

Seek The Old Paths

“Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths...and walk therein” (Jeremiah 6:16)

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ARE PREACHERS TODAY PROPHETS?

Rod Rutherford

Pentecostalism, a movement which has at its basis the contention that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit continue to the present, is riding a high wave of popularity today. Once confined to a few tiny, not too respectable, “holy roller” sects, Pentecostalism is now referred to by some religious historians as the “third major force in Christendom” after Catholicism and Protestantism. This movement has infiltrated virtually every major religious body in our nation, including the Lord’s church. These “Neo-Pentecostals,” also called “Charismatics” (from the Greek word *charisma* meaning “gift”), claim that the miraculous gifts possessed by some first century Christians (Mark 16:17-20; I Cor. 12:8-10) continue today and are available to all true believers in our time.

The influence of Pentecostalism in the Lord’s church is seen not only in members scattered here and there who claim tongue speaking or other miraculous phenomena, but also in the vocabulary used by many members of the church. It is not uncommon in our time to hear Christians misuse “miracle,” for instance. The word “miracle” in our English Bible is a translation of the Greek word “*dunamis*” which, according to W. E. Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, “is used of works of a supernatural origin and character, such as could not be produced by natural agents and means.” Everything in our physical universe operates according to natural laws which the Creator set in motion at the beginning of creation. A miracle occurs when Divine Power suspends, sets aside, or over-rules natural laws in a special circumstance for a specific

purpose. In spite of the Biblical use of “miracle” and the clear teaching of the New Testament that miracles no longer occur, some members of the church will erroneously refer to such things as the birth of a baby as a miracle when the birth process is clearly a matter of natural law. Sometimes God’s providential working in the affairs of men is also called miraculous, when, in actuality, no laws of nature have been interfered with, but God has simply worked through the natural course of human history.

Another misuse or misunderstanding of a Biblical word, which betrays the influence of Pentecostalism, is the misuse of the word “prophet” in reference to a preacher. A study of the way the word “prophet” is used in the Bible will reveal that prophets and preachers do have one thing in common. Both are spokesmen for God. *But there is a great and vital difference between the two!* A prophet was an *inspired* spokesman for God. He possessed the influence of the Holy Spirit which revealed God’s word *directly* to him. Inspired preachers of the New Testament era were also inspired of God, but preachers of today are *not* inspired of God! They must depend upon God’s Word, revealed by inspired men, for their knowledge of God’s will.

David, a prophet of God (Acts 2:29-31), tells us how he received his message: *“The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue”* (II Sam. 23:2). Another example in the Old Testament, which clearly shows that a prophet was one who received his message directly from God, can be seen in the call of the great prophet Jeremiah. The young man protested his being chosen to be

a prophet because of his youth and inexperience (Jer. 1:6). But God assured him: *“Say not I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth”* (Jer. 1:7-9). The Apostle Peter summed up the Source of the message of the prophets when he wrote: *“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scriptures is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”* (II Peter 1:20-21).

**The application of the word “prophet”
to a preacher or anyone else in our
time is not only erroneous,
it is misleading and dangerous!**

Another mark of Biblical prophets, which preachers today do not possess, was the ability to foretell the future. Prophets were *forthtellers* in that they revealed God’s will, given to them by inspiration, to their contemporaries, but they were also *foretellers* in that they were at times given a revelation of some future event. For instance, Isaiah, the great Messianic prophet, was permitted

to foretell the virgin birth of our Lord (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23), His lineage of the seed of Jesse—David’s father (Isa. 11:1; Rom. 1:3), and His vicarious suffering for our sins (Isa. 53; II Cor. 5:21). New Testament prophets such as Agabus foretold events in the immediate as well as the long range future (Acts 11:28; 21:10,22,33).

Preachers today, unlike the true prophets of the Old and New Testaments, do not possess the supernatural ability either to forthtell or foretell God’s word. We are limited to a proclamation of that which has already been revealed by inspired men in the Bible. Surely, this ought to convince any Bible believing person that no man has the right to call himself a prophet today. The application of the word “prophet” to a preacher or anyone else in our time is not only erroneous, it is misleading and dangerous!

Perhaps it is time for us to recall one of the slogans of the great movement to restore New Testament Christianity. Pioneer preachers of the gospel in our land urged believers to “Call Scriptural things by Scriptural names.” Gospel preachers should be satisfied to be known by the Scriptural designations of “preacher,” “evangelist” and “minister of the Word” (II Tim. 4:1-5). To be called by any other designation is both confusing and sinful!

