



## **Beauty & Brokenness, Part 5**

### **The Beauty of the Gospel in a World of Broken Marriages**

If you have a Bible—and I hope you or somebody around you does—let me invite you to open with me to 1 Corinthians 7 and Matthew 19. So we'll be in two different places. We're now in week five of seven weeks in 1 Corinthians on sexuality, singleness and marriage. For those of you who may be joining us today for the first time, I so wish we could go back to week one because these messages are built on each other. We've walked together through what God says about sexuality and our bodies. We've seen how what God's Word says is very different than what the world says about these things. We've seen how God has formed each of us as men and women in His image, how we live in a broken world with broken bodies, and how Jesus has come to make our bodies new.

From there we've seen how God calls us for our good to flee sexual immorality, by fleeing sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman. Yet we've also seen how we are all prone—whether single or married—to go outside of God's good design for our bodies in different ways. All this has led us to see God's radical love and grace for each of us—grace that we want to show to one another in the church and to others in our culture where there's so much confusion about sexuality, singleness and marriage.

All of that now leads us to the topic we're talking about today: broken marriages because that's what the Bible speaks to next in 1 Corinthians 7. As soon as I even say the word “divorce,” I realize I'm uncovering wounds for many people on many levels—some from the past, some in the present, some in your own marriage, others in your parents' marriage or in other ways—wounds which carry many different emotions for many different people. Emotions like hurt, sorrow, loss, disappointment, maybe anger, regret, guilt, shame. I want to be sensitive to any and all of those emotions today. The last thing I want to do is make wounds worse.

Instead, I want to carefully apply the healing balm of the gospel in God's Word to those wounds. I want to show you the radical, transforming, beautiful, eternal implications of the gospel for both marriage and divorce, and ultimately for each of our individual lives. I want to help us as a church to love each other well in a world of broken marriages. I pray that part of the fruit of this series we're walking through will include MBC being a place where we trust God's Word is good, even when it goes against the grain of the

world around us, and at the same time we show God's goodness to others in such a way that anyone from any background with any struggle feels welcome here to experience the fullness of God's grace.

I pray that there would be no shame here, knowing we are all broken in different ways—through ways we have sinned or through ways we have been sinned against. We hurt with each other. We bear each other's burdens. We walk with each other through the many challenges of this world with hope that this world is not ultimately our home.

So here's what I want to do today. I want to read from these two passages in the Bible, then once we've heard directly from God in His Word, I want to show you four truths regarding the beauty of the gospel in a world of broken marriages. In the end, I hope this will help each of us see the beauty of God's love in each of our lives. Let's start with 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 where God speaks to us about singleness, marriage and divorce through Paul. He writes:

*<sup>10</sup> To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband <sup>11</sup> (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.*

When Paul writes in verse ten, "*Not I, but the Lord...*" he is directly quoting from what Jesus had previously said in the Bible. So I actually want to pause here and show you exactly what Jesus said before we go any further in 1 Corinthians 7. I invite you to turn back to Matthew 19:3-9, because this is what Paul is referring to when he says, "*Not I, but the Lord...*"

*<sup>3</sup> And Pharisees came up to [Jesus] and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" <sup>4</sup> He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup> and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." <sup>7</sup> They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" <sup>8</sup> He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. <sup>9</sup> And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."*

That is what Paul is quoting from when he says in 1 Corinthians 7:10, "*Not I, but the Lord...*" A wife should not separate from her husband and a husband should not divorce his wife. That's what Jesus said back in Matthew 19:6: "*What God has joined together, let not man separate.*" That's where Paul starts in 1 Corinthians 7, then he goes on in verse 12, "*To the rest I say, (I, not the Lord)...*" What he means is he's no longer quoting directly from Jesus. Instead, he's applying what Jesus said about divorce to a different situation. What he writes is still under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so it's still God's Word. It's just not a direct quote from Jesus earlier in the Bible.

So with that understanding, Paul continues in verse 12:

*<sup>12</sup> To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. <sup>14</sup> For*

*the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. <sup>15</sup> But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. <sup>16</sup> For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?*

I want to put together these two passages straight from God's Word, showing you four truths regarding the beauty of the gospel in a world of broken marriages.

