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**Decisions!
Decisions!
Decisions!**

(Part 2)

907-B

Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Decisions! Decisions! Decisions!

One of the most important things you and I will ever do as Christians is to learn how to make decisions...God's way. We are, in essence, the product of a continuing series of choices. The choices we make, and how we make them, will have a great deal of impact on the faithfulness with which we grow into HIS likeness.

Decisions! Decisions! Decisions! They are the molds of life which, to a large degree, determine the eventual shape of the life which Christ is pouring into us.

Our outline:

I. The Premises (Four keys to this study.)

II. The Principles (Six basics from the book of Proverbs.)

III. The Prerequisites (Two essentials to finding the will of God in decision-making.)

IV. The Process (One step/four confirmations in finding God's will on a day-to-day basis.)

THE PREMISES

We will go over the premises first because they are the foundation stones of our study.

PREMISE #1: All of the Christian life is related to and affected by the issue of self-control.

He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls. (Proverbs 25:28)

A man without self-control is as defenseless as a city with broken down walls. (Proverbs 25:28 TLB)

He that ruleth his spirit (is better) than he that taketh a city. (Proverbs 16:32b)

It is better to have self-control than to control an army. (Proverbs 16:32b TLB)

The book of Proverbs paints two graphic portraits of the place of self-control in the life of God's children. Portrait #1 is a defensive

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picture. It portrays our resistance to enemy invasions relative to our level of self-control.

If you are a man or woman without self-control, Proverbs says your defenses are down. Any invasion into your spirit is liable to succeed. You are like a city whose walls (which were built to withstand the enemy's onslaught) are broken down, crumbled into dust. You are always wondering what the enemy is doing within your city gates. However, you have made it easy for him, because you lack the quality of godly self-control.

Portrait #2 is one of an offensive nature. It portrays your command of your own spirit as more valuable than your authority to command an army or capture a city. Your accomplishments as a leader are relatively invalid. Proverbs says that if you cannot rule your own spirit, you are not a man or woman of self-control.

Therefore the first premise of our study is that self-control is no side issue in the Christian life. All of life is related to and affected by our ability to rule our own spirits, our ability to exercise self-control.

PREMISE #2: Self-control must be understood to be the continual exercise of the will in response to the Word over the objections of the appetites and the emotions. It is a farce for the one who is not under the Spirit's control, for man, apart from the Spirit, cannot resist the pull of his appetites or his emotions. However, with God in control, self-control is possible.

Remember, self-control is the continual exercise of the will in response to the Word over the objections of the appetites and the emotions.

PREMISE #3: If self-control is the exercise of the will over the appetites and emotions, then Premise #3 is to understand what the appetites and the emotions are, for they are not to control us. Appetites are the desires of the flesh to satisfy the flesh beyond the will of God. For example, adultery is the satisfying of an appetite outside the will of God. Gluttony is the satisfying of an appetite beyond the will of God. Drunkenness, greed, immoral thoughts, ambition, and all forms of lust are reflections of the appetites of life. They are desires of the flesh to satisfy the flesh beyond the will of God. Those appetites will all vie for control of our thoughts and attitudes and responses.

However, if we choose to ignore them and make decisions

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to operate on a higher plane, regardless of their pull, we are experiencing self-control!

We also have a second group of enemies vying for control of our lives. These enemies are the ungodly, uncontrolled emotions. They are the responses and feelings of the flesh which contradict the mind of Christ.

Ungodly anger is an example. It can wrestle control of the mind from God's Spirit, and in an instant, you choose to do something or say something which you will later regret. Your will made a choice, and it refused to ignore the objections of ungodly emotions.

Jealousy and envy are ungodly emotions, too. In a moment of jealousy you will make wrong choices, choices not in harmony with God's Word because you failed to choose to make your decisions over the objections of this ungodly emotion.

Fear is an ungodly emotion. Decisions based on fear will characteristically be wrong decisions.

