Do Not Go Beyond What Is Written

We open the Word of God intending to stay faithful to its teachings. It matters that we do not go past the limits of what is written in Scripture. As we read in 1 Corinthians 4:6: *"And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another."* Amen. This verse urges us to keep to what is written, without adding to or taking away from the teachings of the Bible.

The Lord Jesus is our supreme example here. There is a real danger of misusing Scripture and interpreting it to suit our own wishes, and we must guard against that risk. Let us remember what the Lord Jesus did when the devil tempted Him. In Matthew 4 we see the devil trying to tempt the Lord Jesus, and He answered him with the words of Scripture. Let us ask ourselves: if the devil dared to speak to the Lord Jesus, won't he try to speak to us too? Clearly Satan tries to tempt us, but we must stand firm in the faith.

Let us read again from Matthew 4:3: *"And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."* Amen.

Faced with temptation, the Lord Jesus used the words of Scripture as His weapon. He showed that true spiritual food comes from the Word of God, not only from material things. So let us arm ourselves with the Word of God too, and not turn away from what is written.

We will look at a few points to understand how we can use this weapon in our fight. The devil can use Scripture as well, just as it is written. The Lord Jesus answers the devil, who is tempting Him with Scripture: *"It is written again,"* said the Lord Jesus, *"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."* So it is not enough just to say "it is written." We also need discernment. It is also written: *"not to think of men above that which is written."*

In the Epistle to the Philippians we will read about the Lord Jesus. First we will describe Him, and then we will compare the way He worked with the way we work. It is true that we can have the Word of God in our minds. We want to have it, but Satan can use the very Word we carry in our minds against us. Why did Satan use Scripture when he tempted the Lord Jesus? He had a purpose. And he came to the Son of God Himself.

We can say, as was mentioned earlier, that we need to have the whole Word in abundance. It is written, isn't it? *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."* Let it dwell, but it does not always dwell richly. Laziness or other hindrances can leave the word of Christ a little distant from us. But in the Lord Jesus the Word of God dwelt richly. He Himself was the Word. And still Satan came to the One who was the Word, armed with what is written.

Does Satan come to us for nothing, or not? He has a chance. He has a chance, and that is exactly why he comes. If he had no chance at all, he wouldn't come. Think of it this way: if you know you can't pass a medical school entrance exam because you haven't studied at all, you won't turn up for it. You only turn up when you know you have a chance, when you've prepared well and studied hard, knowing the admission grade is a 9 or an 8 out of 10 and you need to be close to it to stand a chance. Otherwise, what's the point? And remember those who went to high school and didn't study enough: they didn't even apply to university, because there was no point. Their chances were zero.

So Satan comes to tempt us too. Definitely. And with many people he doesn't just have a chance, he actually succeeds. With many he really does succeed. May God help us stay faithful to the written Word.

In the Epistle to the Philippians we find the example of the Lord Jesus, which teaches us that straying from Scripture can lead us to the very opposite of what we want. In Philippians 2, from verse 5 through verse 8, we read: *"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."* Amen.

When we ignore the written Word, we risk making ourselves equal with God, and that is a grave error. Going beyond what is written means making personal decisions that run against God's will. If someone takes on the role of teacher alongside the Lord Jesus, he puts himself on a pedestal equal to His, and that is unacceptable. The Lord Jesus did not seek to be equal with God. Instead, when Satan tempted Him, He answered with Scripture: *"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."*

The Lord Jesus denied Himself and chose not to go beyond what is written. He became obedient, taking the form of a servant and submitting even unto death. This is the pattern we must follow, without departing from His teachings.

To understand better how we should behave, let us turn to Matthew 4 and take examples from John chapter 5, which we will read now. The words *"thought it not robbery to be equal with God,"* though *"being in the form of God,"* remind us that although the Lord Jesus had the divine nature, He did not treat equality with God as something to cling to. This is an example of humility that we are called to follow. It is essential that we do not fall into the trap of considering ourselves equal with God, which is what happens when we ignore the teachings of Scripture. The Lord Jesus warns us: *"Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures."* You err.

In John 5:19 the Lord Jesus explains His relationship with the Father: *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."* This underlines how important it is to follow the Father's example and to seek to do His will, not our own. The same principle applies to our lives: we are to live according to God's will, as the Lord Jesus did.

Turning to Ezekiel and 1 Corinthians, it is important to read carefully and to understand the context and the message. Ezekiel deals with the consequences of sinful behaviour and with individual responsibility. *"If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth the like to any one of these things… shall he then live? he shall not live… his blood shall be upon him."* Amen. These verses remind us that our actions have consequences and that we must take responsibility for them.