## **1. God created marriage to be beautiful.**

This is why 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 says, *"A wife should not separate from her husband...and the husband should not divorce his wife."* Why? Because God designed a husband and a wife in a beautiful way to come together and stay together as one flesh. That's why Jesus, back in Matthew 19, quotes from the beginning of the Bible when He's having this conversation with some religious leaders. He says, *"Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said..."*, then He starts quoting from the second chapter in the Bible. Genesis 2:24, *"A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."* Jesus continues in verse six, *"So they are no longer two, but they are one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."*

God created marriage from the very beginning to be a beautiful uniting of a man and a woman as one flesh, a man and a woman each molded in the image of their Maker with equal dignity, coming together in a way that complements one another in a physical, emotional and spiritual fitting together of two into one flesh with a powerful unity in diversity, a shared equality with variety, with personal satisfaction through physical consummation.

The beauty here is not even just for a man and a woman to experience; it's for the world to behold. The Bible teaches that God designed marriage this way, not just for the good of a man and a woman to come together, but as a picture of His love for us. We read this in Ephesians 5:31-33, where the Bible again quotes from Genesis 2:24: *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."* Then the Bible says, *"This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."*

This mystery of marriage is intended to portray more than just a man and a woman coming together as one flesh; it's intended to portray the relationship between Jesus and the church. Before this, in Ephesians 5:25, the Bible says, *"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."* The husband is designed by God to be a picture to the world of Jesus' selfless, sacrificial love for sinners who trust in Him. Ephesians 5:24 says, *"As the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."* So a wife is designed by God to be a picture to the world of the

church's love for Jesus. In other words, God has designed marriage, not just for the sake of a man and a woman coming together, but for the sake of showing the world a picture of the gospel.

Now, I've used that word "gospel" a couple times. Some of you may be exploring Christianity and may not know what that means. It basically means "good news." The gospel is the good news that every one of us has been created by God for relationship with God. Yet we have all rebelled against God. All of us have turned from God's ways to our own ways. As a result, we are separated from God by our sin, so we deserve eternal death. Yet God loves us and has made a way for us to be forgiven of all our sin and restored to relationship with Him forever. God has come to us in the person of Jesus Who died on the cross to pay the price for all of our sin, so that when we trust in Him we can have eternal life in relationship with God. I invite you to put your trust in Jesus today, to be forgiven of all your sin and to be restored to relationship with God.

Then you can realize this is actually what marriage is all about. Yes, it's about the beauty of a man and a woman in love joining together as one. Yet it is so much more. Marriage is about God's desire for every one of us to experience a loving relationship with Him, which is why God says in His Word, "It is good to remain married..." on both levels. It's good for a man and a woman not to break this one-flesh union and it's good for the world to see the pure and powerful picture of His love for sinners.

To use the language from Ephesians 5, it's good for a husband to love and lay down his life for his wife, because in so doing, he will show the world the way Jesus loves and lays down His life for us. It is good for a wife to love her husband in a way that reflects the church's love for Jesus. This is God's beautiful design for marriage—for our good and for the display of the gospel to a world in need of God's love.

## **2. In this broken world, marriages break.**

The problem, though, comes in truth number two. In this broken world, marriages break; in this broken world, husbands and wives separate and divorce. This is why, back in Matthew 19, the religious leaders were asking Jesus, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" Jesus, in His response, points back to God's beautiful design for marriage, which then leads these religious leaders to refer back to the Old Testament, when Moses had given instructions about divorce. Jesus says in Matthew 19:8, "*Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.*"

In other words, divorce was definitely not in God's original design. Instead, divorce is always a result of sin—sin in this world and sin in our lives. If there was no sin in the world and in our lives—the "hardness of heart" to use that phrase from verse eight—then there would be no divorce. The problem is there is sin in the world and marriage is the uniting of two sinners. Now, we don't like to think about marriage this way. I mean how many wedding vows start with, "Look into your wife's or husband's eyes and repeat after me: I am a major sinner and you are stuck with me for life. You may kiss your bride." That just doesn't give us the feeling we're looking for in that moment, but it's true.

People wonder, “Why do so many marriages struggle?” Experts point to all kinds of problems that hinder marital happiness, such as communication problems, compatibility problems, financial problems, sexual problems, personality problems. All of these and more can certainly be problems, but the major problem in every marriage is sin. Here’s why that’s so important to realize. We can read all kinds of books and go to all kinds of counselors, conferences, seminars and experts on marriage, but if the sin problem is not continually addressed in each of our hearts, then we will just be putting Band-aids on broken limbs. The problems in marriage ultimately go back to a battle that is waging inside each of us, a battle to love God whole-heartedly and to love others—namely our spouse—selflessly.

This means the first place we need to look whenever we experience conflict in marriage is within ourselves, but that’s usually the last place we want to look. Our horizontal relationships with others will always be affected by our vertical relationship with God. Now, to be clear, in most any marital conflict, there are two sides to a story. There are many situations where more fault clearly lies on one side than the other, but in the end both are sinners, so every divorce is ultimately a result of sin. To take this one step further, the act of divorce itself is often sinful.