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. (II Timothy 1:7)

Perhaps the most subtle, as well as the most dangerous, emotion of them all is impulsiveness. It is the making of life's decisions under the control of emotions or appetites, which brings us to the fourth premise.

PREMISE #4: If we are to begin exercising self-control, we must begin by conquering an impulsive spirit. Once we have learned to make godly decisions, then we can then apply that decision-making process to controlling all of the appetites and all of the emotions that vie for control of our lives. So it all comes back to this...decisions, decisions, decisions!

Nothing we will ever do is more important than learning to make decisions God's way!

THE PRINCIPLES

We will briefly review the principles—practical principles from Proverbs on decision-making. We found six of them last week, and in the interest of space, we will only touch on them here.

Principle #1: Get all the facts before you make a decision.

Principle #2: Honestly weigh the consequences of the choices you have.

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Principle #3: Be willing to plan, counting on God for direction.

Principle #4: Seek counsel (to confirm your findings from the Word.)

Principle #5: Shun easy answers.

Principle #6: Remember: the final outcome is in the hands of a sovereign God.

Your job is to make wise choices, to make decisions based on the Word over the objections of the appetites and emotions. God's job is to take that decision and use it however He chooses. We are responsible for our choices, but God is responsible for the outcome, and learning the balance of that principle will set you free to make godly decisions. It will set you free from anxiety over the outcome of those decisions.

Again, once we have made God's choices, our job is to set ourselves, "stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." For remember the battle is not ours, it is God's.

So there we have the basis for this study. You and I are to become men and women of self-control whose decisions are made through the Word over the objections of our appetites and of our emotions. Further, if we are to become men and women of self-control, we must first control an impulsive spirit and learn to make godly decisions.

THE PREREQUISITES

I would quickly like to give you an attitude check at this point. It will tell you if you have God's mind on decision-making. It only involves two basic conclusions. Then, with these two basic attitudes in line, we can look clearly at the process of making decisions.

The two prerequisites, two attitudes that must be right in order to have the mind of Christ in decision-making are:

PREREQUISITE #1: Do you accept the Scriptures for what they really are? The entire premise of this study hinges on this, and from this two facts emerge.

Fact #1: There is no decision in life that is not addressed in the Word of God. Not one. God may not tell you in Scripture whether to buy the pink dress or the blue one. However, He has given you enough direction in the Word on how to spend money; how to buy wisely; how to determine a want from a need; and how to dress to

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draw attention to your character rather than to yourself. So, if you pray and apply those principles, you ought to know whether or not buying any dress is the right thing to do at this time. Once that is clear, the pink or blue thing will take care of itself. I believe God will give you discernment through His Spirit as to detail because you honored Him regarding this principle. (You try it.)

The Word speaks to every issue of life: houses, jobs, children, money, marriage, business. Every issue in life that involves a decision is addressed in the Word of God.

Fact #2: The Word specifically promises to give you answers and direction.

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
(Psalm 119:105)

Or in another version:

Your words are a flashlight to light the path ahead of me and keep me from stumbling.
(Psalm 119:105 TLB)

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.
(Psalm 119:59)

And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.
(Psalm 119:45)

(In other words, the Word sets me free.)

Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.
(Psalm 119:24)

So do not let anyone, anywhere, anytime tell you that the Word does not have all the answers to all the questions of life. It is God's flashlight when you have a decision to make. He will use the Word to light your path and show you which way to go. You will live in freedom because of His precepts. The Word will be your counselor; it will teach you what to do! If you want to make godly decisions, you must realize that ALL your answers are in the Book.

I would like to remind you at this point of five things about the Word.

First of all, the Scripture is the WORD OF GOD. It is not man's thoughts about God. It is not even some of God's thoughts about man. It is ALL that God ever has or ever will have to say to man in time. It is literally the VOICE OF GOD speaking to the heart of regenerate man.

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.