At the start of the passage in Ezekiel we read: *"The word of the LORD came unto me again."* This tells us that the message comes from God and that we must pay attention to what is revealed to us through the Scriptures. It is essential that we do not go beyond what is written, and that we let the Word of God guide us in every area of our lives.

If a man has a son, or indeed if it is any person at all, who lends upon usury and takes increase, the question is asked whether he shall live. According to Scripture he shall not live, because he has done abominations, and his blood shall be upon his own head.

The question is what the Word of God is referring to in this context. It says that whoever lends at interest shall not live, because he commits abominations and must die. That suggests it is a sin to lend at interest.

It is the Word of God, but we also need to keep searching the Scriptures. We are told to follow the Father's example and do everything we hear from Him. In the exchange between the Lord Jesus and the devil, the Lord Jesus rejects the temptation to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple, because *"it is written again"* that we must not do that.

The passage in Ezekiel suggests that lending at interest and taking usury are serious deeds, and asks whether such a son, or such a man, could live. It stresses how important it is not to go beyond what is written and not to make ourselves equal with God when we interpret His teachings. It calls us to discernment and to respect for Scripture, without setting ourselves above God.

So now we need to go to Deuteronomy, to learn directly from God's own words and not go beyond what is written. The Lord Jesus respected Scripture, and it is dangerous to rely on only part of what is written, because the Word of God is complete and must be taken as a whole.

We read from Deuteronomy 23:19: *"Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury."* This lays down a prohibition against charging interest to a brother, that is, to a fellow believer, and it reinforces the idea that lending at interest is considered a sin in God's eyes.

But the Word of God also teaches us: *"Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it."* This verse directs us to handle financial dealings with strangers differently from those with our brothers.

Ezekiel 18 says that lending at interest is a sin that leads to death, which underlines how serious it is. Yet in the verse quoted just now, God makes a clear distinction between lending at interest to a brother, which is forbidden, and lending at interest to a stranger, which is permitted.

So there seems to be no contradiction between the two passages, but rather one completing the other. Ezekiel stresses the grave consequences of lending at interest among brothers, while the verse in Deuteronomy gives a specific instruction about how to handle money matters with brothers and with strangers. In Ezekiel it is clear that whoever lends to a brother at interest *"shall surely die,"* pointing to a spiritual and possibly physical consequence for breaking God's Law.

As for lending at interest to strangers, God mentions no negative consequence in the verse from Deuteronomy, which suggests we will not be guilty if we follow that instruction. So if we were to consider ourselves guilty for lending at interest to strangers, we would be misreading the Word and adding to God's teachings.

It is important to understand that, even if some actions may seem noble, we must be guided by what is written in Scripture and respect the distinctions God makes between different situations and relationships. God gave these instructions to guide us in our lives and to make sure we are in harmony with His will. God handed down various teachings, and among them are the rules about slavery.

According to Scripture there is a clear distinction: *"Thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant... of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids."* This is God's law, and if we choose not to take slaves, that is a personal decision and does not go against God's law. Still, we must be aware that when we see others following these teachings, we must not ignore what is written, because that would mean going beyond the Word of God, and that sets a bad example.

We need to remember that it is man who is in danger when he does not keep God's teachings. As it is written: *"turn not from it to the right hand or to the left."* If we follow these teachings strictly, we are promised that *"thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest."* This shows us that we must respect the Word of God in its entirety, even if some parts of it, such as slavery, may seem unpleasant or wrong from a human point of view. We cannot change God's teachings as we please, because, as Scripture says, *"The Son can do nothing of himself."*

In Psalm 15 we find exhortations that guide us to live in a certain way, but we must be careful not to interpret them in a way that takes us beyond what God intended. Satan can use the written Word itself to deceive us, trying to get us to go beyond God's teachings. It is essential to discern rightly and not to mix things up, but to divide them properly, giving help both to our brothers and to strangers according to the Word of God.

When it comes to condemnation, we must be careful not to treat different situations as though they were the same, because that could lead us away from Scripture. David, king and psalmist, is an example to follow, because he sought to fulfil the Word of God and gave his son advice to that

end. In Psalm 15 David asks deep questions, such as: *"LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?"* These questions push us to reflect on our own relationship with God and on how we live according to His teachings. Who will dwell in the Kingdom of God? God tells us who: *"He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved."* Amen.

