

What Is “Postmodernism”?

Few people in my generation know what the concept of *postmodernism* is. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines postmodernism as:

Any of several artistic movements since about the 1960s that have **challenged the philosophy and practices of modern arts or literature**. In literature this has amounted to a **reaction against an ordered view of the world and therefore against fixed ideas about the form and meaning of texts**. In its reaction against Modernist ideals (see Modernism) such as autotelic art and the original masterpiece, postmodern writing and art

“Going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you an automobile.” — Billy Sunday

emphasize devices such as pastiche and parody and the stylized technique of the antinovel and magic realism. Postmodernism has also led to a proliferation of critical theories, most notably deconstruction and its offshoots, and the breaking down of the distinction between “high” and “low” culture.

The *theological dictionary* at the **Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry** (carm.org) gives this definition for postmodernism:

What Saith

The Scripture

about the cultic concept known as

Postmodernism and the Prophets of New Age

Part 1 of 2

a study developed for the Saints of

Rock Hill Baptist Church

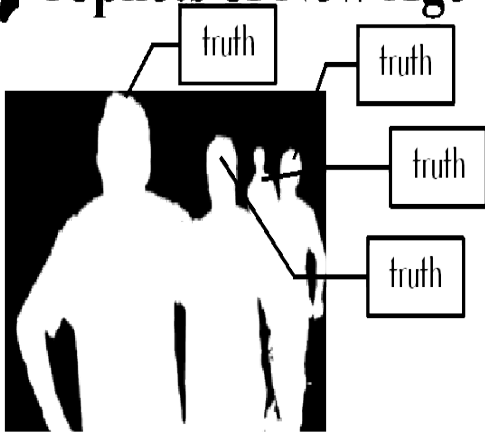
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Postmodernism and the Prophets of New Age



A relativistic system of observation and thought that denies absolutes and objectivity. Postmodernism has influenced theology, art, culture, architecture, society, film, technology, and economics. Traditional social, art, and cultural, constructs are

discarded and reinterpreted in relativistic terms. An example of postmodern thought would be the validation of homosexuality as an equally legitimate sexual expression over and against the Judeo-Christian ethic of heterosexual monogamy. In other words, previously taboo practices and beliefs are given equal validity to traditional values and norms often to the point of displacing the latter. This equalization and displacement are not restricted to religious realms, but affect all circles of human interaction.

In other words, postmodernism regards all things as fluid, not fixed. There are *no absolutes* in our universe, because no absolutes exist. Truth itself can only be understood from the framework of my experiences – and what you regard as truth may not be true for me. Four people may be in a room and each possess four, *equally valid truths* regard the

same thing, possession, activity, or relationship. Truth is relative to *my experience in life*, and what you believe is true is fine – as long as you do not step on my truth.

Postmodernism is a system of thought based on egocentricity: what I want is more important than what anyone else wants or thinks. Therefore I will do as I please without concern nor guilt. There is no absolute right or wrong, but the question I must always ask is “what's right for me?”

What Has Led *Humanity* To Postmodernism?

Postmodernism is *not a new thing*, as many people think, but has *been around since the Garden of Eden*. Postmodernism is rooted and grounded in the “me”, the “I”, the self-satisfaction and gratification of sin. God had forbidden *both* Adam and Eve from partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (**Genesis 2:17**). Both people were free to *touch the fruit*, as they were commanded to *cultivate* the Garden they were in (**Genesis 2:15**). God, the Absolute Source of Truth, warned both parties that *eating* of the tree would bring immediate death. When the serpent Satan (**Revelation 12:9; 20:2**) came into the Garden to tempt Eve he said:

{Genesis 3:1, HCSV} “Did God really say, ‘You can’t eat from any tree in the garden?’”

What the devil did was *twist the meaning* of one of the words in Eve's vocabulary – the word "say" or "said" – and make the definition of that word different. It was an *absolute truth* that God said:

{Genesis 2:16-17, HCSV} "... but **you must not eat from the tree** of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die.”

That was what God said. But Satan challenged Eve's *perception* of what God said by implying in his statement,

“Is that what God *really* meant?”

We hear this same argument today in postmodern thought. How could a *loving God* deny us anything of pleasure? Did God *really* mean that we are not to have sexual intercourse outside of marriage? Does God *really* expect us to go to Church? Does God *really* expect me to tell those I perceive as “good people” that they need to accept Jesus Christ as Savior? Is that what Christ *really* meant in **John 14:6**, or have I somehow misunderstood the words He spoke?

