

Marriage, Eunuchs and Refocusing Dominion

After the fall of humanity into sin and both before and after the coming of Christ, marriage has not always been the norm for God's people. The difficulty yet distinctive opportunities of single life – whether undertaken voluntarily or not – have proved to be of great benefit in the world and especially in advancing God's purposes. However, this has perhaps not been sufficiently appreciated by the people of God. The undercurrent is common that single people of marriageable age are deficient somehow, even socially suspect or odd, though the lives and actions of single persons parallel and have often transcended the contributions of married persons.

Along with reconsidering marriage and singleness after the fall, we will revisit the creation or cultural “mandate” as expressed in Genesis 1:26 and 28, namely, that humanity was to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue or exercise dominion over it. This was spoken to man *and* woman, implying marriage as the norm for fulfilling God's word. Where did this leave single persons? We will explore marriage, singleness and God's first command, particularly in light of the entrance of sin and later, in light of the incarnation – the event which brought radical changes to all three categories.

After seven times judging his creation work as “good”, God said that it was not good that man – Adam – should be alone, and so God created Eve as a helper corresponding to him – flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.¹ God is not a solitary person but a community of three distinct persons, equal in substance and every other way but nevertheless distinct persons. Thus it was fitting that Adam, made in God's image, should mirror his Creator in this respect as well. Man and woman were created equally in the image of God, and as two distinct persons they had the privilege of a sinless relationship with one another and supremely with God himself. To be fruitful and multiply in such a state would expand the display of God's glory in earth's most exalted creatures. Their righteous and holy condition meant that the command to rule would be exercised out of love for God, in accordance with his will and for his glory.

God limited the exercise of human dominion to the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and the creatures which move upon the earth. Dominion over other human beings was not included. In his first recorded exercise of dominion Adam named the animals. As physical multiplication was necessary for the expansion of dominion and is only possible by procreation, marriage was the God-ordained and necessary means for accomplishing this directive. It was not until after the fall of our first parents into sin that the first child was born and all subsequent births. Sin brought enmity between husband and wife and between both of them and God. In time people were born apart from monogamous marriage as Cain's descendants show.² Over the succeeding centuries all humanity became so corrupted by sin that before

¹ Genesis 1 & 2.

² Genesis 4:17-24.

the flood we read of only one man who *found grace in the eyes of the Lord*.³ Men and women, with or without marriage, failed to be godly and the earth was filled with violence by the misdirected and malevolent exercise of dominion.

It is significant that the command regarding dominion was not repeated to Noah after the flood when God reiterated the creation mandate.⁴ Indeed, how could men and women, enslaved by sin and Satan, rightly exercise dominion? Where and when would proper dominion be exercised? Would marriage help?

After the flood and in recognition of the unchanged evil human heart, God instituted capital punishment, anticipating on-going distorted dominion in man-against-man violence.⁵ The sad reality is that throughout much of the world's history dominion has meant the mistreat of women by polygamy among other means, abuse of children and the enslaving and slaughtering of millions of human beings. This is regardless of whatever beneficial uses humanity made over the centuries in discovering their own gifts and the earth's resources and harnessing them into what we call culture in its manifold expressions.

The history of mankind also makes clear that hope for humanity did and does not reside with humanity despite common secular assumptions. Rather from the written revelation of our Creator we know that hope exists only by God's gracious promise that the earth is to continue, marriages be contracted, children born until all those God has eternally ordained for himself are saved. In this way God will fulfill his supreme purpose of exalting his Son in the person and work of Jesus Christ. For it is solely because of Jesus' life, death and resurrection that humanity has meaning and hope. God's creation mandate will be entirely fulfilled in this one man, in his perfect dominion over himself and over all his work has earned, including a numberless progeny.

DOMINION RECONSIDERED

We will consider the contributions of single persons to the merciful purposes of God, but we should also observe that the cultural or creation mandate has been irrevocably altered with the coming of Christ. This is true both in connection with the physical multiplication of humanity and where true dominion now lies.

Godly dominion starts with self-control, dominion over one's own mind, heart, soul and will, those faculties that God created to govern our words and actions. The book of Proverbs states *Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city*.⁶ But how does one consistently rule his own spirit? In regard to persons who are without the regenerating work of God's

³ Genesis 6:8.

⁴ Genesis 9:1.

⁵ Genesis 6:5, 11-12; 9:21.

⁶ 16:32.

Spirit, Scripture teaches that God's restraining goodness and power, exercised by his providential actions and by that selfsame divine Spirit, prevent people from being as evil and violent as they otherwise would be. In regard to the regenerate, God governs them more directly by his Spirit, word, and his providence. In the degree to which the Holy Spirit and God's word take hold of a regenerate person, their love for God and desire to obey him result not only in a great degree of self-control, but also in the flowering of an increasing deadness to the world's allures. They think and live in ways that reveal dominion over their other enemies, indwelling sin, Satan and the poisonous and destructive fruit these enemies desire to produce. Believers give evidence of God's gracious dominion over their persons, so that in all their capacities and relationships they may exercise their gifts to advance the kingdom of God on the earth. After this life God's dominion over them will be perfected to the everlasting praise of his Son.

THE SOLITARY

Well before the incarnation, we see shadows and types of change in the creation mandate. So that while the fall brought God's curse upon the earth, work, childbirth, child-rearing and arguably marriage itself,⁷ even before the coming of Christ, some persons in varying situations did not marry, or were expressly forbidden to marry, or their marriage was greatly troubled by the sins of a spouse, or it was interrupted and/or subordinated by God to his redemptive/historical purposes. Such persons demonstrate that though ordinarily it could still be said that *it is not good for man to live alone*,⁸ for them it was God's will that they should and did.

Such persons anticipate Christ's words in Matthew 19:12: *For there are eunuchs from their mothers' womb and there are eunuchs who are made eunuchs by men and there are eunuchs who make themselves eunuchs because of the kingdom of heaven.* These were eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake – for part or all of their lives. In these cases, the creation mandate, at least as to population expansion, was subordinated to something else, or we might more accurately say it was sublimated in order to illustrate and/or advance the history of redemption. In this way – as well as in perhaps others - they were types of the coming Redeemer.