David is speaking here about the man of God, who does not put out his money to usury. In context, we might think this man does not lend his money at interest even to the Gentiles, which would suggest he is a model of righteousness. Some have tried to set up a righteousness of their own, refusing the righteousness God offers through faith and obedience. It is true that *"he putteth not out his money to usury,"* but we must understand to whom he does not lend it: namely, to his brothers. As for bribes, we will need to discuss whether they are commanded or not.

If we choose not to lend our money at interest, that is our decision. But if we teach others that lending at interest is iniquity, we must ask ourselves whether we are not going beyond what is written. It matters that we do not go beyond what is written, because there is a great danger of making ourselves like God. *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus… who thought it not robbery to be equal with God."*

In conclusion, as far as this teaching of the Lord goes, we are forbidden to lend money at interest to our brothers. But it is our choice whether we want to lend at interest to others, to strangers. If we want to lend to a stranger without interest, there is no problem. If we choose to lend at interest, that is no problem either. Today, under the laws of the state, we are not allowed to lend money at interest, because we do not pay taxes on it and we are not licensed to do so. We must comply with the law and pay the taxes and duties due. Despite these restrictions, we can still lend money, but without charging interest, whether to friends or to other people. As for bankers, who are often strangers, the question arises whether or not we may deposit money in the bank to earn interest.

The Lord Jesus did not ignore these matters, as His teachings show. In Matthew 25, in the parable of the talents, interest is not explicitly condemned. If interest or slavery had been completely forbidden, neither the Lord Jesus nor the apostle Paul would have referred to them in their teaching. In verses 24–27 of the parable of the talents we read: *"Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers (that is, the bankers), and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury."* Amen.

This parable does not urge us to be greedy or miserly, or to love money excessively. We are not called to multiply our wealth through interest or to be misers. Yet God does not flatly forbid interest, as the Lord Jesus' words show: *"thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers."* So we must interpret these teachings in their context and be guided by the moral and legal principles that govern our lives. If it had been forbidden, what would the Lord Jesus have said? Would He have said something like that? "You ought to have done something sinful, something God forbids"? The Lord Jesus obeyed the Father exactly. Everything the Father spoke, the Lord Jesus spoke too.

And because the wicked servant did not work, it follows that he did not manage the money well. The responsibility is all the greater when the money entrusted to you is for the Kingdom of God. The Word of God urges you to manage it well, and you leave it there to rot, so to speak, because inflation eats away at money. It loses value, of course it does. You ought to have done this, to leave it with the exchangers, and you didn't.

And we come along and change the Word of God, spoil it, and say it is iniquity. May God have mercy on us and may we learn not to go beyond what is written. At the meeting I attended yesterday I saw these slips too, these departures from what is written. Out of a desire to be as strict as possible, as obedient as possible in some places, let's say, and loose in others, people spoil the Word of God.

Let's read one more teaching, from Exodus 23. In many Bibles the heading of this chapter is *"Laws Concerning Justice."* God gave laws for us to follow. *"Ye shall keep all my statutes, and all my judgments."* Verse 8: *"And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous."* We'll also read from Deuteronomy 16:19–20: *"Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee."* Amen.

The Word here does not speak of "giving gifts," only of not taking gifts. According to the Word of God, gifts corrupt the heart. It says they blind those whose eyes are open and pervert the decisions of the righteous, the paths of justice. They ruin them. Gifts corrupt these paths of justice.

Yesterday I heard several people saying it's fine if you give a few gifts to the doctor as a sign of gratitude, for instance. But what are you doing to the doctor when you give him gifts as a sign of gratitude? It doesn't matter what they're a sign of; you're giving him gifts. What happens when we give gifts to the doctor? We have to ask whether that gesture affects his heart or not. God has given us clear messages on this. Some might argue that if the gifts are given out of gratitude, there's no problem. But are we going beyond the teachings of Scripture when we act this way? Not necessarily, some would say, because they believe a bribe involves the intention of getting something fraudulently, of claiming rights that aren't ours and encouraging illegal practices. Indeed, actions like that are even more serious.

But what happens when we give gifts without any dishonest expectation? Are we straying from the paths of justice, or keeping to them? Are we encouraging evil by these gestures? Who is the one who tempts? Remember that the Lord Jesus was tempted by the devil, not by God. When we change the meaning of words, we also change how we see reality.

