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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Romans 14:1-15:13
Title of sermon: **How to Please God When We Disagree**
Series: Don't Settle for Normal - #8

Romans 14:1-15:13 - NIV:

14 Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. **2** One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. **3** The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. **4** Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. **5** One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. **6** Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. **7** For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. **8** If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. **9** For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

10 You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. **11** It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.'" **12** So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. **13** Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. **14** I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. **15** If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. **16** Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. **17** For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, **18** because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. **19** Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. **20** Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. **21** It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall. **22** So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. **23** But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

15 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. **2** Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. **3** For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." **4** For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. **5** May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, **6** so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. **7** Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. **8** For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed **9** and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name." **10** Again, it says, "Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people." **11** And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him." **12** And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope." **13** May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

You know, as I was thinking about this whole last three years that we've lived with COVID -- so, I was just listening to this passage being read, and thinking -- you know, God, your timing and your foresight is kind of amazing. So I put this series together back in March and April. You realize what had not happened? All the things that had not happened? I mean, we were just breaking out, and -- we thought, you know, four weeks. I did a four-week series called "Detour" -- I thought the detour was going to be four weeks. And it kind of kept unfolding. And so, I want you to hear this message tonight, in particular, not as me trying to drive some agenda, but -- God laid this whole series -- and in fact, this in particular text, back in April -- March and April -- well before any of the issues that we are

experiencing in relation to race. At the heart of this is a racial tension -- it's a theological tension, but it's also a racial tension. And what it deals with is an issue that we all today have probably felt -- at least, in our lifetime maybe as intensely as anything we've experienced prior to -- or, except for those who have lived long enough to be alive during the 60s, and some of the crazy stuff that was happening back then. I was alive during the 60s, but I was at a point in my life where my mom didn't come home and tell me about, you know, the things happening. And so, today we live with a lot of tension. And that tension's not just out there -- that tension's in the body of Christ. And that tension begins to kind of fester, and people are exhausted with it. And I mean, I cannot tell you how many times in a given week somebody tells me, "I just want to get off of this thing. I want to just get out of this thing." And I say to each of those, "Hallelujah! I'm with you!"

But the tension doesn't just remain in theoretical discussions. The tension gets down to -- "If you don't believe the way I believe, I'm not going to attend church. If you don't act the way I'm gonna act, you're not gonna come over to the house and see the grandkids. If you don't..." I told somebody the other day, I've been a pastor for 34 years, and I've never received as many ultimatums as I have in the last four, five months. And because we live in a culture right now where the tension is as thick as you can imagine. And it's hard -- it's hard to live there. It's hard to live and discuss night after night the riots. And the debate over whether or not we even call them a riot. I don't know what the official definition of a riot is, but when there's, you know, \$47 million worth of damage that is being done and businesses closing -- I really don't care what you call it. It's a disaster! And it's just hard. You get to the point where you're just like, "God, what do you wanna do?" Leadership is sometimes disappointing, and maybe even you've been disappointed in me. And for that, we come to this text. And I think it is one of the most helpful texts. Challenging? I will tell you up front, I think this text is marvelously challenging to answer the question, how do we please God when in the body of Christ -- that's where we're gonna keep it. We're not gonna step outside of the body of Christ. There's some application, I think, here, but let's just leave it within the body of Christ, within your family -- how do we honor God when we disagree? Now, that sentence is used very purposely, because I think I will answer it very differently, as, how do we get along when we disagree? That's not the question. The question is, how do I honor God when there's tension in the body of Christ?

What do we do when we disagree? I'm glad that Paul's been here before. I'm glad that the Bible's been here before. Because -- when I read this text, I think, "Wow, we're not in new territory! This is similar grounds! God, you've been here with your people." And if you've ever read the book of Acts, they were there. The first council was about what? Tension. Tension within the church. And it was huge, and it was splitting the church in two. And they sent the delegates off to the first council. It's listed there in Acts chapter 15. And so, to me -- I don't know, maybe it's misery loves company, but I find this terribly encouraging. It's like, God, this is not new grounds for you -- we've been here before, and therefore, you know how to get the church through this. Because -- I don't know if you noticed, but the church survived the first council and the second council, and this debate, and other tensions. And sometimes people have actually told me, "Do you think the church is going to make it through this?" Well, of course it is. You may not make it. Not thinking the way you're thinking. But the church is gonna make it! Why do I know that? Because, it's been here. And so, he gives us some helpful, and albeit, I think terribly applicational points -- how do we honor God when we face these moments of intense debate and tension?