CONFESSIOAL STATEMENTS

Regarding the purpose of marriage the Savoy Declaration xxv.2 reads: *Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the church with a holy seed; and for preventing of uncleanness.*

⁷ Consider the implications of the almost identical language that appears in Genesis 3:16 and 4:7. As to marriage, it casts an ominous shadow, as is chronicled in part below.

⁸ Genesis 2:18.

We observe that there is no mention of dominion in this paragraph or in the whole of *Savoy Declaration* chapter XXV, probably because it was not deemed something so integrally tied to marriage that it should be included there. We also note that this chapter of the *Savoy* is essentially the same as the *Westminster Confession*. In addition, *Westminster Larger Catechism* #138, on the duties of the Seventh Commandment, has the words *marriage by those who have not the gift of continency*, which may suggest that single life has a special place when it is devoted to God and to Christ, though it will also have its special temptations. Regarding what is forbidden in the 7th commandment, the answer to WLC#139 adds: *undue delay of marriage*. This suggests that marriage is the norm.

Let us consider examples of marriages in Scripture prior to the incarnation that helped or hindered the advancement of redemption history or the fulfillment God's promises. Conflicts within and about marriage demonstrate how not marriage per se nor the individuals themselves but divine grace preserved God's promise over the centuries to bring a creation-renewing, all-conquering Savior. Neither the advancement of "culture" nor fecundity for its own sake was ever the goal but after the fall, blessing came when aligned with God's promises. We may also note where we see "eunuchs" (single persons) for the sake of advancing the kingdom of heaven - the chief post-fall, promise-fulfilling exercise of dominion.

EXAMPLES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

-After receiving God's seven-fold promise of blessing, because of Sarah's beauty Abraham twice urged his wife to lie about his being her husband in order to protect himself against fears for his life.⁹ In this way he put the entire promise of redemption at risk, for if Sarah did not have his child or became pregnant by someone else, God's promise would be void.

-Barren Sarah suggested Abraham take her Egyptian slave Hagar as wife to produce a child. The complications and difficulties from the time of Hagar's pregnancy to the present day, because of Abraham's compliance with Sarah's suggestion, are staggering and all too tragically evident.¹⁰

-After Sarah's death, Abraham married again and fathered many sons, whose descendants later were hostile to the progeny of Isaac. Abraham sent them all away from Isaac, the child of promise. Although born to the patriarch they were outside the promise, merely more bodies and souls upon the earth. Abraham also gave gifts to the sons of his *concubines*, evidence of another departure from God's marital standards and misuse of dominion.¹¹

⁹ Genesis 12:12.

¹⁰ We think of the historic hostility between Jews and Ishmael's descendants, or from among those descendants, the monstrous diabolic origin, spread, power and blood-soaked tyranny of Islam.

¹¹ Genesis 25:4.

-Rebecca was a longed for and wonderful comfort to Isaac when their marriage began, and yet his persistence in honoring his older and rebellious son rather than the prophetic word of God to Rebecca provided the backdrop for her and Jacob's deception of Isaac in order for the son of promise to obtain the patriarchal blessing. Esau had despised and sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of soup,¹² but his resulting murderous hatred of Jacob for stealing the blessing resulted in a permanent separation in the family. Jacob fled for his life and never saw his mother again.

-Jacob's marital life was little short of chaos, and it was all unnecessary had he been satisfied with Leah, his first wife and the mother of both Levi and Judah – principal leaders in the history of God's OT people after the death of Joseph. Was there sanctifying grace in all this? Yes, but it was despite the marital sins involved. Amid all his enormous family, substantial property but many hardships, Jacob seemed often alone and was shut up to God as his portion. Echoing the Psalmist, it is a lesson every saint should learn.¹³

-After Judah's wife died, his former daughter-in-law, Tamar, posed as a prostitute to cause him to fulfill his breeched promise of giving her his youngest son as a husband. Tamar became pregnant by Judah and gave birth to twins,¹⁴ one of whom would be in the line of Christ. In spite of sinful humanity, God's purposes for a Redeemer proceeded.

-Zipporah, a daughter of Jethro¹⁵, priest of Midian, became Moses' wife. She strenuously objected to circumcising their son when the family were en route for Moses to present God's demands to Pharaoh. She did so only to save Moses' life because God had threatened to kill him.¹⁶ Moses sent her with his two sons back to her father's house, it is not clear why. Moses' work to deliver Israel was without his wife and family. Zipporah and the sons returned with her father after the exodus and met Moses at Sinai.¹⁷ Did God want Moses alone, apart from an unbelieving or weak wife, and therefore to be more devoted to the Lord himself when he used him to deliver his people or was Moses just another poor husband?

-Later, God struck Moses' sister Miriam with leprosy for a time when she and Aaron complained about Moses' Cushite wife and, more poignantly, because he was the principal vehicle for God's word to the people.¹⁸ Perhaps Zipporah had died or this was an additional wife. It isn't clear, but she was a source of

¹² Hebrews 12:16.

¹³ *Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.* Psalm 73:25-26.

¹⁴ The story is in Genesis 38.

¹⁵ Exodus 18:1ff.

¹⁶ Exodus 4:24-26.

¹⁷ Exodus 18:1-9.

¹⁸ Numbers 12:10.

envy and contention among the three siblings. Marital issues represented just one more obstacle for Moses to overcome in his massive labors to fulfill God's promises to his rebellious people.

-The Lord stirred Samson to seek a wife from the Philistines¹⁹ when he began his twenty years of judging Israel. Throughout his life Samson vainly sought love – or more probably, to be loved. He was unique among the judges in that no Israelite gave him the least support; rather they opposed or ignored him and his labors until his death when his mangled remains were gathered and buried with his family.²⁰ Samson served alone; yes, he sinned as a single man, but nevertheless he was God's servant and a man who bore witness to his calling and his faith.²¹ In his solitary death he is a type of Christ, surrendering his life to crush the enslaving enemies of his ungrateful people.

