

Luke 12:1-12
October 27, 2019

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Why do you think skepticism about religion is so prevalent? [Let people engage]

Q: Why do you think so many Christians fail the “practice what you preach” standard? [Let people engage]

Transition: Hypocrisy is a common reason stated by non-believers as to why they are skeptical about religion. And as Christians, that’s a frustrating claim because all Christians fail to perfectly live up to the standard the Bible teaches. No Christian has ever been perfectly Christ-like. However, there are many Christians who are genuinely seeking to live the Christian life and are relying more and more on the Holy Spirit to convict, change, and empower them. There have been multitudes of Christians who have lived their lives free from scandal. No Christian is perfect, but making a mistake and failing to reach perfection in this life is not the same thing as being a hypocrite. Do you feel some tension here?! So what is hypocrisy?

Jesus has an answer to that question! Luke recorded Jesus’s teaching on the dangers of hypocrisy. Let’s see if we can gain a better understanding of what hypocrisy is and how to avoid it. Someone read Luke 12:1-12 to get us started.

BOOK:

Warnings and Encouragements

12 Meanwhile, when a crowd of many thousands (a plural of murias and so a multiple of 10,000, so that there could have been 20, 30, 40, 50K) had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another (Jesus did not have a PA system to blast out His message), Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ² There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known. ³ What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.

⁴ “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. ⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. ⁷ Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

⁸ “I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. ⁹ But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. ¹⁰ And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

¹¹ “When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

Tension on Blaspheming the Holy Spirit

Apparently, the Pharisees were being convicted by the Holy Spirit that Jesus was indeed the Messiah but were rejecting His witness. They could never be forgiven because they were rejecting God's only means of salvation.

MacArthur – V.10 opens, "Everyone who will speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him." How can you be forgiven of that? Look, there wouldn't be any Christians if you couldn't be forgiven of that. Do you understand that? Do you understand that every person before they're converted is a blasphemer? What does it mean to blaspheme? To reject Christ, to deny Christ; it just means to be against Christ. You're either for Me or what? Or against Me, and if you're against Me, you've taken the position of one who rejects Me, who speaks against Me, or believes against Me, that's forgivable or nobody is saved. When the Holy Spirit comes, He convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment, "of sin because they believe not on Me." That's the blasphemy. And every sinner is a blasphemer of Christ. Before I was saved, I was. Before you were saved, you were. Before anyone is saved, that's what you're saved from, from the blasphemy of not confessing Jesus as Lord and acknowledging Him as Savior. Jesus said, "Look, I've come to call sinners to repentance," not the righteous.

Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is rejecting His revelation as to the truth of Jesus Christ. And if you reject the revelation the Spirit has given us, if you reject the Scripture, if you reject the external record of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and there were some people who not only had heard the teaching but had seen Christ and seen the miracles both done by Christ and the apostles, if you reject that revelation of the Spirit to the truth of Christ and the gospel, you can't be saved. You've just insulted or blasphemed the Holy Spirit. That's not possible to be forgiven if it's a final rejection of that truth. **You can never be saved; no one can ever be saved who doesn't believe the testimony of the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ, right? You can't be saved unless you believe the truth about Christ. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ." As long as you reject the testimony of the Spirit to Jesus Christ, you are unforgivable.**

LOOK:

Jesus gives a clear warning to beware of religious hypocrisy (12:1). This emphasis is heightened by the extensive description of such hypocrisy given in 11:37–54. The Christian's inner self and outer demeanor are to be the same. We need to realize that ultimately nothing will remain hidden, for a day is coming in which everything hidden will be made known.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 219-220). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Beware of Hypocrisy (Luke 12:1–12)

The word *hypocrite* comes from a Greek word that means “an actor,” “one who plays a part.” There are hypocrites in every walk of life, people who try to impress others in order to hide their real selves. In the Christian life, a hypocrite is somebody who tries to appear more spiritual than he or she really is. These people know that they are pretending, and they hope they will not be found out. Their Christian life is only a shallow masquerade.

It is easy to see why Jesus gave this warning at this particular time. The disciples might be tempted either to gain popularity by pleasing the crowds or avoid trouble by pleasing the scribes and Pharisees. All of us want people to like us, and it seems such an easy thing to “act the part” that others want to see.

How can we keep hypocrisy out of our lives?

We must understand what hypocrisy really is (v. 1). Jesus compared it to leaven (yeast), something that every Jew would associate with evil. (See Ex. 12:15–20. Paul also used leaven to symbolize sin. See 1 Cor. 5:6–8; Gal. 5:9.) Like yeast, hypocrisy begins very small but grows quickly and quietly. As it grows, it infects the whole person. Hypocrisy does to the ego what yeast does to bread dough: it puffs it up (see 1 Cor. 4:6, 18–19; 5:2). Soon pride takes over and the person's character deteriorates rapidly.

