

Spiritual Warfare Series - the Sword

by Jim Cymbala

The sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, is essential for spiritual warfare and helps us to stand against the enemy's schemes by producing faith in our hearts.

Duration: 36:04

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 7:15, Mark 11:24, John 14:27, Acts 17:11, Hebrews 13:5, 1 John 4:4

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of being strong in the Lord and putting on the full armor of God to stand against the devil's schemes. He compares the plans that God has for our lives with the plans that Satan has to bring about destruction. The preacher encourages the audience to prioritize spending time with God in His Word, as it is the most important thing in our lives. He also highlights the reality of the decline in Bible reading and urges Christians to face the challenges of life with a strong foundation in the Word of God.

Transcript

This message could help some people in here maybe more than anything that you've heard in years. It's the missing element of understanding in your Christian walk. It's different because whenever the word of God speaks about the word of God, we gotta listen very carefully and we have to understand that that's not usually what we think about when we hear a sermon.

We hear the word about the Holy Spirit or about the life of Christ. We hear the word about how God created the heavens and the earth. But when the word speaks about the word, then we go, wait, time out, what does this really mean? I wanna bring it to you as the beginning of a series on spiritual warfare.

We are all involved as Christians and even as non-Christians, but especially as Christians, it's pointed out in the Bible that we are involved in an invisible fight that many people don't recognize and thus the stress and strain that we go through, we don't identify it for what it is. We're going through things and we just say, wow, why did that happen or what's going on here? And we need to be educated and have insight from God that we are involved in an invisible warfare with invisible powers, principalities of darkness that are warring against our souls. This is, of course, brought out best in Ephesians, the sixth chapter, so let's look at it.

I just picked a few verses for my purposes today. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. I'm gonna be speaking about another aspect of this at three o'clock.

You need to hear it, you need to hear it. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand like a military soldier against the devil's schemes, his plots, his strategies.

Just like God has a plan for your life, Satan has a plan for my life. Satan has a plan for your life. He's gonna try to bring about that plan.

We're not walking through clover fields here on earth. We're fighting a good fight. How many say amen? Paul's at the end of his life, I kept the faith, I fought a good fight, I run the race, and there's obstacles, there's enemies, they're invisible.

This is not hocus pocus, this is not emotionalism. This is the word of God telling us that there's a spiritual entity called Satan who is anti-Christ and who is against everyone who belongs to God and is constantly trying to trip us up, discourage us, distract us, destroy us. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, but I have come, Jesus said, that you might have life and have it more abundantly.

It's all part of an invisible warfare that's going on, and many of us are sleeping during the warfare. We don't even know the warfare's going on. That is sad.

We must be awake and alert, as the Bible tells us to be. For our struggle, notice, the Christian life is a walk, it's a rejoicing, it's a lot of things, but it's also a struggle. So if you find yourself struggling sometimes and fighting, don't say, oh, that must be something wrong.

No, our struggle is not against flesh and blood. It's not against human beings. There's no human being who's the enemy.

Satan can use human beings, but human beings are not the source of our struggle, but against the rulers, this is a mysterious passage, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world. This is a dark world. It's not a light world, it's a dark world, morally, spiritually speaking, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

So that points out that there's grades of authority, there's an administration of affairs, Satan being our archenemy, but he has those underlings who carry out, just like God has angels that do his bidding, Satan has a host that are somehow, in a way we don't totally understand, what, assigned to us individually, assigned to territories, assigned to countries or cities or families. They are invisible. They dwell and move around in the air, the atmosphere, in heavenly places.

This is not now medieval fiction. This is the word of God speaking to us today, and you just have to be a Christian for one year, and you know you're in a fight. Come on, how many have found out since you've been a Christian, it's not all peaches and cream? Come on, how many have found that out? There's a fight, but you gotta recognize that first, or you live in disillusionment, like what's going on? I thought it was just, it's just all, you know, joy unspeakable and full of glory.

No, there's struggle to that. There's a fight to it. Therefore, put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you've done everything, to stand.