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For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved [or controlled] by the Holy Ghost. (II Peter 1:20,21)

It is called the Word of God in Luke 11:28 and Hebrews 4:12, and the Word of Christ in Colossians 3:16. The Scripture is the Word of God—no more, no less, no other, not ever. It is not a word about God, nor a word for God, nor even a word from God. It is THE WORD OF GOD. It is ALL GOD HAS TO SAY ABOUT EVERYTHING. Therefore, there is no decision it cannot help you make. Accept the Scripture for what it is: the Word of God. All of it is the Word, and it is all of the Word.

Secondly, the Scripture is alive, which literally means the Scripture is a life! It is not a book, it is a Person, the Person of Jesus Christ, the Living Word, communicating His life through its pages. When it speaks, He speaks. In Hebrews 4:12 it tells us that the Word of God is alive (that is what “quick” means here) and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. God’s Book is a living book. Therefore, it is both traditional and contemporary. It speaks to the past; it is relative to the present; and it accurately, to the letter, foresees the future.

When you read a novel, YOU read a novel. When you read history, YOU read history. When you read a biography, YOU read a biography. It is up to you to understand, to retain and to receive what you have read. But when you pray, “Open Thou mine eyes, that I may receive wondrous things out of Thy law”, and you read THIS Book, God is literally speaking to you. Even more, His Spirit will take that Word and apply it to your life. It is not a book, it is a Person. The Word of God is alive.

Thirdly, the Word of God is without error, and it is complete.

All Scripture is God-breathed... (II Timothy 3:16a NIV)

Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever. (Psalm 119: 160)

Every word of God is pure...

Add thou not unto his words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. (Proverbs 30:5a,6)

It is not that most of the Scriptures are true. It is not even that 99.99% of Scriptures are true. ALL of the Scriptures are without error, and the Scripture is finished. So, if when someone comes to you for counsel and you share God’s principles from God’s Word,

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and they say, “I believe the Bible...but not that part”, you have no basis on which to lead them to make a decision. The Scripture is finished, and the Scripture is perfect. Therefore, it is the PERFECT guide to life’s choices, as well as the only guide.

Fourthly, the Scriptures are practical and personal. Again in II Timothy 3:16, it says, “ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable...” for what? It is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” In other words, He will teach you, touch you, turn you and train you. This is in order that God’s man or woman may be complete (whole and holy), and completely equipped for every challenge.

Since God designed the Word to be a lamp and a light, its theology is only a vehicle to make His plans clear. Its theology is not an end within itself. The revelation of Scripture is not only for doctrine, but also for personal reproof, for private correction, and for practical instruction as well. It is not only God’s Word to the church, it is God’s Word to you about your problem, your specific problem, so He can give you a personal, practical solution.

Lastly, remember that the Word of God is eternal.

For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

(I Peter 1:24,25)

Times may change, but God does not, and man does not, and sin does not, and Jesus does not, AND HIS WORD DOES NOT. Man just renames his sins, resets his standards, and glorifies the new names and the new standards as current philosophy. However, man’s problems and God’s solutions from the Dark Ages to the Jet Age will always be the same.

So, that is Prerequisite #1. Accept the Scriptures for what they are: God Himself, alive, perfectly, practically, personally, eternally speaking to you. There is no question man can ask that God has not answered and will not make clear FROM THE WORD. What a load that ought to take off of us when we have a decision to make. We already have the answer; we only have to find it and apply it. So the first prerequisite is, do you accept the Word for what it is?

PREREQUISITE #2: Do you accept life for what it is? I am going to give you a definition of life for the Christian: LIFE IS A

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TEMPORARY JOURNEY THROUGH A FOREIGN COUNTRY BY A CHOSEN AMBASSADOR OF A CONQUERING KING. The objectives of your ambassadorship are clear. You are to be in the world, to minister to the world, but never to become of it, like it, or committed to it (this land to which you have been assigned.) The concept of dual citizenship is a Satanic lie. You are a child of the King and a member of the Kingdom. You are a pilgrim and a stranger, so you abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul. You are an ambassador for Christ, so you beseech men in Christ's stead,

Be ye reconciled to God.