As we’re about to see, there are a couple of grounds where God allows for divorce. But outside of those grounds, divorce in and of itself is a sin against God. Even when God does allow for divorce, the temptations to sin amidst divorce are so strong. It is extremely hard to go through a divorce process—even one for biblical reasons—without sinning, without letting hurt or righteous anger lead to malicious speech or deep bitterness that eats at your soul. God wants to guard all of us against these things in any situation. This leads then to God’s good instructions for when divorce is possible.

### **3. God gives two grounds for divorce.**

God gives two situations where divorce is possible or even preferable. First is in Matthew 19:9, when Jesus says, “*And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery.*” The word used here for sexual immorality is the same word we’ve seen in 1 Corinthians 6:18. It’s the general term that refers to any kind of sexual relationship outside of marriage.

In the context of this passage, right after Jesus referred to this one-flesh union of marriage, Jesus is clearly talking about a spouse who physically violates that one-flesh union with someone else. So we’re seeing one ground for divorce in Matthew 19—adultery. When a husband or a wife forsakes the one-flesh union that God designed for marriage, this could be grounds for divorce.

I emphasize “could be” because you’ll notice in Matthew 19 that Jesus doesn’t say that when adultery occurs, divorce is necessary. Instead, Jesus says divorce is possible in this situation. Keep in mind, Jesus was talking to religious leaders who were looking for reasons to divorce, but Jesus approached that conversation from a totally different perspective. It’s interesting that Jesus’ teaching on divorce in Matthew 19 comes right on the heels of the story of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18, where Jesus teaches His

followers to forgive extravagantly. The implication is clear: adultery is not unforgivable. By the grace of God, marriages that have experienced adultery are redeemable.

I thank God for marriages I know in this church, good friends of mine and Heather's, with whom we have walked through this journey together, who have been restored by God's grace despite adultery. Now, this is not to shame or make anyone feel guilty who divorces after adultery; Jesus clearly makes that exception here. So divorce is possible after adultery, but it's not inevitable.

You may ask, "How can a marriage survive adultery?" The answer is by the power of the gospel. For a spouse who has committed adultery, forgiveness is possible for you—before God and before your spouse—when you repent and trust in Jesus' love. And for those whose spouse has been unfaithful, restoration is possible with your spouse by the power of Jesus' love in you—the same love that enables Him to forgive lives and abides in you.

I want to be careful here, because there are so many different circumstances in so many different lives. There are situations when one spouse may commit adultery once, realize their sin before God and their spouse, confess that sin, hate it, turn from it humbly and do everything necessary to restore trust that's been lost. Then there are other circumstances where a spouse is perpetually adulterous, or is sorry just because they got caught, or is not turning from sin or working to restore trust. This is why I want to call us to be in relationships with each other where we can help one another follow God's good Word in our lives, knowing that when it comes to adultery divorce is possible, but it's not inevitable.

Then the second ground for divorce that God gives in a broken world is in 1 Corinthians 7—abandonment. Now in 1 Corinthians, the Bible is specifically talking about a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. God says, "*If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.*" Likewise, "*If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.*"

In other words, a spouse who knows and believes in Jesus should not initiate divorce with that spouse who doesn't believe in Jesus. The picture here is most likely a situation where both spouses were married as unbelievers because God clearly calls followers of Jesus not to marry someone who is not a follower of Jesus. That's in 2 Corinthians 6 and 7. But it's often the case in a marriage between two unbelievers—two people who are not following Jesus—that one of them may become a follower of Jesus later. If that's the case, the Bible is clearly saying, "Don't divorce your spouse. Stay married, love your spouse and pray for him or her to trust in Jesus. Verse 16 says, "*For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?*" Right before this, verse 15 says, "*But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.*" In other words, if an unbelieving spouse—a spouse who is not following Jesus—chooses to abandon a believing spouse, despite that believing spouse's love for them, then divorce is preferable in this situation. "...[L]et it be so." Divorce is preferable. God says,

“Don’t initiate this kind of divorce, but if it’s forced upon you by abandonment from an unbelieving spouse, then don’t fight that.” Again, there are so many different circumstances in the world, but this is the only other ground God gives for divorce.

Any divorce outside of these two grounds according to God's Word—adultery and abandonment—leads to adultery in any remarriage. That’s straight from Matthew 19:9. Jesus said, “*Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.*” Then we see the other exception in 1 Corinthians 7 of abandonment. In other words, remarriage is only biblically permissible for the offended spouse after a biblical divorce. Think about what that means practically. It means the non-adulterous spouse in the first situation or the abandoned spouse in the second situation can remarry according to God’s Word. Outside of that, a man or a woman is not free to remarry. Such remarriage could be adultery, sin.