Take the example of a difficult birth. My wife was in labour for ten hours without giving birth. Is this God's will? Can God hurry the birth along? Or do we need gifts to persuade the doctor to act more promptly? Is it permitted to give gifts in such circumstances? Does God allow us to sway people's hearts this way?

A bribe is defined as gifts of money or goods given to get officials to do their duties more diligently. But when we see suffering, don't we feel pushed to go beyond the teachings of Scripture? The devil tries to convince us that a small token of gratitude can't do any harm. But even a hundred lei, the equivalent of a twenty-dollar bill, can affect a person's integrity.

Let's turn to the example of Felix, of whom we read in Acts 24. Let us learn today not to go beyond what is written, whatever the circumstances. Even if our life or the life of someone we love is in danger, we must not stray from God's principles. God gave us life, and even if we face death, we must not corrupt our own heart or anyone else's by what we do. Suppose God says: *"You must die today, Peter."* And I say: "No, I want to live longer; I'd rather pay a bribe and live, I'd rather go beyond what is written." Should we go beyond it or not? The Lord Jesus became a servant and was obedient how far? *"Unto death."* Let us follow His example. We are called to live as He lived.

We read Acts 24:24–26: *"And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him."*

Did Paul give him money or not? The man who lived in the righteousness God requires did not give gifts. He did not go beyond what is written. But why did Felix hope Paul would give him something? Why was he hoping? Had there been other prisoners before Paul who had sweetened their time in prison with gifts? How can you hope for it if nobody had ever given anything?

Maybe in your own job no bribes are given. I believe there are places where no gifts or bribes are given. But what about in other positions? Have people come to you to slip you a little something, five or ten lei, a few dollars, into your pocket? Yes! *"Load me up quicker! Unload me quicker! Do this for me faster! Help me out! Here, take a little something, a token!"* They give it as thanks, but doesn't it corrupt the heart of the one who receives it? Can he work out how much money he'll make from gifts today? *"Nobody came today, but I'm hoping this one will give me something."* Isn't that how the heart gets corrupted? Of course it is. But *"woe to that man by whom the offence cometh."* It is written. Or do we not care what it says? Do we just

stick with "I'm giving someone a gift as a thank-you"?

But you can give a flower, can't you? You give a flower; it's a gift. You can give a bar of chocolate; that's a gift too. You don't get anything out of it. You give your wife a flower, you give her chocolate, you give her something. When it doesn't involve corrupting the heart, gifts are fitting and lovely, of course they are. The problem comes when we mix good gestures with bad ones, join them together, and alongside the good ones we slide into the bad ones. In other cases, some people can't bear the bad gestures and give up the good ones too, because they think they aren't allowed to give gifts. So they don't give even a flower to their wife or a meal to the brothers and sisters, because they assume they aren't allowed to receive gifts, even though that is not what is written.

Let's base ourselves on what is written. Let's not add to Scripture or take away from it. Let's not lay extra burdens on people, but let's not simplify situations to solve our own problems either. What does a bribe do? It calms anger, doesn't it? If you don't give a bribe, anger can flare up. So some people give gifts or bribes to avoid someone's anger. *"I'll give something too, because otherwise he gets angry. He won't look after my wife, he'll say I'm stingy,"* someone might think, and that's how he tries to sort the situation out.

Let's take an example that many people often overlook. People go beyond what is written and put forward all kinds of arguments. In Joshua 23:6–7 we read: *"Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left; that ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you."* Amen. *"That ye come not among these nations."* And in Ecclesiastes 7:7 it is written that *"a gift destroyeth the heart."* We must be careful.

I brought up the example of interest. God teaches us not to take interest from our brother, and in Ezekiel we read about the consequences for those who do such things. In Joshua we are told not to mix with the nations remaining among us, but the consequences are not shown; here we are only told what to do. It's important to understand whether or not there are consequences when we ignore what is written.

At first glance, if we only read superficially, we may not see how serious it is to ignore what is written. For example, we say we don't mix with other nations, yet at the same time we let them influence our children. That is a form of mixing, isn't it? The question is: who are we actually mixing in? The answer is, our children. What does the Word of God say about this? Let's go back to Scripture to understand the consequences of disobedience and of going past the limits His Word has set. It is essential to strive to keep and apply everything that is written, turning aside neither to the right nor to the left, staying obedient so as to avoid grave consequences.

Psalm 106 tells us about the consequences of disobeying a specific Old Testament command: *"Do not mix with the nations."* If we choose to ignore this command, we face the consequences, whatever excuses we may offer.