If we want to keep hypocrisy out of our lives, we must avoid that first bit of “leaven.” Once we start to pretend, the process goes on quickly; and the longer we wait, the worse it gets. Sir Walter Scott wrote:

O what a tangled web we weave
When first we practice to deceive.

Hypocrisy is foolish and futile (vv. 2–3). Why? Because nothing can really be hidden. Jesus referred here primarily to His own teachings, but the principle applies to other areas of life. The Twelve might be tempted to cover or compromise the truth so that neither the crowds nor the Pharisees would be offended (see Luke 8:16–18; 11:33). God's truth is like light, not leaven, and it must not be hidden. The lies of the hypocrite will one day be revealed, so why go on pretending? Let your light shine!

We must understand what causes hypocrisy (vv. 4–7). Jesus mentioned “fear” five times in these verses, so He is teaching us that a basic cause of hypocrisy is *the fear of man*. When we are afraid of what others may say about us or do to us, then we try to impress them in order to gain their approval. If necessary, we will even lie to accomplish our purposes, and this is hypocrisy. Unfortunately, many of the scribes and Pharisees were more concerned about reputation than character, what people *thought* about them than what God *knew* about them. The fear of man always brings a snare (Prov. 29:25), and Jesus wanted His disciples to avoid that snare.

The remedy for hypocrisy is to forget about what people may say and do and *fear God alone*. The fear of God is the fear that conquers all other fears, for the person who truly fears God need fear nothing else. All that men can do is kill the body, but God can condemn the soul! Since He is the final Judge, and He judges for eternity, it is logical that we put the fear of God ahead of

everything else. Our God knows us and cares for us. He cares for the sparrows, and we are of more value than they; so what do we have to fear from men?

We must confess Christ openly (vv. 8–9). Once we have done this, we will have an easier time living the truth and avoiding hypocrisy. How can we fear men when we know Jesus Christ is confessing us before the Father in heaven? It is not important that men praise our names on earth, but it is important that God acknowledges us in heaven (see 2 Tim. 2:8–14).

We must depend on the Holy Spirit (vv. 10–12). Jesus appears to be contradicting Himself. In Luke 12:8–9, He demands that we openly confess Him, but in Luke 12:10, He says we can speak against Him and be forgiven. However, if we speak against the Spirit, there is no forgiveness! Does this mean that the Holy Spirit is more important than the Son of God?

Note that this statement is connected with the ministry of the Spirit in and through the Apostles (Luke 12:11–12). The Jewish nation rejected *God the Father* when they refused to obey John the Baptist and repent, for John was sent by the Father. They rejected *God the Son* when they asked Pilate to crucify Him. But that sin could be forgiven because there was still the ministry of the Spirit.

God did not judge the nation immediately. Instead, Jesus prayed for them as He hanged on the cross (Luke 23:34; see also Acts 3:17). Then God sent the Holy Spirit who ministered through the Apostles and other believers in the church. *This was the last opportunity for the nation, and they failed by rejecting the witness of the Spirit* (Acts 7:51). Luke 12:11–12 was fulfilled during the first chapters of Acts when the message went “to the Jew first” (Acts 3:26; 13:46; Rom. 1:16). Israel’s third “national sin” was the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7), after which the message went out to the Samaritans (Acts 8), and then the Gentiles (Acts 10). Note that Stephen said, “You always resist the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51).

I do not believe that the “sin against the Holy Spirit” is committed by people today as it was by Israel centuries ago. I believe that the only “unpardonable sin” today is the final rejection of Jesus Christ (John 3:36). The Spirit of God witnesses through the Word, and it is possible for sinners to reject that witness and resist the Spirit. But the Spirit bears witness to Christ (John 16:7–15); so the way people treat the Spirit is the way they treat the Son of God.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 237-238)

1. JESUS TEACHING HIS INNER CIRCLE OF DISCIPLES (12:1–53).

a. *Jesus’ teaching about witnessing without fear (12:1–12).*

12:1–3. Jesus first stated that it is foolish to be hypocritical because eventually everything will **be made known** (cf. 8:17). So the disciples should be open, not two-faced, about the way they lived. He warned them to **guard against the yeast of the Pharisees**, that is, their teaching, for it **is hypocrisy**. In the Scriptures yeast often refers to something evil (cf. Mark 8:15).