First of all, He tells us. My friend, this is going to be humbling for you. I think it is -- it's gonna be for me. You don't have what it takes to pass judgment. You don't have what it takes to put yourself in the position where you look down upon another person and make a judgment of their life and their relationship with God. You don't have what it takes! What do I mean by that? Number one -- in

verse 10, He tells you -- "You don't have the authority. It's not your authority. You haven't been given that position, and by the way, God's not gonna give it up!" If you look at verse 10, notice what he says. "You then, why do you judge your brother? Why do you look down on your brother? Because we're all going to stand before God's judgment seat." What's the implication? God is the One Who is going to judge, not you. You're talking about a peer-to-peer relationship. Why on earth do you take the position of God with your brother? God never gave that up! He just hasn't. And so, the idea that I'm going to sit in judgment of another person of what they do and how they live their life, and the various things. Passing judgment is the act of being superior, and Paul says in this text, there's only one person, if you will -- God. God's the only one who is superior. We're given authority to do what? To love. We're given authority to live in harmony -- 12:16. We're given authority to welcome -- 15:7, 14:1. But never have I been given authority. I've been given authority to make judgments -- I'm never given the authority to judge a person's relationship with God, whether or not God accepts them, whether or not God is pleased with them. That's not my position. And my friend, it's not yours. When we come into the issue of disagreement, do I come into that place believing somehow that I must render a judgment as to the rightness or the wrongness of that person's behavior? God says, "Huh uh. That's mine."

Not only have I not been given authority, but quite candidly, I don't have the insight. What do I mean by that? And -- nor do you. The scripture says that it has the capacity to judge the thoughts and the intentions of the heart. I don't. A person might be going and helping a local neighbor, a neighbor who is a senior, and that person may have the most genuine heart in the world. They're there to help them. They love them. Or -- they may be one of the most evil individuals in the world, because they realize that that senior citizen who lives next to them has no children and it is their goal to become the inheritance direction of that individual who is maybe going to die in the next two or three years. You say, "Pastor, would somebody do this?" Well yeah, come on over to my office and I'll give you the names. Because an aunt did step in. The reality is, I don't know the thoughts and the intentions of a heart. I don't know a person's motives. That's the reason why I don't have the capacity to render a judgment as to the rightness or the wrongness of why a person does what they're doing.

What was happening in this culture? Well, it was a mixture of spirituality, it was a mixture of religion, it was a mixture of culture, it's a mixture of race. There's two things that Paul lists. Number one is -- some people were eating meat. What meat? The meat bought down at the temple. That's the only place predominantly you bought meat unless you raised it yourself. If you lived in the city, you didn't go to a shopping center, you didn't go to a market. You went down to the temple, where people go and sacrifice their animals in worship to God or maybe in worship to a foreign god. So, you would go, and on the front side of the temple is where you went in to worship. On the back side of the temple is where you went to buy your meat. And there were some individuals, predominantly Jewish people, but not exclusively, that were looking at that and saying, "How on earth can you ever buy meat that has been sacrificed to a false god?" And Paul's point was, "I don't care who the cow's been sacrificed to. The fact is, a T-bone is a T-bone. I like it." But there were some individuals, it's like, "There's no way." They could not get it out of their mind. Why? Well, it was because they were raised that way, because they'd been taught by their family that it was forbidden to buy this kind of meat. And they wanted to honor God. And it was a debate. Oh, and it was splitting the church. And it was following along the lines, as you could tell by Chapter 15, it was kind of falling along the lines of racial aspects, Jews and the Gentiles.

And then there was another issue -- it's what you do on the sabbath. There were some who said the sabbath is sacred. You limit the number of steps; you don't go to work. And they kind of, if you will,