Now, before we move on to the fourth and final truth, I want to briefly address one other thing that is not mentioned here specifically, but it is definitely mentioned in the Bible—abuse. I want to make sure that we hear loud and clear today that the Bible takes abuse in any context—including marriage—very seriously. The Bible is clear that abuse of any kind is sinful and that God opposes those who abuse others. So if you are in a marriage where abuse is occurring, I want to speak to you clearly from God’s Word and with God’s love.

God hates what is happening to you and God is for you. He is on your side. God sees your pain and hears your cries. It is altogether right for you to seek relief from danger. No spouse or child should endure destructive, controlling, exploitative, oppressive, forceful domination, particularly that jeopardizes your safety or wellbeing. God stands against this and therefore we as a church stand against any and all abuse of any kind—physical, emotional, sexual, financial or spiritual. If this describes your situation, we as a church want to do all we can to support you. Please reach out to a trusted brother or sister in Christ, a group leader, one of our pastors. If you don’t know anyone, we have put a variety of resources for people in abusive situations on our website that goes with this series—[mcleanbible.org/sexuality](http://mcleanbible.org/sexuality). Please reach out.

And for anyone listening to this who is abusing your spouse or your child, I say to you on behalf of God Himself, “Repent. Today. Immediately. Repent. Turn from your sin and abuse. Get help from others in the church. And trust in God’s grace to change your heart and life.” We must take abuse seriously, including how abuse affects marriage, children and potentially divorce, knowing that if a spouse continues unrepentant in abuse, it would be clear that spouse is not a follower of Jesus. And by their abuse they would be clearly showing they are an unbeliever who has abandoned their commitment to marriage. There are so many circumstances, but this is why we want to walk together with God’s Word and God’s grace in this broken world. Which leads to this last truth.

**4. For those who trust in Jesus, nothing will ever separate them from God’s love.**

God created marriage to be beautiful, but in a broken world, marriages break. This results in two grounds God gives for divorce: adultery and abandonment. But here's the good news for every single one of us, regardless of what our situation is: separation is never the end of the story for those who trust in Jesus. The fourth truth is the reason why: for all who trust in Jesus, nothing will ever separate you from God's love.

For everyone who has seen divorce up close and personal in your life or in your family, for everyone who has experienced pain and loss and hurt in this way, know that for all who trust in Jesus, God will never, ever, ever separate from you. This means that for all who have sinned, there is hope. And for all who have been sinned against, there is healing. For all who trust in Jesus, God is always forgiving and always faithful.

Even if your marriage was broken in the past, the good news of the gospel is that the ultimate marriage covenant is still completely intact. God is always, always, always faithful—faithful to pick you up, right where you are. Not where you wish you were, not where you thought you'd be—God picks you up right where you are, daily carrying on His covenant of love with you.

I think about a conversation Heather and I had with a sister in Christ whose husband had been unfaithful to her. She said through many tears, "Who can I trust, when I can't even trust the one who I thought loved me the most?" Please hear this. You can always trust the One Who loves you the most, because His name is Jesus. In a world of adultery and abandonment, Jesus will never, ever be unfaithful to you. He will never, ever forsake you. No matter what happens in this world, Jesus never forsakes His bride, so you can count on His love for you forever.

So what do we take away from all this? What do we do in this broken world of broken marriages? Knowing there are all kinds of different situations? That's one of the things that has been so overwhelming as I've been preparing this for today. I think about so many different situations and circumstances. So I want to close with specific exhortations for different people, according to God's Word. I think we all fall into at least one of these categories.

1. If you are single, maximize your singleness to spread the gospel. Now, we didn't talk a lot about that today, but that's coming big time next week in the end 1 Corinthians 7. Come back next week for more. I am confident the Bible makes it clear that for those who are single, God calls you to maximize this good gift as long as God gives it for the spread of the gospel.

2. If you are married, love your spouse in a way that portrays the gospel. I pray that God's Word today will lead husbands and wives in fresh ways to love each other as a picture of the gospel. Husbands, what is one step you can take today from this message to love your wife more like Jesus loves His church? I challenge every husband, ask your wife today—before you lay your head on your pillow tonight—"What is one way I can love you better?" Then listen and do it. Then wives, what's one step you can take today from this message to love your husband more like the church loves Jesus. Ask your husband today, "What's one way I can love you better?"