12:4–12 (**Matt.** 10:28–31). Jesus went on to teach that His disciples (**My friends**) should be fearless (Luke 12:4, 7; cf. v. 32) because God would take care of them. Instead of fearing men who could kill their bodies (cf. 11:48–50), they should **fear God**, the One who **has the power to throw one into hell**. This follows as a natural corollary of 12:2–3—God knows everything. The disciples were far more valuable to **God** than **sparrows**, which were sold for a small amount (**five birds for two pennies**). The word for “penny” is *assarion*, a Roman copper coin worth about 1/16 of a denarius (a day’s wage) and used only here and in Matthew 10:29. Since God takes care of

common little birds (cf. Luke 12:22), He will also care for His own, even knowing the number of their **hairs**.

The point of verses 8–10 is that disciples must make a choice. To **acknowledge** denotes the fact that the disciples recognized Him as the Messiah and therefore they had access to the way of salvation. Those who did not acknowledge Him were denying themselves the way of salvation. Jesus carried the logic one step further, noting that one **who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven**. In Matthew 12:32 Jesus linked this activity with the Pharisees who were rejecting the work of Jesus. Apparently, the Pharisees were being convicted by the Holy Spirit that Jesus was indeed the Messiah but were rejecting His witness. They could never be forgiven because they were rejecting God's only means of salvation. (In contrast to that, a number of Jesus' own brothers who initially rejected Him [John 7:5] later came to faith [Acts 1:14] and were forgiven even though they had spoken **against the Son of Man**.)

Jesus then promised the disciples (Luke 12:11–12) that when they were arraigned and **brought before** officials because of their preaching and teaching (cf. Acts 4:1–21), **the Holy Spirit** would **teach** them **what to say**. In contrast to Jesus' enemies, who blasphemed the Holy Spirit, Jesus' followers would be helped by the Holy Spirit.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (pp. 1539, 1555). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

12:11 For Jesus' prophecy of the coming persecution, see note on 21:12–13 (**21:12–13** Some scholars think the early church invented this prophecy based on its experience of persecution. But, aside from the question of Jesus' ability to prophesy, it is not hard to imagine that Jesus could predict this based on His own experience of opposition and anticipated crucifixion. However, that He successfully prophesied not only these but also many other events (especially His own resurrection) argues strongly for real supernatural insight and for the future fulfillment of His remaining prophecies. See note on vv. 18–19.

Stein, R. H. (1992). *Luke* (Vol. 24, pp. 345-350). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

The opening verse of this section both concludes the preceding section and introduces what follows. The discourse continues to 13:21. Having denounced the glaring inconsistency of the Pharisees' behavior, Jesus' warning against imitating their hypocrisy (12:1) makes a fitting conclusion. The sayings that follow are a loose collection of Jesus' teachings directed to his disciples.

After a warning to beware of the Pharisees' hypocrisy, two proverbs assure the readers that such hypocrisy will be revealed and judged (12:2–3). Next comes a warning to the disciples about whom they should truly fear (12:4–5) followed by an encouragement that although God is to be feared, they need not be afraid, for this omniscient and omnipotent God values and cares for them (12:6–7). These verses are tied together thematically by the word "fear" (12:4–5, 7). Two additional warnings follow concerning Christian confession and the unpardonable sin (12:8–10). They too are accompanied by words of encouragement, assuring Jesus' followers of God's presence and the Spirit's guidance in times of persecution (12:11–12).

Comments

12:1 Meanwhile. Compare Acts 26:12. The following material is closely tied to the preceding woes.

A crowd of many thousands. Luke wanted to show Theophilus that in contrast to the Pharisees and law experts, Jesus was popular among the masses. As Marshall notes: “The implication is that the crowds have increased in size since 11:29.... The situation is similar to that in the Sermon on the Plain and elsewhere (cf. 20:45) where teaching intended primarily for the disciples is given in the presence of the crowds who are thus taught what is involved in discipleship.” See comments on 6:17; Introduction 7 (1).

Began to speak first to his disciples. The adverb “first” can be taken as modifying the verb “speak” or “Be on your guard.” It goes best with “speak.” (Cf. 21:9; Acts 7:12.)

Be on your guard. Compare Luke 17:3; 20:46; 21:34; Acts 5:35; 20:28.

The yeast of the Pharisees. The picture involves not yeast as we think of it today but sourdough (cf. Luke 13:21; 1 Cor 5:6). The reality part of this metaphor is the Pharisees’ pervasive religious influence. The parallel in Mark 8:15 reads, “Pharisees and that of Herod,” and Matt 16:6 has, “Pharisees and Sadducees.” Luke tied this passage more closely to the preceding one by mentioning only the Pharisees.

