL GLORY. HE HAS CHOSEN TO WORK HIS STRENGTH OUT THROUGH WEAKNESS, IN PAUL AS OUR EXAMPLE — AND IN US. But if we are focused on that which is not spiritual but that which is superficial, matters of appearance, then we are open to the enemy's attacks most easily. For if we compare ourselves with others the enemy will surely gain the advantage.***
- ***Paul naturally might have easily given in to such thoughts. After all, the false teachers were leading many in Corinth astray with that kind of thinking. And if Paul had responded to those threats (that thorn in the flesh) he would have been fighting against them using the same carnal or even satanic weapons of warfare. But you will remember his words about that in chapter 10:***

2 Cor. 10:1-5

1 Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence *am* base among you, but being absent *am* bold toward you:

2 But I beseech *you*, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:

4 (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

- ***If only we had the same heart-felt concern regarding his truth and abounding grace. If only ... For the power of God only animates the weapons of warfare of the godly and spiritual! Those weapons are never carnal and are by necessity always spiritual. They bring not bondage to a religious system but the liberty of the true children of God. And only in that realm is the knowledge of what God is doing today manifested.***

- ***So we see a progression in ourselves and others from the world to the flesh to the devil. And, be assured, if this is allowed to continue to progress, the end result will be in compromises that are truly satanic in scope and the power of the enslavement will only increase with time as more lies of the enemy are received. Let's see how the apostle develops this theme further in this letter:***

III. Three Critical Issues in Corinth Still Dominate Today — Satanic Influence:

- ***The Enemy of our Souls Is Subtle and Cunning — Beware! Carnality leads easily to compromise everywhere and then to deception through false witnesses. The latter are the most dangerous of course because without the truth we are open to every kind of deception. Think of Eve in the garden. Paul refers to her here in this letter because of the clear parallels within ourselves and in those around us:***

[READ] 2 Cor. 11:1-3

1 Would to God ye could bear with me a little in *my* folly: and indeed bear with me.

2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you* as a chaste virgin to Christ.

3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

[READ] Gen. 3:1-6

1 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:

3 But of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

6 And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

- ***Notice here how the arch-enemy of God's worked with Eve's mind and heart, regarding the truth that Adam had taught her, regarding***

words even that she knew nothing of, like “evil”, or “gods”. Verses 4 & 5, “Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” This is so carefully crafted, isn’t it? Those words were ones that could draw Eve’s imagination into thing just too overpowering like a new kind of food, a different kind of pleasure perhaps. So common are such lies today and they are everywhere, for satan and his subjects are at work today as he was then. Beware!

May the strongest exhortation of the apostle here also be taken to heart by all of us today. Oh, may it be true that we stay steadfastly focused on his word of truth and grace and never led astray.

- **Satan’s Words May Even Seem To Be “Spiritual” in One Sense of the Word**

2 Cor. 11:4-6

**4 For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.
5 For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.
6 But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things.**

- **But the enemy with his willing surrogates preaches and teaches in the name of the Lord Jesus, but as Paul has written, it is “another” Jesus, one of a different sort indeed:**

- **“... another Jesus”: Another Jesus, yes, but of a different kind (heteros, not allos here); “... another spirit”: Another spirit, yes, but again, one of a different sort (heteros, not allos here too). Note the progression here; “... another gospel”: Another gospel, yes, but of a different kind (heteros, not allos here).**

And then we have reached the perversion of the gospel itself. This is the ultimate attack I would say, an attack on the word of God itself and on the very good news that all must read or hear for saving faith to grasp on to.

- **And, by inference as one might expect, even “another apostle”!! The false teachers were promoting themselves as true and they were calling him an imposter. They were giving false witness, false testimony. That can be the most deceptive of all. But is not this**

exactly how the enemy works so often? First a different Christ, then a different spirit, and then the gospel itself falsified. And since all of these are essential parts of Paul's message one might expect another apostle must be presented as well. In this case it was the false teachers presenting themselves as the true apostles with Paul as the false!!

- ***Discernment Between True Apostles (Paul) and False Is Therefore Needed for the enemy is a sly foe indeed and never appears as he truly is! No, never. For if he did he would not be able to attract the believer. Think of the many implications of this truth today as so many have turned against Paul and his unique apostleship for us Gentiles.***

[READ] 2 Cor. 11:12-15

12 But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.

13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

15 Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

- ***So, in the final analysis, our greatest threats come from the false teachers, for the arch enemy's lies are most compelling as he was a liar and a deceiver from the beginning:***

[READ] John 8:44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

- ***This tells us so much about the enemy of our spirits and souls, doesn't it?***

Eph. 2:1-3

1 And you *hath* he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;

2 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 worketh in the children of disobedience:

3 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 wrath, even as others.

2 Cor. 7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

- *In these verses and others Paul identifies the means by which the Corinthians should evaluate these imposters. But that means was pure simplicity itself and it should be for us as well. What was that means and how important is it to know it today? Before I answer that, consider the obvious candidates:*
 - *Popularity with the people, even the unsaved*
 - *Reputation among church leaders*
 - *Skill in reading a canned message*
 - *People skills*
 - *Graduate of the right seminary*
 - *Pastor of the largest church*
 - *Most beautiful family*
 - *The list goes on ...*
- *But what about the truth of God's Word? Does that count? How much does that count? How much really?*

Conclusions / Application:

- *Paul is the apostle of the Gentiles and his writings are the truth for the Body of Christ today. Other truth is important, but it does not compare with the Pauline revelation.*
- *But what about the Old Testament and the other writings? Aren't they also important for the believer to know? Yes, of course, but apart from the Pauline revelation we cannot even understand the writings regarding other dispensational plans of God. How God is working today is of vital importance to our faith and our life.*
- *Amen. So be it. Be faithful all, a crown of righteousness awaits all who truly love his appearing!*

Next time:

- **Part 3: The Pauline Apostleship, Under Attack and Paul's Defense:**
 - *Paul's apostleship attacked by evil, false apostles — 2 Cor. 11:13*

- *Paul's apostleship defended (10, 11, 13). Words / living letters, best defense of his apostleship - for that was how God had worked!*
- *His many persecutions and trials are detailed (chapters 2?, 4 & 6, 11)*
- *His promise that the full power of his apostleship would be exercised in person if needed (10, 12, 13)*
- **Part 4: The Central Doctrinal Teachings:**
 - *The blessings of God under grace enumerated at length (1:4-7)*
 - *The essence of God's working under grace (a major theme with many references):*
 - *Always rejoicing and triumphing, even in our failures (2:13-17)!*
 - *God's strength manifested through our weakness (1:4-7; 3-4, 12 13:1-4! , etc.*
 - *Liberty under grace is extolled while bondage under law is the alternative — the new covenant (3)*
 - *The sure promise of eternal glory (5)*

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