(II Corinthians 5:20b)

This world is not your home; your journey here is brief. When your job here is finished, you will spend ETERNITY at home.

The Decisions of a Tourist

Therefore, every decision you make must be made in the light of eternity and the laws of your homeland. It is a spiritual kingdom, so every decision you make is a spiritual decision. Every decision you make ought to prefer character to circumstances, the spiritual to the temporal, people to things. The Word must never bow to the world. As God's heaven-sent ambassadors, our orders indicate we are not to become entangled with the affairs of this life. There are some things ambassadors cannot do.

Real Decisions and Real People

Yes, we must make earthly decisions, but they must all be made by heavenly standards. For example, you have a decision to make concerning a job. Whether or not you take that job is not determined by what will best exalt you, or grant you prosperity, or give you satisfaction. I find no place in Scripture that either promises or infers those goals as vocational objectives for the Christian. That is what the world looks for in a job, but you do not belong to the world. You are on an official visa. You could be called home at any time, and when you get called home, you can only take back to the kingdom commodities spendable in the kingdom. Your prestige stays here, your prosperity stays here, and your "personal satisfaction" over your job stays here. God has a bank account, and you can send back home treasures that will wait for you. What you accomplish that is of this world will not spend in heaven. It will be burned in the incinerator of the presence of God at the Bema seat of Christ. If you have a decision to make concerning a job, look at it from God's vantage point. I can promise you, it will be 180

degrees from the world's viewpoint.

Work From God's Perspective

I believe Scripture teaches that work (as we know it) was part of the curse, the result of sin. Since sin entered the scene, work was never meant to be a primary source of man's satisfaction. I believe God gave us work for three reasons:

Reason 1: to earn money to meet our basic needs and then to give the rest away.

Reason 2: to develop character under authority, often through tribulation, and sometimes even through persecution. It is a vehicle by which we grow into HIS likeness.

Reason 3: to place us strategically on the mission field of planet earth, where we are needed, when we are needed to testify of our King. (That is why we are here; we are ambassadors!)

I believe that is God's perspective of work. If that is true, then you do not look for the easiest job with the best pay, the best benefits and the most security. The world does, but you do not. Chances are the easiest job will do nothing for your character. The best pay may be more than you can handle. Those benefits may make you presumptuous. Remember, your security is to be found ONLY in Christ.

If you are looking for a job, first consider your priorities. Will it so consume your time that it will compromise your commitment to your family? Will it cause you to compromise conviction for profit? Will it place you in an environment that experience has proved will destroy you spiritually? Will it take your primary priorities—your walk with God and your family—and trade them for temporal success or financial ease? Then scratch it off; it is not God's will.

Secondly, consider character. Are you slothful? Then look for a job that is demanding and exacting. Are you undisciplined? Look for a job where your time is structured, where your duties require "discipline or else"! Do you have a problem with pride? Look for a job with no glory attached. Are you in rebellion to authority? Look for a job with a tough boss. Don't look for someone to oil your strengths; look for someone to sandpaper your weaknesses. I may possibly get shot for this, but oftentimes you are better off (character-wise) to take a job that will not be a showplace for your natural talents or skills for two reasons. The first is that God's strength is perfected in weakness. (When you succeed, you have

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a testimony.) The second is that it causes you to be dependent on God minute-by-minute, and dependence is a MUST to produce character. You take a job you are not naturally suited for, let God magnify Himself through it, and you will have become a man or woman of prayer; a man or woman of dependence; a man or woman who glorifies God alone with each measure of success.