-One need only mention David and Solomon to evoke great dismay on the subject of marriage and home life. David's first wife, Michal was Saul's daughter. He gave her to another man after driving David out of Jerusalem. After Saul's death, David – now with two other wives - demanded Michal's return from Abner. David appears to have considered Michal a spoil of war.²² After consolidating his reign in Hebron, we read of sons born to David's now six wives.²³ The chief disaster of his life and reign came from his seduction of the wife of a faithful, foreign-born soldier whom David had put to death to cover his adultery. In one way or another the rest of David's life was made miserable because of the chastisements God brought upon him because of these horrific sins. The reality of sin's wretchedness, despite all God's creation ordinances and gifts, is written with indelible ink in the life of this *man after God's own heart*.²⁴

-Solomon took Pharaoh's daughter to be his first wife. He built her a separate house, not deeming it fit that she live in David's house or where the ark had been.²⁵ This ominously signaled the beginning of what happened in his later years when Solomon seemingly lost all the wisdom he was given in his youth, and in the depths of his sexual sin, lost the fear of the Lord as well by accommodating the multiple idolatries of his hundreds of wives and concubines. As with his father, God's judgment²⁶ brought severe and permanent consequences on Solomon's household and the nation of Israel.

¹⁹ Judges 14:4.

²⁰ Judges 16:31.

²¹ Hebrews 11:32.

²² 2 Samuel 3:13-16.

²³ 2 Samuel 3:2-5.

²⁴ 1 Samuel 13:14.

²⁵ 1 Kings 3:1; 2 Chronicles 8:11.

²⁶ Regarding Solomon's person, were they chastisements or judgments? Are we confident that Solomon was converted?

-King Ahab took Jezebel as his wife, the daughter of a Sidonian king. Her retinue included prophets of Baal, so that a temple was built to worship this non-existent god. Through marriage Ahab imported an even greater degree of idolatry into the northern kingdom.

These examples suffice to show that the entrance of sin into the hearts of men and women distorted at times beyond recognition the benefits God intended by marriage: holy companionship and mutual encouragement between potential or actual fellow heirs of the grace of life.²⁷

We can hope that there were many faithful marriages in Israel, and to be sure none of the examples listed above alters the nature of marriage as God in his goodness and wisdom ordained it. Isaac, Joseph, Joshua, Samuel, Jehoida and his wife Josheaba,²⁸ Isaiah and Ezekiel appear to have been monogamous and faithful in their marriages. All the same, the OT record demonstrates how difficult it was for even godly men to conform to God's standards. With the entrance of sin, the divine solution for the "not good" solitary condition of Adam was by no means always remedied by marriage.

"EUNUCHS"

In light of the many Old Testament texts that reveal the marital sins of saints, one might well ask, "Would many of them have been better off single?" This question anticipates the disciples' comment: *If so it is with husband and his wife, then perhaps it is better not to marry.*²⁹ Our Lord had just stated the only grounds for divorce. It no doubt seemed to the disciples so far from the reality of the marriages and behavior of contemporary Judaism that they saw the picture regarding marriage as hopeless. Our Lord responded to them as cited above regarding the three classes of eunuchs. Let us consider them.

1) *Born eunuchs.* We are perhaps not very familiar with the category of *intersex* persons. They are *people born with any of several variations in sex characteristics, including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, or genitals that, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "do not fit the typical definitions for male or female bodies".* Such variations may involve genital ambiguity, and combinations of chromosomal genotype and sexual phenotype other than XY-male and XX-female. *Intersex people were previously referred to as hermaphrodites...*³⁰ This birth-originated condition is not to be confused with transgender persons who are the result of actions taken by or for those who were born clearly male or female. Very often intersex persons are not able to reproduce, depending on the severity of their deformity. Such persons for this reason are *born eunuchs*. They often hide their condition and thus their suffering is not known. Like everyone else, they are of one blood with all humanity, need the gospel and should be welcomed into our lives and churches whenever they become known to us.

²⁷ 1 Peter 3:7.

²⁸ 2 Kings 11:2-4.

²⁹ Matthew 19:10.

³⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intersex>

2) *Man-made eunuchs*. Castration is the means of producing this category. It is not at all certain that the four Hebrew youths exiled to Babylon and put through its rigorous three-year seminary were in fact made physical eunuchs, though perhaps they may have been. The Hebrew term sometimes translated “eunuch” in other texts clearly describes a kind of official in a royal court.³¹ But ancient literature is replete with the reality of such men, their roles and activities.

3) *Eunuchs so made for the kingdom of heaven*. The third category is sometimes illustrated by the church father Origen who is reported to have castrated himself to insure his chastity. Whether or not this in fact happened, what is certain is that performing the physical act was no more Jesus’ intention than literally plucking out an eye or cutting off a foot or hand - actions which he urged to avoid sinning.³² Our Lord identified the seat of sin in the heart, not in the body.³³ Rather he was implying that this third category of eunuch benefits the kingdom of heaven by their labor, zeal and devotion to God and to his cause, but they do not marry or are widowed or may be married to one less godly than they or to an unbeliever but still serve the Lord as best they can. And though the full flowering of this reality awaited the incarnation and subsequent history of the church, nevertheless precursors existed during Old Testament times.

“EUNUCHS” IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

--At arguably his worst moment following the devastating loss of children, property and health, when the need of his helpmeet could have offered sympathy, consolation and love, Job’s wife urged him to curse God and die. In great self-restraint and kindness, Job gently rebuked her for speaking like foolish women. He defended his God whose hand, Job said, brings both good and evil.³⁴ Until his restoration at the close of the book, Job suffered, endured, listened and responded *alone*. His friends became his enemies. His children were dead. His wife seemed to have abandoned both him and their God. Nevertheless, in the majority of what he spoke of and to his God, Job retained his faith in his Maker, despite his inability to know or understand why all this had come upon him.