Once Satan led Eve to question the *authoritative*

God's Truth



Satan's Truth

meaning of God's command in Genesis 2:16-17, her next step was to *add to* that which God commanded. Now that God's Word has become relative to Eve's thought processes she has – in conjunction with Satan – developed a new perception of truth *based on – not the Word of God – but on her own experience*. Notice how Eve inserts human experience into Divine command:

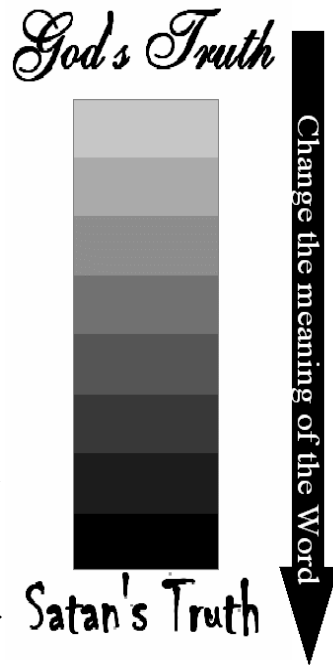
{Genesis 3:2-3, HCSV} “We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘**You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.**’ ”

Eve has begun the slide from adherence to the *pure, white, absolute truth of God's Word* and has now added human experience as a qualifier for truth. The issue now is NOT what God has commanded. Now the issue is *touch* as well as *eating*. God NEVER told either Adam or Eve that they couldn't touch the fruit. In fact, their very God ordered vocations demanded that they touch the fruit. How can you cultivate a Garden without touch? You can't. But Eve, stepping

out on the pathway of Satanic reasoning stepped on a muddy slope ... and began a slide that would ultimately lead her – and all humanity – into Satan's service.

Change The Meanings, And You Change The Truth

How does one go from a *garden* to a *garbage dump*?
How does one's life go from *perfect* to *putrid*? Satan didn't lead Eve directly from God's truth to demonic truth in one step, but he carried her along a pathway of *gradual change*. Once Eve showed a willingness to walk away from God's Word by adding her own experience – touch and taste – now the devil moved to a state of further *self determined truth*.



{Genesis 3:4-5, HCSV} “No! You will not die,” the serpent said to the woman. “In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, or divine beings knowing good and evil.”

Satan, having led the woman to walk away from

God's Word, now leads her to outright *disobedience* and *blasphemy*. “God knows you won't die. He's just trying to withhold what you deserve. If you eat this fruit you become just like a god – in fact, you'll both be gods – and He's afraid that you'll take that step!” Eve began the slide from *absolute truth* (God's Word) to *relative truth* (Satan's Word). God is now being openly portrayed by Satan as *a liar, a deceiver, or at the least a petty party-poopers*. It is interesting to note that neither Adam nor Eve asked Satan or themselves the obvious questions, questions like:

- “If God made me and put me in this wonderful place, would He really deny me any good thing?”
- “If God hates me, why did He make me?”
- “Is Satan really greater than God? How can he know what was in God's mind when He gave the command?”
- “Has God *ever* lied to me up to this point? Why would He do so?”

Satan proposed *alleged truths* that had no basis in reality, and both Adam and Eve failed to confront his *proposals* based on God's previous track record. God was now branded a liar – or at least a tyrant. Satan, perverted truth, and human experience are now foremost in the minds of our first parents. What's the next stop? Absolute disobedience!

{Genesis 3:6, HCSV} “Then the woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate [it]; she also gave [some] to her husband, [who was] with her, and he ate [it]”

Now that human experience rather than God's Word was *internalized as truth* – remember, my truth may not be your truth – both Adam and Eve were free to *experience what God had forbidden*. Notice how Eve satisfied her human senses:

the woman SAW
delightful to LOOK at
it was DESIRABLE
she TOOK some
and ATE it

Human experience rather than God's Word became the criteria for *truth*. This is *exactly* what postmodernism teaches: my truth may be different

“A man's greatest care should be for that place where he lives longest; therefore eternity should be his scope.” – Thomas Watson

from your truth, but both truths – no matter how radically diametric – are *equally valid*. Change the meaning of the word so that it's non-offensive to my conscience, then move forward into the activity itself.

How America Has Partaken Of The Forbidden Fruit

As I said before, few parents realize how much postmodernistic thought has impacted their children ... or themselves. If you truly believe what Jesus said, that He could return at any moment:

Matthew 24:42 (KJV) "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."