That brings up another thought. What is the day of evil? It doesn't say, but it seems like while we're all susceptible to satanic temptation and attacks, we're all at all times experiencing different problems in life spiritually that attack us. There is a day of evil, and it seems like from the biographies we see in the Bible, and from men and women who have served the Lord, that there are specific seasons and times where Satan tries to come in like a flood, and he's permitted by God.

Remember, no temptation, no attack can come to us without God permitting it. Satan does not have free reign to just do whatever he wants, and this is all part of us growing in faith and growing closer to the Lord. Satan uses even the attack, God uses even the attacks of Satan to bring about something good according to his purpose.

So we have to stand in that day of evil, and part of the armor is take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. I skipped over some of the other pieces of the armor, but what I want to focus on is the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

Many commentators believe that since this was one of the prison epistles that Paul wrote while under guard, that he was, somehow as he was writing, he was watching a soldier, and as he was writing about spiritual things, he noticed how the soldier was dressed, and he noticed how he went to war, and he took that and made it a metaphor, used the symbolism of, ah, he wears a helmet to protect his head. Take the helmet of salvation. Put on the girdle of truth, meaning sincerity.

Put on the breastplate that's protected the heart of righteousness. And now the only offensive weapon that is mentioned in that armor of God, which hopefully we'll cover, was the sword. Everything else was defensive.

The sword of the spirit, the sword that the spirit uses, which is the word of God. The sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. It would be unthinkable for any Roman soldier to go into battle.

Remember, they had things that they would fire at each other, that were lit, and they catapulted certain kinds of weapons at each other, but it was primitive warfare. A lot of it, if you wanna kill somebody, was, and defeat them, you had to get up close. And you had to be able to parry the blows, the shield of faith.

You had to be able to protect yourself, and be protected, and then the one offensive weapon was your sword. Nobody would think of going to battle without their sword. How could you fight without your sword? That would be like going to a gun duel without a weapon.

You have to have a sword. So Paul says, make sure now you put on the full armor of God, and make sure you have your sword. The sword of the spirit, you could look at it, it's the sword that the spirit gives us, but it's also the sword that the spirit uses.

He helps us to be able how to use the word of God. I was recently visited by people who are in charge of the translation of the NIV, and they told me that every day in America, as part of the decline of religion, the decline of Christianity, which is very marked now, no faith talk, and praise talk can get around it. All the statistics are clear from four different sources, that probably, right now in America, evangelical believers, not those who claim they're born again, those who claim they're born again is like 52% of America, but they also believe that Jesus sinned, that Jesus is the same as Buddha, and that all religions lead to God.

So born again has become a cultural, emotional phrase. Athletes who beat their girlfriends and are stoned half the time off season, but when they score a touchdown or they score a basket, they point up to heaven, thank you. That is not a good statistic, nor is Protestant, but as some very good literature now, pertinent to this subject, has brought out now from four different sources, there is no moral majority of 52% or 60% or 43% or 32% or 33%.

Right now, evangelical believers who claim they're born again and believe in the Bible as the rule of faith and believe Jesus is the only one who provides salvation, it's something like seven to 9% of America. And it's declining every month. People in their 20s are leaving the church in droves.

There's many reasons for that, which I don't wanna go into now, but as part of that picture and the statistics I just mentioned, here's a number that these people told me that just froze me. Every day in America, 1,200 people stop reading the Bible. But this is reality, you know? This is reality.

Christians live, we live like in a fantasy world sometimes. We don't face reality. We use faith talk and praise God, God is on the throne, and all of that, and he is, but we also have to be aware of what's happening around us.

And it is what it is, es lo que es. Whatever's true is true. Then we ask God how to change that, but you don't change things by denying the reality of the thing.

Jesus never did that. When he wrote to seven churches in Revelation, he told them exactly what was going on with them. You're lukewarm, you've lost your first love, you're doing great.

He didn't give them faith talk, he spoke truth to them. When you go to a doctor, you don't want him to tell you what you wanna hear. You want him to tell you what's going on in your body so that you can then know what to do.

But Christians, especially since the so-called faith movement, and some elements of the so-called charismatic movement since the 60s and 70s and 80s, we live in like a fantasy bubble. By just saying things, we think we create reality, but that's not the way the world works. That's not the way spiritual things work.