Which is hypocrisy. The parallels in Mark and Matthew do not spell out what the yeast represents. By his explanatory comment Luke made an explicit connection with the material in 11:37–54, which describes this hypocrisy. For Jewish criticism of the Pharisees (“the seekers after smooth things”) by the Essenes, see 1QH 2:15, 32; cf. also 1QH 2:34; 4:10. For a self-criticism, see *Sofa* 22b.

12:2 This verse and the next are examples of synonymous parallelism. They are proverbs of judgment directed against the Pharisees’ hypocrisy.

Nothing concealed that will not be disclosed. Compare Luke 8:17. The second verb is a divine passive for “God will disclose.” What is on the inside of the cup cannot remain concealed. Hypocrisy is folly, for the true inner self will one day be revealed. The Pharisees’ hypocrisy, greed, and wickedness will be displayed (11:39), and they will be seen as graves full of corruption (11:44). Both in Jesus’ situation and Luke’s, this proverb would be a truism, for a future divine judgment was part of the people’s worldview (cf. Acts 17:31).

12:3 Because 12:2 is true, the events described in 12:3 will also take place.

12:4 My friends. Here and in John 15:13–15 only is this expression used for the disciples. This designation assured them that the preceding words of judgment were directed not toward them but toward the Pharisees. Now Jesus addressed his disciples’ concerns.

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body. Others can bring the believers’ human existence to an end. The prophets experienced this (Luke 11:47), and the church was experiencing it now (11:49). Whether persecution unto death was a present reality for Theophilus and Luke’s readers is not known.

After that can do no more. Since opponents can only bring about physical death, there is no need to fear them, for they cannot affect the believer’s ultimate destiny. The believer’s “real” life is an eternal one to be spent in God’s presence, and no outside power can affect this (cf. Rom 8:35–39).

12:5 But I will show you. Compare Luke 6:47; Acts 9:16; 20:35.

Fear. This refers not to a hopeless terror but to a kind of reverential awe that leads to obedience.

Him who. This refers to God rather than the Son of Man. As for Satan the believer is not to “fear” him but to resist him (cf. Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 5:9).

Has power to throw you into hell. “Hell” is literally *Gehenna*, the Hebrew for the Valley of Hinnom. This valley to the south of Jerusalem became a symbol for the place where the unrighteous were forever punished because it was used as a refuse dump where fires were always burning (cf. Mark 9:47–48; cf. also 1QH 3:19–36). This was Luke’s only use of this term.

Yes, I tell you, fear him. The repetition of the command gives added emphasis and weight to this saying.

12:6 Sparrows. These were considered good, cheap food and were sought after by the poor.

Pennies. The *assarion* (NIV penny) was a Roman copper coin worth one-sixteenth of a denarius.

Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. In God’s providential rule of creation, not even something as inconsequential as the fall of a sparrow occurs apart from his omniscience and will.

12:7 Hairs ... are all numbered. This is a second example of God’s omniscience. The divine passive means *God has numbered all your hairs*.

You are worth more than many sparrows. This example of *a fortiori* reasoning assures believers that as God’s children they are far more important to God than sparrows. As a result, believers can be assured that God knows and rules over every aspect of their lives.

12:8 I tell you. Compare 12:4. This verse introduces the second warning and encouragement in this section. The warnings in this and the next verse are examples of antithetical parallelism.

Acknowledges me before men. This “acknowledgment” involves more than simply a verbal confession. It involves a witness of both word and deed, i.e., this public confession is to be accompanied by a life of obedience to God’s commandments. The Pharisees were criticized because their inner selves did not correspond to their outer profession. In contrast believers are challenged to integrate their outer and inner selves.

The Son of Man. The parallel in Matt 10:32 has “I,” revealing the freedom the Evangelists felt to interchange Jesus’ titles (Son of Man, Christ, Lord) and the personal pronoun. See Introduction 8 (4). For the attempt to distinguish Jesus and the Son of Man in this verse, see comments on 9:26.

Angels of God. This is a circumlocution for “God,” as is evidenced by Matthew’s “my Father in heaven” (Matt 10:33). Compare Luke 15:10; cf. also Acts 10:3. This verse, though a warning, is also a promise. To acknowledge Jesus as Savior is to be acknowledged as his follower (cf. Acts 7:55–56).

12:9 But he who disowns me before men. The same word is used in Luke 22:34, 57, 61; Acts 3:13; 7:35. To be ashamed of Jesus and his words (9:26) is a synonym. Jesus in 9:23 spoke of denying oneself to follow him. To refuse to deny oneself is to disown Jesus. Both put self before God and bring about the loss of life. Whereas 9:23 is an invitation to follow Jesus, 12:9 is addressed to the believing community (cf. Rev 2:13).