For example, there is a custom of giving gifts when a baby is born. If we don't go along with it, the midwife may get irritated and refuse to help any further. What should we do in that situation? When we are tested and have to pay a price for our integrity, what do we do? Sometimes it seems easier to give up our principles than to put up with the difficulties, even if that means selling our birthright as children of God to avoid temporary suffering or other inconveniences in hospital.

How serious it is to ignore what is written is underlined in Psalm 106, which warns us not to mix with other nations. God commanded them not to mix, and the text says plainly: *"They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them: but were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works."* So they did not obey God, and they went beyond His teachings. Perhaps the devil encouraged them to think there was nothing serious about it, but by mixing with the nations and adopting their practices they fell into the trap of idolatry. And so the people sacrificed their sons and daughters in honour of idols, shedding innocent blood, the blood of their own children, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan. By these killings the land was polluted, and they defiled themselves with their works and went whoring with their own inventions. As a result, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against His people, so that He abhorred His own inheritance. Amen.

What are the consequences of disobedience? What happens when we ignore what is written? What should we do, brothers and sisters, if we can't educate our children at home, if we don't have that option? Lack of money, no teachers, not knowing English: these are all obstacles. But *"Do not mix with the nations"* is a clear command.

Think of the Hebrews: what if they had sent their children to be educated by the Philistines? What would those Philistine schools have produced? What would the children have learned there? They would have learned about Dagon, the Philistines' idol, because that was the religion taught in their schools.

What is taught in state schools today? Is it said that God does not exist? Yes, that is taught. Is it claimed that man descended from apes? That is taught. Is evolution discussed? That is taught. Do they teach that everything came out of nothing? Yes, it is taught in state schools, where the textbooks contain such things. What is being passed on to our children? What are these nations teaching them?

Are the children of God being taught to live the way these nations live? They mixed with them, and what is the consequence of mixing with the nations? They took on their customs, they took on their ways. There is the consequence, just as it is written: they did not destroy the peoples. Today we cannot destroy anything literally, we have no weapons for that, but what can we destroy? We can destroy the ties. Can we or can't we? Of course we can. Are there consequences when we break these ties? Yes, there are. Do we pay a price for it? We do; there is a price to pay. We must learn not to ignore what is written.

When we ignore it, what consequences follow? Do we still remain children of God? God showed His anger against His people when they did wrong, but does that anger apply to me too if I do

wrong? Or did God only deal with the Jews, being partial and hating His own people, with different standards of love for me?

Is God's wrath directed at me too, or not? It seems God's wrath is necessary. Is it possible that God could abhor His inheritance, that is, me, since I am part of that inheritance? Is that a serious situation or not? It is, in fact, very serious. We tend to ignore what is written. These days, discernment seems to be lacking in this area. We sing, we pray, we have plenty of religiosity, but when it comes to discernment, how do we relate to the nations? God commanded in the Old Testament that we not mix with the nations. Is this command still valid today, or does it only apply to the old folks, that they shouldn't mix with the nations? What should our children do? Mix or not? Do children have discernment at school? From a young age, at 7, 8, 11 or 12, what are they learning, what are they soaking up? Isn't a child like a sponge, filling his mind with everything he hears?

If a child is taught that the Earth is flat, that is what he will believe. If he is told it is round, that is what he will know. In Galileo Galilei's day, what did people believe about the Earth? Before him, what did they know about its shape? Their knowledge rested on what they were taught. To change that knowledge, someone had to discover and bring new teaching. Until then, people learned what was taught in the schools. If you learn mathematics, you will know mathematics, won't you? If you learn Romanian, you will know Romanian. But if you learn French, will you know German? Obviously not. And so it came about that they mixed with the nations.

There are many situations in which we can choose to ignore what is written. Yes, very many. In religious practices and rituals we often add extra rules to what the Lord originally said. We fret that certain things must be done in the evening, or in the morning, or at midday; that we must use one cup or two; that the bread must be unleavened or leavened; that we must use wine or grape juice, even though these details are not mentioned in the Scriptures.

These were added by people who thought it better to make themselves equal with God and say what God did not say, to declare what God never said. It matters that we do not go beyond what is written and that we learn to respect these teachings. Let us strive to live as the Lord Jesus lived, holding strictly to what is written. When we face teachings that Scripture does not support, we must ask ourselves whether to accept them or not. God keep us from stepping into territory where nothing is written. Let us strive to stay on the path the Lord Jesus walked and to have in us the mind that was also in the Lord Jesus. Amen.

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