Right now, a leading minister whose name you would know if I mentioned it, told me as he travels around, and I've noticed the same thing. The biblical illiteracy of people who go to church, who even go to church, is at an all-time high. This is why fake prophets and fake preachers and fake whatever can dupe the people and get their money and do all kinds of blessing plans and all kinds of crazy things, because the people don't know the word of God so they can discern what's true and what's not true.

If you don't know the real, you won't know the counterfeit. But if you know the real, if you study the life of Jesus and you study the life of Paul and you study the book of Acts and you know what church life was then, then you'll know what church Jesus wanted to have on earth. He didn't give me the luxury, as I hear ministers say, of, Pastor Jim, what's your vision for the church? Why would I have a vision for the church? It's not my church.

I didn't die on any cross. How many know who died on a cross? Jesus died on the cross. It's his church.

Upon this rock, I will build my church, and he doesn't ask for creative thought from me. He gives me what I'm supposed to do in the Bible. So I meet pastors, and it's very disconcerting, I meet pastors as I travel

around who are creating an alternate Christian church because it's based on their vision or some book they read, instead of doing what the Lord told us to do.

That's why Timothy and Titus are in the Bible, to tell ministers what God wants us to do with his church, with Christ's church. At the forefront of that, as one of my first responsibilities, which I ask God for mercy that I have not done it as well as I should, is to make sure that the people who come to church are people of the word. There's an old saying that if a minister dies, you can tell how well he's done by three things, not by numbers or pretty building or Grammy Award choir means nothing.

Do the people who go there live in the word? Do they love, and do they pray? If they are people of the word, he did a good job. If they're into his personality and his vision and his prophetic utterance and all that other nonsense, then he made the church around his charisma, but not around God and his word. If the people only love white people or black people or Latino people or people of their denomination or people in their church, he did a bad job.

If the people have no desire to spend time in God's presence and pray, he did a bad job. He led them into church, but not into God. They have to be able to sing.

We're standing on holy ground. Let us praise Jesus now. If someone has no time for that, somehow I've disconnected what I was supposed to be doing.

So now, why is the sword of the spirit, the word of God so important? And do you realize why this might be the missing link in your defense against the enemy and my defense against the enemy? Do you realize what the Bible says about the Bible? Because especially during this resurgence of praise and worship music, it's odd to me that as we have praise and worship music proliferating, we're having a decline in Bible reading. Is there some relationship to that? Nobody likes to sing more than I do and listen to talented people like that sing. We love to praise God.

How many love to praise God here today? Praising God will never replace the word of God. The Christianity of the New Testament is not based on praise and worship services. It's based on a lot of elements.

And the whole counsel of God brings us to this point where the sword of the spirit is the word of God. Why so important? Because all the battles that we fight are attacks on our faith. What Satan wants to crush in me is my faith.

What Satan is after in your life is to make you faithless, is to make you lose your faith, weaken your faith, lose a hold of God and his promises. Trust yourself instead of God. When you go through hard times, wanna give up and say, where's God in the middle of this mess? Instead of having faith, I don't know what's going on, but I know my God is able to keep me and protect me and he's with me.

That is all a matter of faith, faith. And the word of God has everything to do with faith because as Roman 10s tells us, consequently faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God, the word of Christ.

Brothers and sisters, listen to me from my own struggles, my own weaknesses in years gone by and things I still battle with. The battle is all about faith. The just shall live by, Peter tells us, we are kept by the power of God on a daily basis through faith.

What's the button that turns on the power of God? Faith. If we're worrying and faithless, we can get in real trouble. Satan is after faith.

He wants to crush faith. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Faith is that which latches onto God and holds on and when you latch onto God, you cannot be moved because nobody can move God.

This pulpit's too little, but I used to have a big old pulpit up here that was heavy and if I tie, I'm tied to that. The only way you can get me to move if I'm strapped to that thing is you have to move the entire pulpit because I am now latched onto that pulpit. That's the way it is with God.