12:10 The first half of this verse seems to contradict the previous verse. Luke, however, did not see them as contradictory, for if he had, he would not have placed them side by side. Luke 12:10a may refer to something like what happens in Acts 3:17–21, where a non-Christian speaks against Jesus in ignorance. Luke 12:9, however, is a clear instance of apostasy by a member of the Christian community (cf. 12:4).

Will be forgiven. This is a divine passive, i.e., *God will forgive*. Although unstated, subsequent repentance is assumed. As Marshall notes: “It would not need to be pointed out to a Jewish audience that the forgiveness promised here is not granted automatically but is conditional on the repentance of the person seeking it.”

Blasphemes against the Holy Spirit. Blasphemy is not limited to speaking evil of the Holy Spirit. It can also mean a hardened attitude toward God and unrelenting opposition to what he is doing through his Spirit in leading individuals to faith.

Will not be forgiven. This is another divine passive, i.e., *God will not forgive*. Compare GT 44.

The second part of this verse is a warning about the unforgivable sin of speaking against the Holy Spirit. What exactly this sin consists of is far from clear. The suggested interpretations include: (1) claiming that Jesus possessed an unclean spirit (cf. Mark 3:28–30); (2) apostasy by a Christian (Luke 12:8–9), as opposed to a nonbeliever speaking against Jesus (as in 12:10a); (3) rejecting Christ after his resurrection, in contrast to doing so before the resurrection; (4) rejection of the disciples' testimony, which (after Pentecost) was inspired by the Holy Spirit; (5) persistent and unremitting resistance to the Spirit's work as he brings conviction of sin and reveals the need for repentance and faith. The last probably is the best interpretation, for rejection of the Spirit's work renders faith impossible and salvation unattainable (cf. Acts 7:51). One thing is clear. Anyone concerned about this sin has nothing to fear, for such a concern witnesses to a sensitivity and openness to the Spirit's work, which those who have sinned in this way do not possess.

12:11 Both the first (Luke 12:4–5) and the last set of warnings (12:8–10) are followed by encouraging words (12:6–7, 11–12).

Brought before synagogues. Compare 21:12. This refers to Jewish persecution.

Rulers and authorities. Compare 21:12. This refers to appearing in Gentile courts.

Do not worry. This encouraging word was not addressed to Christian ministers and teachers who had been negligent in handling God's word (cf. 2 Tim 2:15) but to Christians facing possible martyrdom.

12:12 For the Holy Spirit will teach you. Jesus gave the reason his followers do not have to worry (Luke 21:14–15). Luke gave examples of this in Acts 4:8–13; 6:10; 7:2–60. John 14:26 and 1 Cor 2:13 mention a similar kind of teaching by the Holy Spirit under different circumstances.

At that time. Compare Luke 7:21; 10:21; 13:31; 20:19; cf. also 2:38; Acts 16:18; 22:13.

The Lukan Message

Luke's key concern in this passage centers around the requirements and assurances of Christian discipleship. Luke shared this theme with his readers already and would deal with it again. His unique contribution to the account involves a clear warning to beware of religious hypocrisy (12:1). This emphasis is heightened by the extensive description of such hypocrisy given in 11:37–54. The Christian's inner self and outer demeanor are to be the same. The reader should realize that ultimately nothing will remain hidden, for a day is coming in which everything hidden will be made known. Believers are also admonished concerning the need for fearless confession. They need fear no one but God, for he alone controls their ultimate fate. Therefore, even under persecution, they dare not deny their Lord and become like the seed planted on rocky soil, which believed for a while but in time of testing fell away (8:13). Yet Luke's readers are also given words of encouragement to help them follow the Lord. They are reminded of God's omniscience and omnipotence as well as his providential care for them (12:6–8). They need not fear, for their names are written in heaven (10:20), and God has promised to provide for their needs. Even in times of persecution, God will direct and provide for his children through his Spirit (12:11–12).

Two other brief references to important Lukan themes should be noted. One is that despite the animosity of the Jewish leadership, the people still favored Jesus and sought to hear his teaching (see comments on 12:1). The second is the Spirit's role in the believer's life. In times of persecution

and trial the believer need not fear, for God's Spirit will be present. Should Luke's readers find themselves in such a situation, they need not worry about what to say. The Spirit will give them the right words. This does not mean that they should not think about what to say or fail to prepare. It means rather that they can be at peace knowing that the Spirit will guide in the preparation of their defense.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 12:1-12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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