-After his mother died, Joseph’s exemplary early life was without the love of all but his father, and even Jacob rebuked him when he heard of his second dream.³⁵ Joseph’s character and integrity were without blame through thirty years as a single man. He remained devoted to his God in the face of repeated temptation and mistreatment. God used him not only to bring relief from starvation to his entire family but to a famine-struck world.³⁶ More importantly, through Joseph came conviction of sin and repentance to

³¹ See E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, Eerdmans, 1949, page 39. Also “eunuch” in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, Moody Press, 1980, page 635.

³² Mark 9:43-48.

³³ Matthew 12:24-25; 15:19.

³⁴ Job 2:9-10.

³⁵ Genesis 37:10-11.

³⁶ Genesis 37:1-41:46.

his wicked and self-righteous brothers.³⁷ Joseph was a great type of the Son of Man who also had to suffer before he could reign.³⁸ *Before honor is humility.*³⁹

-Much of Moses' ministry would appear to have been carried out apart from help from his wife.⁴⁰

-The irony of Deborah's service to Israel is not only that she was the sole female called to be a judge, or that she did her work alone, though *a wife, mother and prophetess in Israel*,⁴¹ but that she, along with the Kennite woman Jael, were the singular voice and final hand of God, respectively, in the triumph over tyrannizing Sisera and his army of nine hundred iron chariots.⁴²

-It would appear that Elijah never married. After his earlier ministry which was largely on the run, he took Elisha as his disciple. The word of the Lord came repeatedly to Elijah in the northern kingdom during the reigns of wicked Ahab and his son. God provided for Elijah, was his portion and used him mightily. He was zealous for God and a man of prayer.⁴³ He became the model for John the Baptist's work.⁴⁴ His appearance with Jesus and Moses on the mount of transfiguration is a testimony to his status as the quintessential OT prophet.

-We do not read that Elisha had a wife. Called by God through Elijah, the younger man left all and followed his master. He did so faithfully and was granted the bitter-sweet privilege of viewing the glorious home-going of Elijah in a heaven-sent chariot and horses of fire.⁴⁵

-Elisha's comments to his servant Gehazi that close the sobering history of Naaman, the leprous Syrian general, give us his perspective on life in the dark times in which he lived. Elisha sent Gehazi out to tell Naaman how he could be cured. When cleansed, Naaman returned to reward Elisha but the prophet would take nothing. Covetous Gehazi felt the Syrian should pay! He ran after Naaman, lied to him, returned with what Naaman gave him, hid it and stood before Elisha. He lied in response to Elisha's query. After announcing that God had revealed to him all that Gehazi had done, the prophet said the following: *Was it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male servants and female servants? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your*

³⁷ The process extends from Genesis 42 to 50.

³⁸ Luke 24:26.

³⁹ Proverbs 15:33 & 18:12.

⁴⁰ See above on Moses' marriage(s).

⁴¹ Judges 4:4 & 5:7.

⁴² Judges 4 & 5.

⁴³ 1 Kings 18:36-37, 42-44; James 5:17.

⁴⁴ Malachi 4:5-6.

⁴⁵ 2 Kings 2:1-14.

*descendants forever.” So he went out from his presence a leper, like snow.*⁴⁶ To Elisha, as likely to Elijah before him, theirs was no time to marry, have children, accumulate property nor even to think in those terms.

Both these great prophets were examples of men wholly devoted to God and his specific ministry for them, which was without the ordinary comforts that marriage and family were intended to bring.

-There is one who could easily escape notice in such a list: a nameless little girl, taken captive from her home in Israel by Syrian raiders and given to Naaman’s wife. The only other thing we know about her is that, seemingly without rancor or bitterness for what had happened to her, she longed for her Syrian master to go to the prophet in Israel to be cured of his dread disease. This child evangelized her enemies without even giving out the savior’s name! If she had not spoken this good news, there would be no Naaman story. Did she reach adulthood? Did she marry? Have children? Escape her captors? None of these things was important to the Holy Spirit in giving us what we read. The details are sufficient to illustrate the point of what great usefulness may come to the advancing dominion of redemption by single individuals who are devoted to God’s service. *I ask thee for the daily strength, to none that ask denied, a mind to blend with outward life while keeping at thy side, content to fill a little space if thou be glorified.*⁴⁷

-God told Hosea to marry a prostitute and take her children as his own. He did so and yet she was unfaithful to him as well. All this was intended to picture Israel’s idolatry, though God would transform a remnant and at last make of it a faithful wife.⁴⁸ Thus God dramatically moved Hosea from being single to married to portray temporal realities in Israel – at that time and in the future.

-Jeremiah was explicitly told not to take a wife from among the degenerate people of his day nor to father children, for the people were doomed to destruction because of their wickedness, and their city would be destroyed by fire.⁴⁹

-Over ninety times God calls Ezekiel *son of man* as if never to let him forget that he was mere flesh and blood. His difficult ministry began with perhaps the most exalted visions of God granted to any one before the incarnation.⁵⁰ God spoke to Ezekiel on the very day when Nebuchadnezzar had laid siege to

⁴⁶ 2 Kings 5:26-27.

⁴⁷ Anna L. Waring from her hymn that begins “Father, I Know that All My Life.”

⁴⁸ See the entire book of Hosea. Though some would dispute that Gomer was a prostitute before Hosea married her, the text is explicit that she was. Translations faithful to the Hebrew and to the LXX and Vulgate of Hosea 1:2 do not add the word “have” before “children” but recognize them as belonging to Gomer before Hosea married her. Further, the children later fathered by Hosea were not illegitimate because he had married Gomer before their conception and birth.

⁴⁹ Jeremiah 16:2ff.

⁵⁰ Ezekiel 1-3.