When we have faith and we're holding onto God and his promises, you have to move God to move us and nobody's moving God. Can we put our hands together and say, amen to that? But when we lose our faith and we lose our grasp on God and his promises, then we're just out there and that's why Christians are capable of doing all kinds of crazy, horrible things. Why? Because in that moment, they've lost their faith.

When Peter lost his faith, he denied he even knew the Lord. He cursed and said he didn't know the Lord. When Elijah lost his faith, he went from this mighty prophet who withstood the prophets of Baal to sitting under a tree and saying, I wish I were dead.

Jezebel gave one threat and he ran like a frightened animal. He lost his faith. It's all about faith and notice where faith comes from.

Faith never comes by trying to have faith. Faith comes from the word of God. There's power in this seed.

There's power in the word of God. When you get this word of God through the outer cord of your mind into the inner cord of your heart and you meditate and you get it in there, that alone produces faith. It produces faith.

Here's the battle that a lot of us have. We read promises and we go, oh, I wanna believe that. Yo, I wanna believe that.

I wanna believe that God helped me to believe that. We try to bring faith to the word. Don't bring faith to the word.

The word brings faith to your heart. You don't have to try to believe. Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee.

When the seed is planted, you just read this and meditate on it. The Holy Spirit uses it to produce faith. You will have faith.

You'll have faith you never experienced. You don't try to have faith. You let God produce faith.

Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Just think of all the battles that we have of faith that we try to solve by trying to believe harder. I believe, I believe.

And then something's telling you, you don't believe. No, I believe. I rebuke you, spirit of unbelief.

I believe, I believe. And it goes into mental positivism and it goes into Christian science, creating reality by things we try to think. That's not the faith of the Bible.

Faith comes from the word of God. That's why I tell you in the name of the Lord that you pray with me at the end of this service. God, I'm gonna find the discipline.

I'm gonna make time, find time. You will help me. But I am gonna read the word of God every day like I've never done it.

You will be fought by every demon in hell. The phone will ring. You'll be distracted in your mind.

You'll think of things you had to do that day. Come on, how many know what I'm talking about? Why? Because Satan knows. You and I get that word in our heart.

It's better than hearing any group sing. Preachers can do okay and help us if they preach the word. But there's nothing in the world like getting alone with your Bible.

This, for hundreds of years, was the sign of devout Christian life, people alone with the word of God, with a Bible open on their lap or reading it on their knees, and then intermixing with praise and worship and prayer with the word of God because the word of God will help you to pray because those promises create faith. Those promises create prayer. You just don't pray emotionally and out of desperation.

You pray with faith. And Jesus said, when you pray, believe. But how can you believe unless you have a promise to believe and how can you have a promise to believe unless that word is found in your heart? And it's gotta come fresh every day.

I don't care how long you went to church and where you went in Kingston, Jamaica, or Brooklyn, New York, or any place else that you ever came from, or Tennessee. That word is not, you need a fresh word. You need fresh manna.

When God was feeding the Israelites for 40 years in the wilderness, he did an interesting thing. He said, I'm not giving you food for a week. I'm not giving you food for five days.

Every morning, you go out and you gather the word. I'll have it for you for the food, the manna. You go out every day, you bend over, that's a sign of humility, and you pick it up and I'll feed you every single day fresh.

If you keep it overnight, it'll rot. If you keep it overnight, it will rot. This is the sign of how preachers lose their anointing and their blessing.

They preach old sermons and stop digging and searching. They stop spending time with God and approaching the word of God with humility. They just get by with Pentecostal culture, or charismatic culture, or Baptist culture.

We need fresh food every day. Come on, how many love fresh food every day? One day, I got deathly sick many years ago when I first went in the ministry. I didn't know much about Puerto Rican food.

I know a lot now and eat a lot of different dishes, but I didn't know, I knew a little, but I knew rice and beans, I knew a few things, but I went to a restaurant and ordered a pasteles. And if you know anything about pasteles, which is a delicious food, Puerto Rican food, you don't eat it in a restaurant unless you know who cooked it and when they cooked it. Anybody here ever eat a pasteles? Lift your hand if you ever had a pasteles.