As I was praying this week for marriages in our church, I thought about marriages where there may not be adultery or abandonment or abuse, but there's pretty strong disappointment. Wives and husbands who feel neglected, disrespected, uncared for or unloved—even lonely—you're looking at your marriage and thinking, "Surely God's design is better than this." Yes, God's design is better. So go to Him with all that's on your heart, to the extent possible, communicate with your spouse, then share with others in the church or in your small group. Share your struggles with others.

We must all be proactive, single and married alike, in helping nurture marriages in the church, helping each other when there's a small flame in the corner of a house, instead of waiting until the whole house is burning down. Some of you need to get involved with the re|engage ministry we have online for any MBC members from any location. You can go to [mcleanbible.org/care](http://mcleanbible.org/care). We want to help each other experience God's beautiful design for marriage; no couple can do that alone, Heather and myself included. That leads to this next exhortation.

3. If you are married and considering divorce, remember the power of the gospel. If you are considering divorce right now, first ask if you have biblical grounds for divorce. If you don't, think and pray and work through how—with the help of other brothers and sisters in Christ, a group leader, a pastor or other Christian leader—you can resolve the conflict and repair the wounds that are real and damaging right now in your marriage, knowing this is only possible through the power of the gospel. It's impossible apart from the supernatural power of God's love and God's Spirit in you. But His love is true and His Spirit is good.

Again, the greatest problem in any marriage is sin, so the greatest need in any marriage is to press in to the Savior and focus on Him. This means that even if you do have biblical grounds for divorce, I would still encourage you to remember the power of the gospel, knowing that Jesus is able to change even the hardest hearts. He's able to redeem and restore even the most broken marriages. Even if your marriage is not restored and divorce happens for biblical reasons, know that Jesus has power to transform the way you think about and relate to your former spouse. If you're considering divorce, remember the power of the gospel.

4. If you are divorced for a biblical reason and now single, rest in Jesus in your singleness, or in a future marriage. If you are divorced on biblical grounds, meaning you were the non-adulterous spouse in the first situation or the believing spouse abandoned in the second situation, then rest in the singleness God has given to you at this time. Enjoy this good gift as long as God grants it. Then, if God leads you to remarry, display the gospel beautifully in that future marriage.

5. If you are divorced for an unbiblical reason and single, repent and rely on Jesus to glorify God in your singleness. Repent of your sin before God and your former spouse, then pursue reconciliation with your former spouse if that's possible. If it's not, let the gospel give you great hope for a single life that thrives for good and for God's glory.

6. Then finally, if you are divorced for an unbiblical reason and married, repent and reflect the gospel in your current marriage. If you're divorced for unbiblical reasons, the Bible encourages you to repent genuinely before God and your former spouse. At the same time, God doesn't say you should break another marriage by divorcing again. Instead, God's Word encourages you to reflect the gospel in the marriage you have now.

In the end, regardless of our situations, God's Word says to every single one of us today, look to Jesus. This is the takeaway for each of us—look to Jesus. Trust in His Word; trust in His ability to bring beauty out of brokenness, knowing that for all who trust in Jesus, nothing will ever, ever, ever separate you from God's love for you (Romans 8:37-39).

Will you bow your heads with me? As you bow your heads and close your eyes, amidst all the different situations represented here—and every single one is unique—one question is at the center. Do you trust Jesus? Have you put your trust in Jesus as the Lord of your life? If you've never done that, I invite you to make today, this moment, when you say to God, "I know that I have sinned against You, God. I know I've turned from Your ways to my ways, but I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sin and rose from the dead. Today I confess that He is Lord of my life. Forgive me of my sin and restore me to a right relationship with You forever."

This is what it means to become a follower of Jesus, what it means to put your faith in Him. I invite you to do that today. When you do—and for all who have—in a fresh way right now in this moment, look to Jesus as Lord of your lives.

Jesus help us. We pray for husbands and pray for wives, that You would help us love our spouses well and selflessly. We pray that You would show the power of Your love and Your Spirit in our marriages, so the picture of Your gospel and Your glory might be clear. For marriages that are struggling and hurting, we pray for healing and restoration. We pray for strengthening of every marriage by Your strength. We can't do this on our own.

God, as we think about things in the past or things we're wrestling with in the present, we pray for Your help. Guide our every thought, our every desire, that we might live according to Your good Word. Jesus, we are so thankful for Your unshakeable faithfulness to us. We praise You as the ever-faithful Husband Who loves Your church as Your bride. We praise You that You will never, ever, ever forsake us. I pray over every person who has trusted in You that they would know right now that they are loved by You, that they can count on Your love, grace and help at every single moment for all of eternity. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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