believed in the spiritual blue laws. And for those of you who are older, you know what I'm talking about. For those of you who are younger, go Google it. But there were individuals who said, "You know, the sabbath is sacred, man. We've got to protect that." And then there were others, it's like, "Are you kidding me? We have been liberated! Every day I live for Christ." And there were people who were looking down on another person saying, "I'll tell you what, man -- God's gonna judge you. He's not gonna accept you, because you are buying meat at the local temple that has been sacrificed to idol worship. And you're not taking the sabbath seriously, and there's no way you could be a serious Christian." They were judging their what? Their motives and their hearts, and yes, their behavior. And the fact is -- Paul said, "I do not even judge myself." In II Corinthians, Paul says, "I don't even judge myself." In other words, "I have no idea about my motives. I don't ultimately know my motives myself. How could I ever judge another person when I can't even determine my own motives? Only God knows my motives." Why can I not pass judgment on another person, judge the rightness or the wrongness or the acceptance of God based upon their behavior? Because God hasn't given me that insight, and thirdly, it's because my life simply is not pure enough. Nor is yours. The point of the text is this -- for some of you, you're strong in some areas and maybe weak in another area, and that weakness and strength is not necessarily right or wrong, it's -- you have freedom in this area, but then in other areas, you may not have freedom. And the fact is, it's not about right or wrong, it's about freedom to do something and not freedom, it's about a restriction in your heart. But here's the point -- the point is, it changes, because none of us are perfect.

It's a little bit of what Jesus said to all of those who were gathered around a woman who had been making her living through prostitution, and Jesus -- says He was looking at a bunch of people who were condemning her and sending her to Hell with their words, said those convicting words -- "How about the guy who is sinless? Why don't you lead us off and throw the first rock. If we could find the one person in this whole group who has never sinned, step up to the plate." And the scripture says, "As Jesus leaned over and he was drawing there in the dirt, they all walked away," and I am convinced their heads were low. That's why you don't condemn another person. That's why you don't stand in the place of judgment when there's a disagreement saying that somehow I am right and you are wrong. In other words, Paul says when it comes to disagreements, you might want to live with a high level of humility.

Number two -- you don't have the right to demand that other people live the way you do. You have the right to say that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation. Why? Because the scripture says that. You have the right -- absolutely -- to say that all people are made in the image of God and therefore have value. Absolutely you have that right. Because the scripture is clear. You absolutely have the right to say that you will never look into the eyes of anyone that does not matter to God, because the scripture says that God loved the world, and for the world's sake He sent Jesus Christ. But you do not have the right to demand that people have the same convictions as you on these what we might call "disputable areas," or areas where the scripture is not as clear. I say that; however, you realize the scripture is pretty clear. Even Peter's dream that opened the day to dietary freedom. So, in a sense you could argue, even in this sense it wasn't really disputable. The scripture was pretty clear. And Paul says this -- "You don't have the right to demand that everyone be where you are in your relationship with God." I'm free, but I'm never free to put my freedom and my desires over the benefit of another person.

I think it's absolutely clear from scripture that God knits people together in the womb. I think it is absolutely clear from scripture that at conception there is a life which God is creating, and in fact, that God knew before that person lived one minute of life, anointing their days and identifying their personhood. But there's a lot of ways to be pro-life. I was talking with one dear brother, and he

made the observation, he goes, "Sometimes I think people are pro-birth, but they're not pro-life." I think it's a good statement. There's a lot of ways to be pro-life, but it doesn't mean that if I go out and march against a clinic that does abortions, that if you don't come, you're not pro-life. The scripture is pretty clear -- life begins at conception as God knits that child in the mother's womb. What the scripture doesn't tell you is how you have to live out that pro-life. And for me to judge you - - you may feel called of God to go and open a home and let a ton of unwed moms come and give birth to the child and connect the child, and maybe even help that mom give that child up for adoption. Or to get that mom settled into work. You may labor with all -- but that doesn't mean that everyone has to do that. You see, there's a lot of ways to be pro-life. What the scripture is clear about -- life begins at conception. What the scripture is not clear about is how you live that out. And I don't have any right to demand that you play the game the way I play it.

Let's get to something a little more controversial. Mask. I know. I mean, why pass this one up. Right? Is it not a moderate tension? Hello? [Audience member: "Yes."] Thank you. ["You're welcome."] I'll pay you later. A person may wear that mask because they are convinced in their heart. They've read, they've done the research. And they are convinced that -- "You know what? I'm gonna err on the side of caution, and I'm gonna wear that." They're not a sheep. They're not cowards. They're not filled with fear. They've just read certain data, and they've looked at certain things, and they've decided, "You know what? I'm gonna wear this mask." There are others who have COPD, they have other factors, they have migraines that they get when they begin to breathe their own air and they can't get external air, and they're gonna lose their job because they get severe migraines -- and so, they don't wear the mask. Here's the reality, my friend. You go to church and you see that person, you have no idea of their story, do you? Can I speak so boldly? Well then, how dare you judge them? Because you don't. You don't know the whole story, you don't know their conversations with the medical doctors. You don't -- I don't know. Yes, I want to be legal. Yes, I want to honor those who are above me. And yet, we're in this place where there's great tension. What do I do with it? What I don't have the right to do is to demand that you live the way I live. When I move into that place, I move into the place of the superior judge of God, and I can't go there. Some people think that the mask is nothing but a tyrannical experiment of people who are malicious and hate the church. And they hate Ace Hardware, too. Others think that the mask can save us. I'll be honest with you -- I've read a lot, and I'm simply not smart enough to tell you where it's gonna land. The question is -- God, if I'm going to honor you, how do I relate to this world that is so filled with tension?