Oh, they're good, patele yuca, mi favorito. I ate this patele, and I took one bite, and I knew, there's something wrong with this. But I thought, no, maybe it's an acquired taste, and I forced it down.

They had probably made it about eight years previously and frozen that thing. I started getting sick and feeling weak within a week. Two weeks later, Pastor Olmo was there, I think, when it happened.

My wife ran up to me at the end of the service in this little building in front of 30 people and said, Jim, something's wrong. Your eyes are yellow. I got hepatitis.

They put me in a hospital. Even the nurse wouldn't talk to me. She just came in with her pills.

I knew I was sick. When the nurse doesn't talk to you, you know you're sick. And she would just drop something, angels, she'd go, later, see you.

And I was there 10 days, I think 10 days. Old food, every day. Listen, the most important thing today and tomorrow when you wake up, the most important thing is you spend time with God and his word.

That's the most important thing. No, no, Pastor, but I have a list of priorities. I gotta do this.

You don't know how busy my life is. Listen, you wanna stand in the day of evil? You wanna fight the devil? Come on, how many wanna fight the devil and overcome him? The sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. Let me give you just two other things about the word.

And we also thank God continually because when you receive the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it, isn't that a good definition of a preacher? Not preaching baba and nonsense, and this is what I think, but when you receive the word of God from us, you got it from us, but it was the word of God, which you heard from us. You accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God. Notice now, which is at work in you who believe.

What's at work? The word is at work. So many people come, we have all thought that. Oh, I want God to do a new thing in me.

Let him do it through the word. Notice when you get the word in your heart, it works by itself. Remember I said it produces faith? You don't have to try to have faith.

The word produces faith. There'll be faith all over you, in you. It works, this word is sharp and powerful.

Look, I close, Hebrews. For the word of God is what? Living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to the dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrows, it judges the thoughts and the attitudes of the heart.

Sin will keep you from the Bible and the Bible will keep you from sin. Did you hear me? When you and I get into bad things and wrong attitudes and bad practices and we're clinging to it, you will not want to read the Bible because the Bible will get to you quick. You got a bad attitude towards somebody, you just open up anywhere you want, it'll talk to you about that.

How many have ever had that experience, right? And that's why some people avoid the word of God, they don't want to be dealt with by the word, but the word is sharp, it's active, look, it's alive, it's living. It gets in our hearts and it cuts out all kinds of junk. The Bible says the word of God is pure.

Are you bothered by unclean thoughts? Are you bothered by past life things you've did which are wrong but they come back in your memory bank? The only way to overcome that is to fill yourself with vitamin Bible, vitamin B, the Bible. That's not bad, is it? That's not bad, it just came to me. Vitamin B. Listen, the Bible will fight that.

Don't you fight it, how would you fight that? Do you have the strength to fight it? No, but the word of God, it's living, it's sharp, it's cutting it. So attacked by impurity, the best thing is to fill yourself with the pure word of God because the spirit works through the word. Let me tell you something, you cannot separate God from his word.

Let's say I talk to Angel Zapata and I say, I really love Angel, I love Angel, I love his wife, they mean so much to me. Angel said, Pastor, I'd like to talk to you. I don't wanna talk to you, I wanna hear what you have to say.

Well, I thought you loved me. I know, but I just don't wanna hear what you wanna say. Someone say, no, you're mistaken, Pastor, you don't love someone if you don't wanna hear what they have to say.

How many Christians live under that deception? We say we love the Lord, but all the letters he wrote to us, love letters, we don't wanna hear what he has to say. I need to hear what he has to say. One last word here along that line.

The Bible talks about don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. How do you get your mind renewed so you don't think like that old person you used to be, but you think like the new creation that Jesus has made you? A lot of us have the Holy Spirit living in us. Obviously, if we're Christians, the Spirit lives in us, but our behavior doesn't change the way we want, and we wonder why.

I don't know what's wrong. God is in me, the Spirit's in me, but I just act, you know, I blow up my temper, I blow up, I go crazy. I talk, and my profanity comes when I get frustrated.