So, believe it or not, contrary to public opinion, consider

- 1) Taking the most difficult job you can get;
- 2) Taking a job that will sandpaper the character needs of your life;
- 3) Taking a job that will not exploit your natural talents or strengths, but will rather require God to glorify Himself through your weaknesses.

Consider your priorities, consider character, and lastly, consider the mission potential. God is not giving you a job to satisfy you, but to change you and to use you.

You say, "I don't want that job. There is nothing but a bunch of pagans there." Then in the same breath you mutter, "Gee, I wish God would send me to the mission field!" How blind we are! Those "pagans" ARE your mission field, and the job is incidental. It is just God's way of placing you in your world where your witness is needed.

Now the job is just one example, but do you see how different God's ways are from the world's ways? How decidedly distinct are the principles of the Word? God will show you which job to take IF you will look at it from HIS perspective.

So, if you want to learn to make decisions, first accept the Word for what it is: God speaking, alive, without error, practical, personal, and eternal. Then learn to accept life for what it is: a temporary journey through a foreign country by a chosen ambassador of a conquering King. Then you will be in a position to make decisions God's way consistently.

Decisions! Decisions! Decisions! We have seen the precepts, the principles, and the prerequisites. Now, in closing, we will glance at the process because this is where, so many times, we get off course.

THE PROCESS

We had a preview of it in the last chapter. It looks like this:

THE PROCESS OF DECISION-MAKING

The Word + Counsel + Time + God's Long-Term Peace +
A Long-Term Look at the Circumstances of Life

All undergirded by the process of prayer
(God's dynamite of dependence)!

Decisions are made in harmony with the Word of God, led by the Spirit of God. They are then to be confirmed by counsel, time, the continual peace of God's Spirit, and finally, by a long-term look at the circumstances of life. But the key to this five-factor "formula" is this: You must come to see the Word of God IS your decision-maker! The other four factors are only God's confirmation process, His exclamation points, if you will. When you come to see that, then (and only then) will you see this process in perspective.

The Decision-Maker

So first of all, the Word of God is God's answer to man's questions. Each time you have a decision to make, God has an answer to give you IN THE WORD. It may be by principles; it usually is. It may be through a verse that speaks to your circumstance; it sometimes is. The more you become a man or woman of the Book, the more decisive and consistent you will become in the choices of life.

Confirmation # 1

Once you have received direction from the Word, the second step is to then seek counsel. Do not place the pressure on your counselors to take God's place, thus using them as a crutch. It is not up to your counselors to be the Holy Spirit for you. Counsel ought but to confirm what God's Spirit told you through God's Word. The Word gives direction; counsel gives confirmation.

Confirmation #2

The third step is to give God time (and watch God's timing.) Man is always in a hurry; he has God on a stopwatch. God, meanwhile, is looking at a calendar, rather than at the second hand of a clock. He moves slowly, he confirms slowly, and He teaches as He goes. Ninety per cent of the time when we have a "rush" decision to make, the "rush" part comes from Satan. God is methodical, consistent, and deliberate. Satan is impulsive, frantic, and inconsistent. God

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is never in a hurry; Satan always is! GIVE GOD TIME, and as the days go by, He will put the pieces in place.

You say, “But I’m out of a job. God has to show me this week what He wants to do with my life.” I beg your pardon! He has to do no such thing! God has got lots of time. Get a “job” sweeping floors or flipping fries or waiting tables. Then, once the immediate pressure of the no-income situation is over, begin again to tackle the long-range problem.

TIME: It means Transformation In the Making of Eternity. It is God’s parenthesis in the decision-making process in which He so builds character that the decision itself is almost incidental.

Confirmation #3

The fourth step is to ask God for continual peace. Continual peace is the settled tranquility of spirit that defies understanding and is unaffected by circumstances, and it is the direct result of prayer and thanksgiving. Philippians 4:6,7 describes the terms: stop worrying, start praying, and keep praising. The tranquility is a peace beyond comprehension, a peace that passes all understanding, a settled peace. It is an inner, long-range, consistently relaxed spirit, not a day-to-day emotion.