When it comes to the Bible, race is pretty clear. All people matter to God. All people. When it comes to the Bible, you'd have to be flat-out blind to believe in racism. What is racism? It's the belief that a race or a person is superior by the nature of their genes, their blood line. It is to believe that one race or one group of people is superior and another is inferior at some fundamental level. I think that's as clear as the Bible could ever get. That God has created all people, and He loves them. Oh, but now comes a real, real issue -- doesn't it? Yeah, I'm concerned about slavery. I'm concerned about individuals who work for organizations who use slave labor to make tennis shoes and make millions of dollars. I'm really concerned about slavery. I am. I'm concerned about organizations that exploit slavery through women. I'm concerned about countries that exploit slavery and are destroying certain sects of Muslims. And you say, "Well, Pastor, you're concerned about Muslims?" Yes, because they're made in the image of God. Does that mean I'm going to join and be a card-carrying member of BLM? Probably not. Is the Bible clear on race? I think it's very clear. Is the Bible clear on how you live that out? No. And that's where we need grace with each other.

Some of you are going to watch the NFL this year -- if they play -- and, you'll be delighted. My stomach is so sick I don't think I'll ever watch the NFL or the NBA again. If I repent, I'll tell you. Am I asking you to do that? No. I've got sons who probably want to admit me to a local mental hospital. My friends, the Bible's really clear about race. Racism is anti-God. But how you play that out, be careful. Because you and I have no right to demand that people live and play that out the way I do. Paul says, "My friends, you're free to eat. You do not have the right to demand that everyone is free to eat. Some of you are restricted in your diet and you can't go to the temple. If you can't overcome it," Paul says, "God accepts you. He honors you. You just don't have the right to demand that the body of Christ takes that position." Rather, what do we do? Take every opportunity you can to build up the body, especially those you disagree with. That's what he tells us. He tells us that in verse 19. He says, "Let us, therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." This is where it gets challenging, I think. In other words, don't walk away from somebody who you disagree with or disagrees with you, but it's -- here's your assignment -- "Make every effort to be at peace with them and to make them stronger." That doesn't mean to agree with you. That says to build them up. And building them up, in this context, is not to get them to agree with your position. It's to strengthen them. It's to love them. It's to be a part of doing whatever you can to help them honor God.

How do we do that? It's a hint. Chapter 14, verse one says, "Accept those whose faith is weak without passing judgment." Chapter 15, verse seven, says it in a different way, but it's really the same. "Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you." What's the best way that you can edify a person? It's put out your arms to them and accept them. Let them know that there are things that matter to me more than that we agree on masks or that we agree on the conspiracy issues of the day, or that we agree on our governor, or that we agree on all of the things that are happening in Portland. There's things that matter more to me, and number one, it's you! You matter to me! And he says, "I want you to throw out your arms, and I want you to accept people just the way Christ accepted you." How did He accept us? "When we were not worthy, He loved us. When we were sinners, He embraced us. When we were weak, He was patient with us. When He ran from Him, He sought us, and when we turned, He threw a party."

Ah, my friends. Amy Adams -- she's an actress, not a big actress, but she's an actress. And one day she got on an airplane -- this story happened a few years ago -- and she got on an airplane, and there was a -- she was in first class, and she was getting ready to sit down, and she looked back in coach and there was military personnel sitting there. And Amy thought to herself, "I go first class all the time. I bet that guy never goes first class." So she calls the steward over, and she goes, "Would you do me a favor? Would you switch our seats?" Steward says, "Why?" "Because I want him to feel honor." So she made the switch. And Amy went to the back, and a soldier came up and sat in first class. She wasn't going to say a word. She didn't say a word. But when she got off the plane, somebody was already tweeting the story of what Amy did -- I think the steward had loose lips. When asked, "Why did you do it? Did you do it for notoriety?" She goes, "No. I did it because I wanted him to feel honor. I did it because I wanted him to feel special. I did it because I wanted to thank him." Then she walked away. My friends, if Amy Adams can do that on a flight from Detroit to LA, think what can happen in the body of Christ if you'll begin to look around and say -- "How can I honor people?" And by the way, don't choose people who think like you. Find the one person in the church with whom you are most diametrically opposed, and ask yourself the question, "How can I bless them?" Think of the person who, every time they post on Facebook, you wanna go throw up. That's the person. Think about the person who just espouses a view different than you, rather than draw the line and say, "I'm no longer going to that church." Have the courage to say, "You matter more to me than whether or not we agree on [Portland Mayor] Wheeler." Take every opportunity