Jerusalem. The news of what would transpire was terrible enough but then we read this: *The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, behold, I am about to take the delight of your eyes away from you at a stroke; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down. Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban and put your shoes on your feet; do not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men."* So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died. And on the next morning I did as I was commanded.⁵¹

Why this difficult word to the Lord's faithful prophet? There is no evidence of evil in him or his wife, no word of personal chastisement or judgment. God explained it to him: in this act, as had been true at other times in his life, the prophet was to be a sign, a portent of what would surely come upon Jerusalem and all its inhabitants.⁵² God often said to Ezekiel: *When these things come to pass, then they will know that I am the Lord.* Judgment reveals God, especially to those who do not want to hear from him. Ezekiel likely finished his days and his prophesy as a widower in double grief, for the loss of *the delight of his eyes* but also for those in Israel depicted by her sudden death.

-Perhaps they were married, but we do not read anything about Ezra or Nehemiah having wives or family. Their calling and work were after Judah's exile and during times of extraordinary stress and great difficulty. Both were faithful to God's call, including having to deal with wrongly contracted marriages by the residents of Judah and Jerusalem, which risked the future godliness and holy seed of the entire nation.⁵³ And if polluted, how could Messiah appear?

-We cannot omit Isaiah's powerful invitation to all - including eunuchs - to participate in the service of Israel's just and glorious God. *Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree."* ⁴*For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, ⁵I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off..."*⁵⁴ Perhaps this passage in particular was behind our Lord's words on this subject quoted above from Matthew 19.

What do these individuals have in common? Whether married or not, they prized the kingdom of God and obedience to his word above their personal interests, including wife and family. To that end they exercised self-control, dominion over natural desires. In the words of Hebrews 11 they *confessed they*

⁵¹ Ezekiel 24:15-18.

⁵² Ezekiel 24:19-27.

⁵³ Ezra 10 & Nehemiah 13:23-27.

⁵⁴ Isaiah 56:3-5.

*were strangers and pilgrims on the earth...seeking a city...a heavenly.*⁵⁵ This does not mean their singleness or single-mindedness was necessarily superior in God's eyes to other faithful married persons, but that in the absence of the companionship of a spouse, or married, in difficulty or grief, if in nothing else than their devotion to duty, they foreshadowed the life and work of the Lord Jesus.

FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus Christ never married; he carried out his public ministry without a place to lay his head.⁵⁶ However, in three different contexts in John's Gospel our Lord clearly stated that he was not alone. These passages tell us much about where the spiritual strength of Christ's human nature lay: in the ever-present sense that his Father was with him. Our Lord relied on the Father for what he taught, and to him he retreated for fellowship and communion in prayer no doubt whenever he could. In statements that clearly refer to his human nature, the Lord Jesus decried all self-sufficiency, stating that his enablement came from the Father and that the Father's presence was sufficient:

*-You⁵⁷ judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. But if indeed I do judge, my judgment is true because I am not alone but I and the Father, who sent me.*⁵⁸ Jesus defended his testimony regarding himself when he gave it as true because it was based on the Mosaic requirement of two witnesses – his own and that of the Father.

*-Jesus therefore said to them, "When you lift up the son of man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing from myself, but just as the Father taught me, I speak these things. And the one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone because I always do the things that please him."*⁵⁹ We have here the striking connection between the Father's presence with Jesus and the reason: Jesus pleased the Father at all times.

*-Behold, the hour is coming and has come that you [disciples] will be scattered, each to his own things and I will be left alone – though I am not alone because the Father is with me.*⁶⁰ Astonishing as it is, later, to obtain our salvation, Jesus was abandoned by the Father at precisely the moment when he pleased his Father most.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Verses 13-16.

⁵⁶ Luke 9:58.

⁵⁷ Jews.

⁵⁸ John 8:16-17.

⁵⁹ John 8:28-29.

⁶⁰ John 16:32.

⁶¹ Matthew 27:46 & Mark 15:34 quoting from Psalm 22:1.

The Christian is assured of the presence of Christ at all times.⁶² The confidence that Christ and the believer are a majority, or at least Christ's presence is that which is most to be cultivated, ought to gird and sustain every believer but perhaps especially *eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake*. God's presence was essential for Moses when because of their rebellion God threatened to abandon the Israelites.⁶³ It was the same for Joshua in the conquest of Canaan.⁶⁴ It was true for the rebuilders of Jerusalem after the exile.⁶⁵ Apart from Christ we can do nothing spiritually worth anything.⁶⁶ Doctrinally to know he is with us is a blessed thing; but to live aware of his presence, well, there is power, there is love that has taken hold from above enabling the believer to take hold from below; there is the ability to mortify sin by the Holy Spirit as we begin to see and treat sin and our other spiritual enemies as our holy God sees them. Married or single, widowed or unable to marry, with Christ the believer is never alone and possesses in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,⁶⁷ all the comfort of him who knows every human weakness⁶⁸ and is full of love and compassion.⁶⁹

JESUS' FRUITFULNESS

Christ had no physical issue, but he became the firstborn among many brethren,⁷⁰ to realize what was written: "Behold, I and the children you have given me."⁷¹ Fulfilling many Old Testament promises, the fruit of Christ's work was vastly more than the progeny of a married person.⁷² The seed our Lord sowed and the harvest that came was spiritual⁷³ but, of course, was a harvest of bodies and souls. This occurred principally through his original disciples. Though they misunderstood his mission, they argued among themselves as to who was the greatest.⁷⁴ One of them was a thief and traitor. Another denied Jesus three times and all, though confessing loyalty to the point of death,⁷⁵ forsook him and fled in his hour of greatest need.⁷⁶ But their Lord had promised these very disciples that they would do *greater*

⁶² Hebrews 13:5 quoting either Deuteronomy 31:6 or 8 or Joshua 1:5.

⁶³ Exodus 33:12ff.

⁶⁴ Joshua 1:1-9.

⁶⁵ Ezra 8:23,31. Nehemiah 2:8.

⁶⁶ John 15:1-8.

⁶⁷ Colossians 2:3.

⁶⁸ Hebrews 2:18 & 4:15.

⁶⁹ Isaiah 54:10.

⁷⁰ Romans 8:29.

⁷¹ Isaiah 8:18 quoted at Hebrews 2:13.