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Beware Of Washed-Out Bridges (Marking False Teachers)

Garland M. Robinson

I suppose no one is so naive as to think that running your car over a washed-out bridge will not cause certain injury and, perhaps, even death. Is it not the responsibility of everyone to inform others of such perils? I would be derelict if I did not inform you of the danger and waste of driving your car onto a broken-down bridge. Suppose, though, I had the attitude of many so-called “well-intentioned” brethren who do not believe in

specifying the danger of false doctrine and those who promote it in the Lord’s church. Or on the other hand, suppose I am one who says false doctrine should be exposed but not the individual or personality espousing it. Can I ignore to expose both the doctrine and those advocating it in light of Bible teaching? The idea is promoted by many individuals that if people know what false doctrine is, they will be able to identify it when they run

into it. That's well and good and so it should be. However, the scriptures command us to identify the false teacher, too!

Let's turn our attention back to the example of washed-out bridges. It is my duty to warn people of driving over bridges which have fallen down. Therefore, whenever they see such a bridge they will hopefully be able to identify it and stop short of certain disaster. But suppose I know the location of such a bridge on a certain road over which many of my friends travel or may very well travel on occasion and do not warn them the bridge is out. I've known all along that it is out but did not believe in telling people the identity and location of it. I have always instructed my friends and acquaintances of the danger of said bridges and always to be on the lookout for them. On one particular occasion you find yourself traveling the road on which the bridge is out. As most of us drive, you are relaxed and at ease behind the wheel not really alert for quick defensive driving. All of a sudden your car plunges to the river or ravine below. You never knew what happened! Perhaps, though, you were fortunate enough to see the danger ahead but by the time your foot hit the brake it was too late! The damage was done.

What kind of friend would I be if I failed to point out the identity and location of such hazards? I might even be held on criminal charges if it could be proven I knew of the danger and did nothing to warn motorists.

WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR ROMANS 16:17

Can you see the parallel? What kind of an elder, preacher or teacher would I be if I refused to inform the brethren of not only false doctrine but those who teach it as well? Would God not hold me accountable in light of Romans 16:17-18? This passage reads: "*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*" Notice the pronouns used in these verses: "Mark **them**...avoid **them** ...for **they** serve not our Lord Jesus Christ but **their** own belly." These verses do not tell us to mark the false teaching or doctrine, but *the person teaching it!* Please explain to me how this command can be obeyed while refusing to name the individuals

causing the trouble? The word "mark" means "to give attention to, observe, watch." Now how are we going to watch them when we do not know who they are and preachers and elders refuse to identify them?

Surely, no one will deny that the gospel of Christ is pure and is to be defended. How can we be faithful and refuse to do that which the inspired apostle Paul said he was ready to do? He defended the gospel everywhere he went (Phil. 1:7,17). The command to preachers is to "**preach no other doctrine**" or anything "**that is contrary to sound doctrine.**" Further instruction is given to "**fight the good fight of faith**" and to "**keep that which is committed to thy trust**" (I Tim. 1:3,10; 4:6-11,13,16; 6:3-5,12,13, 20,21). In Paul's second epistle to Timothy, he was instructed to "**hold fast the form (pattern) of sound words**" and to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. He was told to "**preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine**" (II Tim. 1:13,14; 2:1-4; 4:1-7). Are you familiar with Jude 3 which commands us to "*earnestly contend for the faith?*" Then why not do as God has commanded?

IT IS NOT RIGHT TO DISOBEY GOD'S COMMANDS

How can we be right and refuse to do that which Christ and his apostles did? Are there any examples of false brethren being identified and marked in the Bible? There most certainly are! Read these passages and see for yourself: **Hymenaeus and Alexander** (I Tim. 1:18-20), **Phygellus and Hermogenes** (II Tim. 1:15), **Hymenaeus and Philetus** (II Tim. 2:16-18), **Demas** (II Tim. 4:10), **Alexander the copper-smith** (II Tim. 4:14,15), **Diotrephes** (III John 9,10), **Jannes and Jambres** (II Tim. 3:8).

What conclusion must be drawn? Is identifying false teachers right or wrong? How can we obey II Thessalonians 3:6 which says to "**withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly,**" if he is not identified? Did not Paul warn the brethren at Ephesus night and day, with tears, of such things (Acts 20:26-31)? Did he not warn the Philippian brethren also (Phil. 3:18)? Can we do any less and expect to be pleasing to God?