you can to build up the body, especially those whom you disagree with. Why? Because this is Paul's statement -- "Do not destroy the work of God over secondary matters. Don't." He's not talking about Christ as our Savior. He's talking about days that we worship. He's talking about meat that we eat.

If I haven't offended you enough, let me try a few more. When I grew up, we practiced Halloween - we did Halloween. And I never heard anything about Halloween and Satan. All I thought and heard when I heard Halloween was a lot of candy. And that was, like, Hallelujah! And my mom, she let us dress up, and -- I never was good at dressing up. I usually would go into my grandmother's closet and get stuff and put it on. Or my grandfather. That was dressing up. I went and got something that was ugly, or -- whoa. I just said my grandmother's stuff was ugly. It was ugly. I would go, and I would just put together garbage, and I never was a ghost, I didn't want to spend the money. But Halloween had no connection to Satan at all. When I became a pastor, I found out how unenlightened I was, and how horrible I was, and despicable that I would take my kids trick-or-treating. And that I should either decide whether I wanted to honor God or cave in to Satan. I was like, "Wow! All of that over Snickers?" I didn't get it! I still don't! Some of you are absolutely convinced there's an association of satanic witchcraft to Halloween. I'm with you! I honor that! The reality is, some of us are just -- well, it's about the candy. And so, we relabeled, and we called it a harvest party. I'm fine with that. But behind it sometimes is that spirit where, if you don't agree with a person that Halloween was formed in Hell, and if you have anything to do with it, you're not a believer, I'd say to you, do you have the purity and the insight and the position to make that judgment?

Homelessness. If you were here for the series, I've got a lot of views on homelessness. I think the vast majority of what our country has done in the area of benevolence towards homelessness has not decreased it, it's actually increased it. And I found out when I preached that series that not everyone in our church agreed with me. [Chuckles] Surprise! What do I do with that? I do, I have certain views of responsibility and human responsibility, and I'm terribly concerned that we are creating a culture that has absolute every passion to demand that everyone meets their needs with no personal responsibility on their own. But my friends, if I say that's the criteria whether or not you honor God, I don't have the right to make that judgment. Do not destroy the work of God over secondary matters. I could take you on a tour today of a camp -- well, it's no longer a camp. It's million-dollar homes. It's million-dollar homes because there was a tension within a group of churches. It was those who wanted to invest in kids and it was those who wanted to invest in maintenance of facilities. And oh, they fought. And the rhetoric was amazing! It was like, "If we aren't responsible for God's buildings and take care of them, there's not gonna be any camp!" And then there was those folks over here, it's like, "Man, I'll tell you what -- the camps in Africa don't have any buildings!" Yeah, you're right. Actually, you're not right. I've been there -- they do. And oh, there was such great debate. Churches got mad, and some of them left the association over maintenance of a camp. The work of God is no longer in existence at that camp. It got shut down. Fire Chief said, "You can't do it anymore. Your buildings are dilapidated." The work of God was destroyed because they didn't know how to handle disputable matters.

My friends, you and I don't have the right to pass judgment. But we do have the responsibility, like Christ, to open our arms and to welcome people the way Christ welcomed you. Warts and all. And if we do, what might happen? Well, there might be a gathering together of Guatemalan immigrants and white evangelicals that become partners. There might be an African-American church that partners with a Korean church. Of all things! And together they planted another church. There might be a Burmese group who comes together with Nigerians that historically had been at war.

There might be a six-day creationist who goes out for dinner with a day-age theorist. There might just be a work of God -- because you're willing to look at a person and say, "You matter more to me than the meat. You matter more to me than whether or not you worship the way I do on Friday. You matter more to me than that silly mask. And you matter way more to me than all of the things that we're fighting over. Because God made you, and Jesus Christ opened His arms for you, and I want to do the same." That's how you handle tension in the church.

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