If someone says to you, “I know now what I am supposed to do. God gave me a peace this morning”, I would be careful. What about tomorrow morning? And yesterday morning? Does God keep changing His mind?

P E A C E is a:

Progressive **E**ase at **A**ccepting **C**ircumstances as **E**ternal.

If your peace can vanish with a pizza, or an upset stomach, or an argument, or a “closed door”, that is not peace. That is responding to your emotions, and emotions are not indicators of the will of God. Look to God to confirm His will through LONG, STEADY, LASTING, INNER PEACE. The key words are “confirm” and “lasting”. Remember, too, the first half of the verse: you bathe the whole process in prayer. God may have given you that decision to make, that seemingly difficult choice, just to teach you to pray. The decision is no “biggie” to God. He could spell out the answer in the clouds if He so desired. If through that decision you learn how to pray for His will in faith, believing...don’t you see? Then the decision itself becomes almost incidental.

Confirmation 4-

The fifth and last step is to let God confirm, not lead, but confirm finally through circumstances. Here is where open and closed doors come in. They are not revolving doors that you have to rush into or be crushed. When God opens a door, He shows it in the Word, confirms it by counsel, seals it by time, grants lasting peace, and then opens a door and holds it open until you can quietly, confidently enter in. But if you move, being LED by open doors, I guarantee you will get your fingers smashed. Let the circumstances of life form a pattern, a consistent, long-range pattern. Then see them as the final confirmation of God's decision-making process.

Do you see the process? It is God leading through His Word, then confirming His leading once through counsel, twice through time or timing, thrice through lasting peace, and fourthly through the long-range pattern of the circumstances of life. You see, then, that you are not tossed to and fro, vacillating from day to day because of your feelings or "open doors". You are on a steady, consistent course headed for a clear destination: the will of God. It is not a changeable, elusive possibility but a consistent, continual confirmation of His plan and purpose.

You say, "But I don't have that much time." You do, if God does! If necessary, let a few of man's deadlines pass, and then let God do the impossible; but WAIT until you know.

Decisions! Decisions! Decisions! What a major part they play in God's scheme of things. Are they really the mysterious cloud we make them out to be? Not if we accept the Scriptures for what they are: a living God speaking without error, personally and practically, in the light of eternal truth. Not if we accept life for what it is: a temporary journey through a foreign country as a chosen ambassador of a conquering King. Then all of life's decisions are made through the Word with eternity as the only criteria. Not if we learn that the process is simple. The Word speaks and God confirms by counsel, timing, long-term peace, and long-term circumstances. All the while we are growing, as we pray day after day after day.

Then the decisions of life become natural products of a natural relationship with a supernatural God. The world will stand in awe as you quietly, confidently move through life, because you (unlike them) will know where you are going, as well as why. You will have a testimony because you have passed the test, the test of walking

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with God minute by minute as He shows you by His Word how to make decisions, decisions, decisions! The key then is to...

(See poem on next page.)

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LET THE WORD DECIDE

Let the Word decide, Beloved.
Let the living Word decide.
Not the winds of chance that flutter,
Nor the peace you feel inside.

Are you struggling as a Christian
Some decisive choice to make?
Is there yet that cloud of mystery
O'er which road you ought to take?

Let the Word decide, Beloved;
Let God's Word decide for you.
Let the Scripture be your searchlight;
Every word it speaks is true.

Every word it speaks is perfect,
Every word is God's own voice.
Every single word is eternal;
You can trust its every choice.

Let the Word decide, Beloved.
Take the Word for what it is—
It's the very breath of Jesus;
Every syllable is His.

It will give your life direction;
It will speak to your own heart.
It will tell you by God's Spirit,
When to stop and when to start.

Let the Word decide, Beloved;
It's as current as the news.
Use the Word, and let God's Spirit
Lead you every time you choose.

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