Words I'm ashamed of using come back to me because I'm thinking the old way. How do you get your mind renewed? The Word of God renews your mind. But, Pastor Cimbala, it takes time, and I want instant.

I want just someone to lay their hands on me, and then it'll all be better. God can do a lot of things through the laying on of hands, but he can't renew your mind through the laying on of hands. God cannot change the way you think by the laying on of hands.

He's given us another method. God cannot feed you and keep you strong every day. God cannot give you the sword of the Spirit by laying on of hands and then never attending to anything else.

No, we need this Word of God. You know the best days of my life? Listen to me. I'll be as vulnerable and open as I can be.

The best days of my life has been days I spent in the Word of God. Not like a hermit, although sometimes, if you're going through special battles, you need sometimes an hour or two just in the Word of God. What's that? Somebody's gonna watch a football game or go to a movie? What's that, a couple hours? They don't even think about it.

10 minutes in the Word of God, and we're already getting itchy. Come on, it's true. Come on, do I get a witness here? Because we're so carnal in our thinking.

No, there's some things that bring the greatest joy of just having a good meal and being filled with the Word of God. And then when challenges come in life, the Holy Spirit just brings what you read during the day right to you. Oh no, no, I'm not afraid.

I used to be afraid of that. No, I just read this morning. Greater is he that's in me than he that is in the world.

I don't have to be afraid. Jesus said, no, peace I give you. I have his peace.

I'm gonna enjoy it. I will never leave you or forsake you. Satan, don't lie to me and say I'm alone.

God doesn't care. Jesus said, I'll never leave you nor forsake you. He's not a man that he should lie, but unless that Word is alive, being made real to us by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit works through the Word because he wrote the Word.

He wrote the Word. This is how we grieve the Holy Spirit. He wrote a Word and we don't wanna read it, but we want his help.

No, we have to spend time in the Word of God. And that's the battle for a lot of us. We're going too fast.

Those are my worst days. My worst days, even busy doing the work of the Lord. Too much counseling, too much preaching, not enough time alone with the Word of God.

Pastor Simba, that's dinosaur religion. I don't even hear people talk about that. I would care less what you hear people talk about or what I hear people talk about.

I know what God says in his Word. Faith comes by and hearing by the Word of Christ. That Word will work in you.

It'll produce faith. Are you struggling to believe? Just today, say, God, I come to you humbly. Yeah, that's right, I need thee.

Every hour I need thee. Close your eyes with me. We never make invitations like this, but let's make one and close.

If you're here today and say, Pastor Simba, I want to come to God today and ask him to revive the Word of God in my life. It's gonna take time. It's gonna maybe take a change in my schedule, whatever, but I am not gonna go into a battle without the sword.

No, I will not do that. I will not try to walk the walk of faith and live by faith and overcome by faith when I don't pay attention to the only thing that can produce faith in me, the Word of God. I love music, I love to witness, I love to talk, I love fellowship, but oh, Almighty God, give me a new love and desire for your Word.

Not gonna ask anyone to stand. I'm not gonna even open my own eyes, but just lift your hand and say, Pastor, I want to pray that prayer with you at the end. I need more of the Word of God in my life.

I have to learn how to read it and get it in my heart, meditate on it, not just quick speed read it. I need to really find out this Word that works in you. I want to see that Word working in me.

Thank you. Father God, I thank you that we could study your Word about the Word, and for those who might be watching via streaming, Lord, I pray that this Word will go into their hearts, and they will make a decision today to ask God that they might come into a new relationship daily with the Word of God. God, give us this self-control, give us these new godly habits of every day.

I can't live off of last week's food, leftovers. Some of us have spiritual hepatitis because we're living off of stuff from 20 years ago. No, give us fresh food every day.

We need you, and we want everything you have provided for us, and one of the great things you've given us is the Word of God. It's a lamp, it's a light, it's pure, it's holy, it's powerful, it produces faith. Now, Lord, we've prayed this, it's gonna happen starting this moment, this very day.

The Word of God is gonna start working in us as we read it, as we meditate on it. It's powerful, it produces faith. It's full of life, and it cleans out junk that we get clogged up with.

Thank you for the power of your Word.

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