Surely it ought to go without saying that we are not "blood-thirsty" to have someone to mark. It is not an easy task nor is it pleasant to do. Let

us use caution in being sure whereof we speak. Let us not be hasty in opening our mouths. But please, brethren, let us open them when the occasion is necessary! Have the facts, a person's good name is sometimes all he has and is certainly a prized possession.

NOTE: When it is deemed necessary to identify individuals by name in **Seek The Old Paths**, it is by the request and/or approval of the elders of the East Corinth Church of Christ. —The Elders—

I applaud these faithful shepherds who stand guard over the flock and are ready to "stop the mouths of the gainsayers." We wish their kind would increase! —gmr—

Identifying Rattlesnakes

It's time for church. You get ready and go as you normally do. The service begins. The singing is edifying and the prayers are offered before God. The preacher steps into the pulpit and speaks about the serious problem of error and false doctrine. He reads many verses warning of the danger of error, those who propagate it and not to fall captive to it (I John 4:1; Jer. 5:32; 23:16; Matt. 7:15-16; Rom. 16:17-18; Acts 20:29-31; II Cor. 11:13-15; Gal. 1:6-9; 2:4; Eph. 4:14; II Tim. 2:16-18; I Tim. 1:20). However, he does not believe in identifying those who teach error. He simply warns brethren to watch for themselves and be on guard.

At the close of the service he says, "Oh, by the way, as I entered the building before service I saw a snake coiled up under a car. I know for sure that it was poisonous. We all know the danger of such deadly, venomous reptiles. As a matter of fact, I know whose car it is under. But, as you know, I do not believe in calling names or identifying such deadly enemies. Therefore, you must be extremely careful as you leave the building and approach your car."

Who ever heard of such a wild and ridiculous tale? Would not every person present want to know where the snake was? Why in the world, then, would not every member want to know the deadly and damnable doctrines tearing the church

apart and especially those who are teaching them? To fail to point out and identify those who are working havoc in the Lord's body today is beyond the realm of reason and common sense and is anti-scriptural!

Let us warn of error and its deadly end. But, let us also identify those who are spreading it just as we would warn about rattlesnakes.

—Garland M. Robinson—

Consenting With Sinners

Charles A. Pledge

It is difficult to conceive of one professing to be a Christian while consenting with a murderer to murder; or remaining silent when a witness to the same. Yet, we have become a people who, claiming to be God's people, have learned to peacefully co-exist with sin in nearly every form. One only needs to read the history of ancient Israel to learn that this is not a new art but one nearly as old as man. Did not Adam hold his peace while the serpent was tempting Eve? Only Noah spoke against the evils of his day. Israel had those who thought it prudent to hold their tongues while their brethren sinned at will. Jesus was crucified by those whom he spoke against while the mob was moved to cry for his blood. Did not each who held their peace in the face of sin consent with the sin they were aware of but did not speak against?

In the Old Testament a law concerning this very thing is set forth to Israel. "And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity" (Lev. 5:1). It was a very simple command: when one knew of sin and failed to testify against that sin, he was guilty of the same sin. To know and fail to speak is not only wrong, it is to consent with the sin about which one remains silent. This was the case in the eighth chapter of John when the men brought the woman caught in adultery. Determined to ensnare the Lord, they momentarily overlooked the fact that they became guilty of adultery when they did not testify against the man in the case. "...Let him that is without sin

cast the first stone" (v.7b) brought them back to reality because each of them knew the law under which they lived; and by that law they stood condemned. If the woman was to be stoned, so must they be stoned for allowing the man to go free. They each took their guilty conscience and stole away.

But, say some, that was the Old Testament law governing only Israel. What has that to do with us? First, that law only affirmed a principle that has always been man's responsibility. Second, we have an explicit statement in the New Testament to "*Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*" (Eph. 5:11). This statement, again, merely emphasizes a principle that has always been alive in God's dealing with man. Am I guilty of that sin about which I remain silent? Do I actually consent with the sin which I refuse to reprove?

Sin is personified in Romans chapter seven as being alive and aggressive. Sin is not some passive principle that remains inactive and silent. Sin works through the passions and desires of the flesh (James 1:13-15). It is alive and active, therefore it must be opposed or allowed to overcome. When one remains silent about sin, that one is consenting to sin. It matters not what the sin may be, whether of the mind (pride, arrogance, etc.) or other works of the flesh such as drunkenness, murder, adultery, one consents with the sin he does not reprove.