⁷² Consider the import in post-Pentecost redemptive history of Paul's allegorical interpretation in Galatians 4:21-31, especially his use of the quote from Isaiah 54:1 (and through verse 3) in 4:27.

⁷³ The promise to Abraham that his "seed" should be without number like the stars (Genesis 15:5) was strikingly focused by the apostle Paul on Christ alone as the one "seed" (Galatians 3:16), but since thus seed "fell into the ground and died" and therefore did "not abide alone" (John 12:24), its fecundity is truly immeasurable and continual.

⁷⁴ Mark 8:33-34.

⁷⁵ Mark 14:31.

⁷⁶ One could argue that like the fruit trees planted in the promised land, the disciples were uncircumcised ("forbidden" in many modern translations of Leviticus 19:23) for those three years with Christ in their

things than he because of his return to the Father.⁷⁷ John mused that the entirety of the world's scrolls could not contain all the works Christ did on earth.⁷⁸ How could it possibly be that these ignorant, weak cowards would exceed the works of Christ Jesus the Lord, Emmanuel, God with us?!

The eleven, together with the women who followed them for three years and various others, amounted to one hundred twenty souls after Christ's ascension.⁷⁹ But when in an entirely new degree the Holy Spirit was poured out as the Lord Jesus had promised, these eleven men were transformed into bold witnesses. Christ's life and words were brought back to their minds in their organic connection with the Old Testament. They all were willing and did suffer; most of them were martyred for advancing the testimony of their Master.

The fruit of Peter's first sermon was greater by far than anything recorded of enduring change in the minds and hearts of human beings during Jesus' lifetime.⁸⁰ Such *greater things* have not ceased to advance to this very day throughout the world. Christ taught his disciples to pray for the coming of his kingdom and that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. This expansion of Christ's kingdom is the new cultural mandate, the principal reason why the world continues. The kingdom comes one new birth at a time and deepens with the nurture of believers in the ways of righteousness and holiness. Here is the chief ministry of the church and the principal commission from Christ for all his people. How encouraging it should be for us that the greatest fruit of Christ's work in making disciples awaited his departure and the coming of the Spirit in power! Indeed, *now is the accepted time, behold, today is the day of salvation!*⁸¹

EFFECTS OF CHRIST'S WORK ON DOMINION AND CULTURE

Is there a greater good, a more excellent way of carrying out Christ's last command and exhibiting him in the world than when we are able and take the opportunity to warn the unconverted by word and deed, whether from pulpit or in public places, at home, neighborhood or at work, that they are kept out of hell by the sheer goodness of God, as Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon described them?⁸² Every moment of their existence as non-Christians makes their case worse, regardless of whatever "cultural" or other contributions they make to society. Notwithstanding the host of gifts that God continues to bestow on ungrateful and rebellious people, gifts that display divine goodness and patience, every action, every thought and word of such individuals are at best discoveries, treatments or arrangements of what God

understanding, but after the outpouring of the Spirit as promised in the OT and by Christ himself, they bore abundant fruit. See the Leviticus text in the Hebrew, KJV and NKJV.

⁷⁷ John 14:12.

⁷⁸ John 21:25.

⁷⁹ Acts 1:15.

⁸⁰ The irony has often been noted that 3,000 were slain by the Levites in executing God's vengeance on the idolaters at Sinai, while 3,000 were converted as the fruit of Peter's Pentecost sermon.

⁸¹ 2 Corinthians 6:2.

⁸² See *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*.

has created, though encrusted with ingratitude, ignorance and idolatry. As one has called them, the best acts of unconverted people are but splendid sins. In themselves and spiritually considered all is cultural crud.⁸³

Artists, builders, politicians, athletes, soldiers, the rich, the poor, the young, the old, educators, university people, the illiterate, the clever, writers, musicians, farmers, doctors, lawyers, judges, politicians, scientists, manual laborers, housewives, those in every lawful or unlawful vocation that exists are, if unconverted, moment by moment living in rebellion against God though sustained by him, who nonetheless remains wholly innocent of their sins. By the “foolishness” of Christ’s cross, God has made all human wisdom and secular achievements foolishness.⁸⁴ The Preacher described this situation long ago: *This evil exists in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. And moreover, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.*⁸⁵

None of these comments is meant to deny that even much of what unbelievers do can be, and indeed is, humanly beneficial, even useful for advancing God’s temporal or eternal purposes. By an animal God spoke to a perverse prophet, whose words advanced our knowledge of the coming Savior.⁸⁶ Judas Iscariot’s betrayal of Christ served to further human salvation.⁸⁷ Nothing is outside the decree of God. Further, the contributions of many gifted persons are enjoyable. We can all relate to them, even when that relation is tragic or repulsive. But none of this has ever been static; there is movement.

From the Tower of Babel to the present time, the earth’s history is filled with the impulse toward ever-increasing urbanization, mechanization, self-deception and/or brutalization by words and deeds, by individuals or in groups, and using what become so often idols instead of mere tools. By the love of power, fame or money as roots of these evils and despite their veneers, people become twisted into the condition Paul described to Titus: *hateful and hating one another.*⁸⁸ Material things, the great inventions, machines and, nowadays ubiquitous electronic devices so often enslave—the latter with their images of violence and filth, creating scars on the conscience and taking captive countless males, in particular. Dominion gone awry. How ironic that these same instruments can be tools to advance the gospel when put to use, especially by those devoted to the lesson of Christ’s shocking first parable in Luke 16.

⁸³ Read in Philippians 3 what Paul, the apostle, thought of his brilliant former life as Saul, the Pharisee.

⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:20-24.

⁸⁵ Ecclesiastes 9:3.

⁸⁶ Numbers 22-24 contains the history of Balaam’s prophecy.

⁸⁷ Matthew 26:24; Mark 14:21; Luke 22:22.

⁸⁸ Titus 3:3.