Matthew 25:13 (KJV) "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

then would you truly skip Church services, watch the television shows you watch, or engage in the activities you do? If Jesus is coming back without warning, and you truly believe this as *absolute truth*, then why is your behavior inconsistent with your faith? Do you really want to be watching *Sex and the City* when Jesus comes to take you from this earth?

Each generation of parents in America may have helped to foster postmodern thought in their children. When a parent steps away from God's Word and moves toward human experience as absolute truth children see this and a new *truth* is formed. The most serious problem reported in schools in the nineteenth century was chewing gum and talking in class. Today

if a child is caught smoking a cigarette and not marijuana the teacher is relieved!

The widespread use of computers has further enhanced this free diffusion of knowledge and value. Through the Internet and other computer networks one can access virtually every possible form of knowledge and value that is available. All one needs is a computer, a modem, and the right software; one does not have to be a member of the intellectual and political elite.

But who is to control religious knowledge and value? Televangelists challenge the theology of the mainline churches. MTV and pornography in cyberspace challenge traditional moral values. Videos watched in the privacy of one's own home challenge the values of polite, public society. Information gleaned from the computer networks challenges the culturally and religiously sanctioned view of things as presented by one's teachers. We live in an intellectual -- and spiritual -- marketplace.¹⁸ (Cross Currents, Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism, by Daniel J. Adams)

Though many parents would like to lay the blame for postmodern thought in their children at the foot of the media agencies (television, radio, print, and internet), the truth is God addresses *none of these agencies* when He gave parents the command to control their children. *Unless we as parents, grandparents, teachers, and pastors stand up and proclaim that there is an absolute truth with both our mouths as well as our lives*, then America will continue its slide into a terrible pit of immorality.

Where Is Truth? What Is Truth?

(John 18:38a KJV) "Pilate saith unto [Jesus], What is truth?"

"The postmodern mind refuses to limit truth to its rational dimension and thus dethrones the human intellect as the arbiter of truth. There are other valid paths to knowledge besides reason, say the postmodernists, including the emotions and the intuition." (A Primer on Postmodernism, Stanley J. Grenz, Eerdman's, pg 7)

Our children and grandchildren have been flooded with postmodern thought through both video games as well as television. Video games put children in positions where, in many cases, they act out shooting, cutting, or some other form of taking life. Many games have children attacking depictions of humans. Though it is only fantasy, it has the effect of telling the child that violations of the 6th Commandment, *Thou shalt not murder* (Exodus 20:13), are acceptable in certain circumstances. Television shows and movies depict men and women (if we're fortunate) in acts that violate the 7th Commandment, *thou shalt not commit adultery* (Exodus 20:14). Are parents watching these shows too? Very likely! You need to realize that what you do **speaks much louder than what you say**. Movies like *Cradle To The Grave* glorify cursing, theft, lying, and even murder. Children are watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,

being drawn into plots where scantily clad teenagers do things which are forbidden outside of marriage

On what is perhaps a more personal level, within Western society the metanarrative (the concept of an [[ideology]] or world view) of the **Judeo-Christian sexual ethic has been delegitimized. There was a time not many years ago when chastity before marriage was accepted as a given.** To be sure, there were those who did not always live up to that ideal, but virtually everyone accepted it as the ideal. College professors now report that there are students who do not even know the meaning of the words abstinence and chastity, to say nothing of the sexual ethic underlying these terms.¹⁶ Sexual activity prior to marriage, living together without being married, and alternatives to traditional marriage such as gay and lesbian relationships are so common in contemporary Western culture that most people accept this new situation as a given. (Cross Currents, Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism, by Daniel J. Adams)

per God's Holy Word. The show *Charmed* glorifies witchcraft, a form of cultism that is specifically forbidden in the Scripture (**Exodus 22:18; Deuteronomy 18:10-12**). The constant barrage of television, computer, and print media - telling our children there are no lines of right and wrong - has twisted truth until it appears - to the postmodern mind, at least - that there is *no real truth*.