DOMINION AND OUR PROPERTY

Jesus told those who would be his disciples that, in imitation of the acts of an unjust steward, they should make use of the mammon of unrighteousness⁸⁹ to gain friends who would later welcome them into eternal dwellings.⁹⁰ How might an unjust steward teach something profitable about money?! Christ explained that sons of this age are wiser in their own matters than the sons of light. The steward used the final moments in his job to create a place for himself among those benefiting from his dishonesty. If the world can do this using stolen means and for temporary pleasure and comfort, how much more, Jesus urged his followers, should they use all the means at their disposal – time, money, property, abilities, etc. - to advance the gospel message and thereby seek to win friends to Christ. These on the last day will welcome their human benefactors into the heavenly kingdom and forever bless God for them.

This perspective on temporal matters is in stark contrast with the common expectations of education, job, husband or wife, family, children, home, avocational interests, hobbies, accumulation, retirement and earthly inheritance for surviving family, friends or charities – even and perhaps particularly among church members. The world is well populated. Christ called it a field that needs laborers for whom he taught us to pray.⁹¹ There is the need to sow and to reap with zeal and fervor, because at its longest extent, the life of every present and potential laborer is a mere moment.

This perspective on the use of tangible possessions corrects an acquisitiveness that fills bags with holes or where moth and rust corrupt. The apostles knew and believed that they were in the “last times” or “the end of the ages”.⁹² This did not necessarily mean that they thought Christ would return in their lifetimes in light of the many prophesies of the gentiles being brought into the kingdom. But with the coming of Christ and his work on earth, the creation mandate is now subsumed into Christ’s agenda of the new era. The mere filling of the earth with even brilliant and cultured lost souls can in no way even be mentioned alongside the Christian’s duty and privilege to ceaselessly pray for the advance of and bear witness to the heavenly kingdom, to explain and urge faith in Jesus Christ and thereby to seek to fill the earth – or at least our church buildings, please God! – with humble, holy, Christ-loving persons. The apostle John’s consummate joy was not even in the birth of his children by grace but that they continued walking in the truth.⁹³ In this he was merely experiencing and augmenting the joy of angels.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ That is to say, money which is so often used to produce unrighteousness, not that money in itself is evil.

⁹⁰ Luke 16:9.

⁹¹ Matthew 9:37-38.

⁹² 2 Timothy 3:1; 1 Peter 1:20; Jude 18. 1Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 9:26; 1 Peter 4:7.

⁹³ 3 John 4.

⁹⁴ Luke 15:7. *I tell you there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.* Did Christ mean to include the *spirits of just men made perfect*?

IRONIES AND EXPECTATION OF THE NEW MANDATE AND DOMINION

Jesus described the way of the soldiers in his kingdom: in order to gain, they must lose; in order to get, they must surrender all. After the sad departure of the rich man who ran to Jesus asking about eternal life, Jesus told his disciples how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God, especially for the rich. The people were astonished, no doubt thinking rich people the most blessed of God and therefore closest to the kingdom. They ask Jesus, "Who then can be saved?" His answer was that with men it is impossible but not with God. Peter replied that they had left everything to follow Jesus. Jesus then described the blessing in store for those who had left family and property for his sake and the gospel, not only in the infinite abundance of the life to come but now. They would receive all these and more in following him, and, Mark added, with persecutions.⁹⁵ Here is the spirit if not the reality in each case of being a *eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake*: leaving all to second or lower importance in order to love and serve the Savior.

Peter wrote of the other-worldly outlook that should be the chief motivation of all believers. It is the love and inexpressible joy that comes from contemplating the believer's heavenly future, even in the face of severe trials and persecution on account of faithfulness to Jesus' name. He summed up the Christian's future oriented "mandate" with these words: *Therefore, girding up the loins of your mind and being watchful, set your hope fully on the grace that is being brought to you in the revelation of Jesus Christ.*⁹⁶

This, of course, is not meant to exclude earthly activities, occupations and legitimate pleasures, including Christian marriage, devotion to rearing godly children, work and doing as much good as our duties, abilities and time permit. But all these are to be undertaken in light of our love for Christ and desire to grow in holiness, so that we may then live before believers and unbelievers alike pleasing Christ in all things and urging the lost around us to repentance and faith before it is everlastingly too late.

THE APOSTLE PAUL'S "EUNUCH" PERSPECTIVE

Writing to Titus⁹⁷ Paul announced one purpose of his apostleship when he said it concerned the faith of God's elect. He emphasized this again in his final letter: *I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they may obtain salvation in Jesus Christ with eternal glory.*⁹⁸ Without doubt, his singleness helped fuel this paramount goal.

We can be thankful for what we know of Paul's life and heart: *I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.*⁹⁹ While recognizing that his own

⁹⁵ Mark 10:30.

⁹⁶ First Peter 1:13.

⁹⁷ 1:1.

⁹⁸ 2 Timothy 2:10.

⁹⁹ 1 Corinthians 7:7.

singleness and its opportunity for expanded Christian ministry would not be the norm for everyone, it was still his wish for others. Were Timothy or Titus married? Was Epaphroditus single and many of the other men and women who accompanied or worked with or for Paul? There is little evidence either way except that those who traveled about like him would have experienced hardship in marriage and even more in faithful parenting.

Paul wrote more specifically how the saints should think: *Now concerning the virgins,¹⁰⁰ I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present¹⁰¹ distress,¹⁰² it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that.¹⁰³* In all this Paul is counselling contentedness in one's providential situation and actively discouraging undue concern about earthly things. He knows the natural inclinations – not to mention discontentedness – people have. Even when not sinful, such desires may involve “troubles” that hinder peaceful walking with Christ and effective ministry.

He went on: *This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. I want you to be free from anxieties.¹⁰⁴*

These directives are radical. When did you last preach or teach them or hear them preached? Paul is pressing for the subordination of all earthly things to the kingdom of Christ, even creation-ordained good things, not by abandoning one's duty or in disobedience to Scriptural directives about lawful relationships, but by understanding what the appearance of the Messiah has meant, how all things have been irrevocably changed by his coming, that the end is in sight, so that temporal goals (what is seen) are immeasurably less important than what is eternal, yet still unseen.¹⁰⁵

CHRISTIAN COMMONWEALTH?