“The abandonment of the belief in universal truth entails the loss of any final criterion by which to evaluate the various interpretations of reality that compete in the temporary intellectual realm. In this situation, all human interpretations - including the Christian worldview - are equally

valid because all are equally invalid. At best, say the postmoderns, we can judge these interpretations only on the basis of pragmatic standards, on the basis of “what works”. (A Primer on Postmodernism, Stanley J. Grenz, Eerdmans, pg 163-164)

Are we in an impossible position as Christians? Not really. The First Century Church faced many of the same problems that we face. Rome was steeped in decadence, and many people were *religious*, worshiping many gods and goddesses. In many ways the early Christian Church suffered much greater than believers do today. The first *recorded* persecution of Christians was under Emperor Nero. When Rome burned for six days, Nero (54-68 AD) blamed the Christians. Tacitus, a contemporary of Nero, wrote:

“First Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Then, on their information, large numbers of others were condemned. ...Their deaths were made farcical. Dressed in wild animal’s skins, they were torn to pieces by dogs, or crucified, or made into torches to be ignited after dark as substitutes for daylight.”

Another writer of that day, Suetonius, was more succinct:

“Punishments were also inflicted on the

Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief.”

See if you can see any *similarities* between ancient Rome and present day America.

1. Rome trusted in a *number of gods*, for instance "Honos" the god of chivalry, honor and military justice; "Dei Lucrii" the early gods of wealth, profit, commerce and trade; "Virtus" the god of bravery and military strength, and so on. Some of gods were localized. For instance, in Corinth, virgin *priestesses* sold their bodies for money. In Ephesus, the Ephesians worshiped a goddess of fertility, Diana or Astarte - the Ashtaroth of the Old Testament.
2. Rome faced serious erosion of family ties.
3. Romans expressed an inordinate desire for luxury. Wealthy Romans lived a sumptuous lifestyle - often at the expense of others.
4. Human life became cheap. The Empire operated on the enslavement of others. Romans owned so many slaves that they lived in constant fear of a slave revolt. Spartacus, a slave, led a brief, but intense, revolt before the first century. Physicians prescribed various medications to induce abortion. Many Romans took infants into the country, leaving them to die by exposure or by wild animal attacks.

5. Roman society displayed overt sexual deviation and perversion. Emperor Nero lived an openly homosexual lifestyle. Pornography and perversion in art were common. Romans demonstrated no modesty about exhibiting their sexual preferences.

What the Christian and the Gospel message is up against today is truly no greater than that which our forefathers stood against. We must resist the urge, though, to use *human ability* to resolve the problems that face us.

The Written Word & The Living Word Are Christianity's Anchor

(Hebrews 13:8-9 KJV) "**Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. {9} Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.**"

There are a couple of things that we who are truly Christian remember (and I qualify *truly Christian* from *professing Christian*. Around 98% of Americans *profess* to be Christian, though most have not the *slightest idea* as to what "Christian" means). First, **Jesus Christ** has never changed, and never will change. **Jesus Christ as revealed in the Word of God is the absolute truth** that the believer clings to,

professes, and tells others about. Jesus Christ promised the believer the indwelling *Holy Spirit of God*, and the power available to the Christian is as valid today as it has ever been.

Christians must, I repeat, **MUST** return to the *supernatural aspects of their faith* and cease living in this world in their own power. For too long you have turned away from the spiritual practices that our forefathers knew and used. You must return to living by the absolute Truth of God's Word:

Luke 4:3-4 "And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That **man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."**

When Jesus was attacked and tempted by the devil in the wilderness, Jesus made His stance on God's Word perfectly clear. Man shall not live by bread alone. If the only food you're giving yourself is physical food, you're slowly starving yourself to death. Man needs both physical and spiritual food. He needs every Word of God, not just the parts that appeal to us. We need that Sunday Sermon, but we need more than that if we're going to grow.

Luke 8:19-21 "Then came to him his mother and his brethren, and could not come at him for the press. And it was told him by certain which said,

Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee. And he answered and said unto them, **My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it."**

Too many Christians are wandering around saying, "I just don't know what God wants me to do", or, "What is God's Plan for my life?". A faith that has no sense is nonsense. We must study His Word.

Luke 11:27-28 "And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, **blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."**

Happiness (blessed: Greek makairos, happinesses) can only come to those who both study and guard the Word of God.

Ephesians 6:16-17 "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the **sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"**

1 Thessalonians 2:13 "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye

received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the **word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.**"

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

The postmodern mind rejects the Bible as yet another "intellectual work of man", but the Christian knows the Scripture as a *supernatural work, a living thing, a gift from God* that empowers him.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Is there an absolute truth? Absolutely, and it is a truth that works. For some 2000 years people have come to Christ through the preaching of the Scripture and through the leading of God's Holy Spirit.

God Is Absolute Truth!

If you are a Christian then you have a choice: accept

what the Word of God says about the *absolute truth of God and His Word*, or fall in line with the postmodernistic mindset. If you choose the latter you will have to do so by *rejecting God's Word in its entirety*. Why? Because the Scripture is clear that both it – and God Himself – are an absolute Source of truth. For example:

(Deuteronomy 32:3-4 KJV) "Because I will publish the name of the **LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. {4} He is the Rock, his work is perfect:** for all his ways *are* judgment: a **God of truth** and without iniquity, just and right *is* he."

(Psalms 25:4-5 KJV) "Show me thy ways, O **LORD**; teach me thy paths. **{5} Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation;** on thee do I wait all the day."

(Psalms 26:1-3 KJV) "*A Psalm of David.* Judge me, O **LORD**; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the **LORD**; *therefore* I shall not slide. **{2} Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. {3} For thy loving kindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth.**"

(Psalms 31:5 KJV) "Into thine hand I commit my spirit: **thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.**"

(Psalms 33:4-6 KJV) "For the word of the LORD *is* right; and **all his works *are done in truth.*** {5} He loveth righteousness and judgment: the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD. {6} By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth."

(Psalms 40:10-11 KJV) "I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: **I have not concealed thy loving kindness and thy truth from the great congregation.** {11} Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: **let thy loving kindness and thy truth continually preserve me.**"

(Psalms 57:3 KJV) "He shall send from heaven, and save me *from* the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Selah. **God shall send forth his mercy and his truth.**"

(Psalms 57:10-11 KJV) "For thy mercy *is* great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds. {11} Be thou exalted, **O God, above the heavens: *let thy glory be* above all the earth.**"

(Psalms 86:11-12 KJV) "Teach me thy way, O **LORD; I will walk in thy truth:** unite my heart to fear thy name. {12} I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore."

(Psalms 89:14-15 KJV) "Justice and judgment *are* the habitation of thy throne: **mercy and truth shall go before thy face.** {15} Blessed *is* the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance."

(Psalms 91:4 KJV) "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: **his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.**"

(Psalms 100:5 KJV) "**For the LORD *is* good; his mercy *is* everlasting; and his truth *endureth* to all generations.**"

(Psalms 117:2 KJV) "For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the **truth of the LORD *endureth* for ever. Praise ye the LORD.**"

(John 1:17 KJV) "For the law was given by Moses, **but *grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.***"

In part 2 of this study we will look at the New Age Movement, and how it developed as a response to postmodernism.

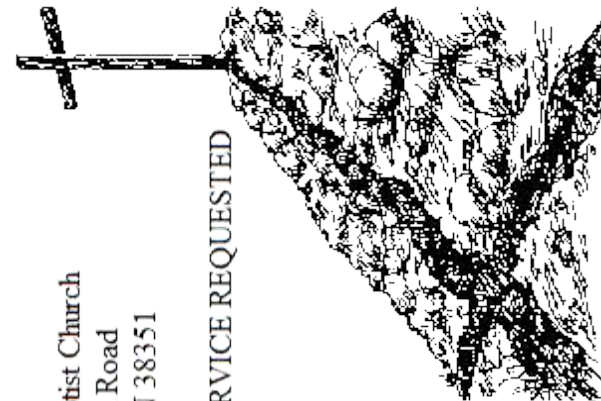
Footnotes

¹⁶ Reported by Boston College professor William Kilpatrick; see Sue Browder, "Raising a G-Rated Child in an X-Rated World," Reader's Digest (March 1995): 169. Academic scholarship and the popular press suggest widespread ignorance of traditionally held cultural values. See Edward Farley, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press

International, 1996), 1-28.

¹⁸ For a discussion of the role of computers in contemporary religious life, see Stephen D. O'Leary, "Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion in Computer Networks," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 781-808.

Rock Hill Baptist Church is located between Parsons and Lexington, Tennessee, on Highway 412. Look for our sign! We have services on Wednesdays (Adult, Youth, and children's Bible studies) at 7:00 PM, Sundays at 10:00 AM and 6:00 PM. Rock Hill is a family oriented Bible believing Church - Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever! Our Pastor, Brother David Buffaloe, will answer any questions you have about our Church if you contact him at 731-845-6104, or through his website at bibleteacher.org; or e-mail him by writing webmaster@bibleteacher.org. Rock Hill is an independent Church affiliated with the Tennessee Baptist Convention, the Southern Baptist Convention, and is a regular contributor to missions through the Cooperative Program.



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