Does this leave place for striving toward a Christian commonwealth as a worthy exercise of dominion? What about John Calvin's Geneva or Abraham Kuyper's Holland during his time as prime minister? We need only ask, “What became of these attempts to either discipline the church and/or the community by

¹⁰⁰ *Parthenon or virgins; also in verse 28.*

¹⁰¹ *Or impending.*

¹⁰² *Or necessity.* It is entirely unclear to what Paul may have been referring if not to “normal” antagonism to the gospel.

¹⁰³ 1 Corinthians 7:25-28.

¹⁰⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:29-32a.

¹⁰⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:18.

the church or guide public officers in accordance with the law of God, or similar attempts to govern a mixed multitude of saints and the unconverted by biblical standards?” Present day spiritual conditions in Geneva and the Netherlands answer the question. However commendable the motives for seeing biblical justice govern mixed populations and since the law primarily brings a knowledge and conviction for sin, it is impossible to build a godly society amid a mixture – if not majority – of unbelievers with believers.

Further, it is hardly commensurate with the directives of Christ or his apostles that such a society in this world should be attempted apart from opportunities to warn all and several - including governments and their leaders - of their Creator’s existence, moral standards, coming judgment and Christ as the only hope for humanity. Clearly the gospel call is to believe and to repent – regardless of the audience. But then it also is a summons to embrace and follow Christ into the one holy society he established on earth: his church, comprised of congregations of believers, their children and church officers who serve, teach and govern one another. Did the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost include anticipating, let alone advancing, the idea of a mixed-multitude “Christian” commonwealth?

Historically when attempted this idea has been modeled on Old Testament structures that were shadows and types of Christ’s kingdom.¹⁰⁶ How much prayer, labor and money – not to mention blood! - have been poured out on such endeavors to the great loss of a holy, humble, often suffering witness by word and deed to Christ and the gospel by the church? Think simply of the gargantuan struggle Luther and others had in even beginning to overthrow with biblical truth the thousand-year old tyranny of the politico-ecclesiastical monstrosity that “the Church” had become! These experiments were grand distractions from the church’s duty to prepare her soldiers for daily battle by stirring up an ever-increasing love for Christ and for one another through a deepening discipleship commitment to meditating on the word of God.

Dear fellow saints, I do not need to remind us that our lives are a mist; both parts of our Bible tell us this.¹⁰⁷ The faithful ever since the apostolic age have had eyes to see their terrestrial future compressed into that vapor. When will our eyes turn, rise and settle on the white fields? When will our wills agree in longing and praying for good fruit from Christ to burst forth more and more in all the world? Is there no change in the purpose of marriage? Are we still *primarily* to fill the earth with offspring – even godly ones – by means of physical birth and nurture? Or is not the Christian’s purpose more akin to Aquila and Priscilla, with whom it seems that the driving catalyst of their union was kingdom work?

¹⁰⁶ For example, we are no doubt familiar to some degree with theonomic movements in recent US history, their proponents, leaders, followers and the fracturing results in their families and churches.

¹⁰⁷ Psalm 39:5,11; James 4:14.

Indeed, the dragon has unleashed his beast and false prophet everywhere¹⁰⁸ and their focus is often on the unwary church. Do we know our people? The stability of their marriages? Where the spiritual strengths and weaknesses lie? Are we ready to counsel prospective and married couples for their mutual encouragement or in the absence of growth in one mate, to edify the other in patience, diligent godliness? And do we realize the potential treasure that single men and women represent – of whatever age¹⁰⁹ and for whatever reason – who give evidence of loving our Lord Jesus? Are we prepared to encourage them – even those who wish to be married – to live as *eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven* and join the company of the apostle Paul and countless others still on earth or alive in glory?

God promised Hosea that he would remove all mention of *baals*,¹¹⁰ not only the false god and its worship but also the use of this word for *husband*; for *baal* can mean both *husband* and *master*. In its place would be *my man*.¹¹¹ This was no mere change of terms. Rather it meant a new relationship based on the covenant God would make with the beasts, birds and creeping things in a divine restatement of the first dominion given to Adam and Eve but fixed by God's solemn promise of a loving and eternal betrothal to his people¹¹² and to their environment that would never again be sullied by unfaithfulness or defection. God would prepare and take his people to himself in righteousness, justice, covenant love and mercy *forever*.¹¹³ How fitting, then, is the apostle's summary of marriage as a picture of Christ and his church.¹¹⁴ The life and work of the God-man, the heavenly bridegroom, has paid the bride price. He has redeemed a people from all their false *baals* and woos them one by one to himself, never to be separated from an ever-deepening relationship of communion, love and service.

May Almighty God come down upon us and his people in every place, to raise up a generation of those willing to wholeheartedly embrace the heavenly bridegroom, to count the cost because of their great love for the Lord Jesus and their fellow man, so that they subordinate every lesser affection to devote themselves to advancing Christ's kingdom under the banner of promised victory: *Christ in you, the hope of glory!*¹¹⁵

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¹⁰⁸ Unholy trinity mentioned in Revelation 12, 13 and 16.

¹⁰⁹ See J. I. Packer's excellent book *Finishing Our Course with Joy – Engaging with Our Aging*, in which he scolds the church for wasting the valuable resource of her mature saints and their gifts (due often to an emphasis on "youth culture"), and he scolds elderly saints for not "racing" to the finish line by being productive for Christ's kingdom as long as and however possible.

¹¹⁰ 2:17. The plural is because of the multiple uses of the word and the connection of Baal worship with multiple cities and practices.

¹¹¹ In Hebrew, LXX and Vulgate.

¹¹² Betrothal was the commencement of a marriage under OT law as evidenced, for example, by honest Joseph's intention to "divorce" Mary quietly when he knew she was pregnant, Matthew 1:19.

¹¹³ Hosea 2:16-20.

¹¹⁴ Ephesians 5:32.

¹¹⁵ Colossians 1:27.

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