It is not an unusual thing in our age to hear of some preacher being forbidden to speak on some Biblical subject, such as fornication and other sins, some in the congregation are guilty of. There are two presumptions made when this is true.

- 1) A congregation (its elders or others) presumes to have the right to forbid the Bible to be preached. If any have the right to forbid one passage or one Biblical subject to be preached, they have the right to forbid all passages and all subjects of the Bible to be preached. The same authority that allows forbidding one passage to be mentioned allows the whole Bible to be forbidden.
- 2) A congregation (or individuals) forbidding any Biblical subject or passage to be preached must presume that sin is acceptable to God, and that consenting to that sin is an option God grants to all. Both presumptions are fatal to those making them and all who will submit to such.

Among preachers it is not unusual to know those who have been "fired" for speaking on some Biblical subject that was taboo in a congregation.

Some preachers seem to have accepted such presumption and learned how to be silent at the appropriate time. Some editors and writers know what not to write in order to be popular. Some sins are allowed to go unchallenged and unreproved until it is too late. But in all this, let us never lose sight of the fact that silence equals consent. Failure to reprove sin amounts to guilt of that sin.

Congregations, more often than not, want their preacher to be a good mixer who will get along well with the world. The more the world applauds the preacher, the better the congregation likes him. But let the preacher preach a little too hard on sin, and the community disapprove, and watch the fair weather folks turn against him. This writer has always been fortunate to preach in congregations where plain preaching was wanted and support of straight teaching against sin of every kind was supported. But we have observed that many of our friends and acquaintances were not so fortunate. There are too many Ahabs who stand ready to accuse preachers of righteousness of being "*troublers of Israel*" (I Kings 18:17). But, as was Ahab, these are consenters with sin and need to be reproved along with the sinners because sin is that which troubles.

In a day when the intoxication of sin has brought inebriation even to the people of God, let each who desires to live eternally in God's presence speak against sin with all the force within us. If we want to live in heaven, let each learn how to hate the evil and love the good and speak accordingly with conviction. Let preachers be preachers of righteousness and, if they refuse, let them be known as those who consent with sinners and hate the good. About the only thing some will speak against is the "attitude" of those who speak out against sin. Let all such continue in their evil ways but the rest of us should gird our loins with truth and righteousness and speak the word of God.

Be not deceived by smooth words and fair speech, brethren. Perverted love and feigned concern for the lost may cause some to hold their tongue in the presence of sin, but in every such case they have become guilty of the very sins they remain silent about. God commands us to "*Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*" Every person who by practice denies the validity and vitality of that command is guilty of the sins unreproved by them. They have consented with sin and the sinners who perpetrate them. Let those who would criticize

the “criticizers” and fight against the “fighters” continue to cast their first stone. The Lord is their judge and He has spoken!

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What Happened?

Warren Wilcox

I don't know when it happened. I don't even know if I knew it was happening. But sometime in the last fifteen or twenty years a lot within the church changed.

Used to, you could go to almost any congregation in any large town and hear the same thing taught. Now, it seems you could hear much of the same things denominations are teaching except it's in our pulpits.

Used to, you went to the congregation closest to you because where you went wasn't as important as what you could do through the church as you taught and served and worshipped. Now people drive past many church buildings either to hear sound preaching or to find a place to have their ears tickled—whichever they prefer.

Used to, people within the church tried to believe and practice what the Bible taught. If they didn't want to do that they left the church. Now, it seems, some want to stay in the church but change what the Bible teaches.

I know when you get older you get “old fogey,” “set in your ways,” and otherwise stubborn. But it seems to me that **this** characteristic of “stubbornness” is actually taught and encouraged in the Bible. I believe it comes under the heading of “faithfulness,” or “soundness,” or “old paths.” Sure, tradition is condemned (WHEN it makes the word void). We aren't talking about something man has a choice in, however.

We are talking about knowing what the Bible commands, believing it, preaching it, teaching it and standing up for it. Folks, it's the only thing that makes the Lord's church different from the world. Is it too late? I don't think so. Let's be those unique, “peculiar people” that God desires who “do the will of the Father who is in heaven.”

(Continued from back page,
FAR COUNTRY)

As I prepare this article, it now has been just about a year and a half since I entered into “full and complete unity” with the Independent Christian Church. Both before and after I made the transition, several faithful brethren tried to show me the error of my position, but I steadfastly refused to be swayed by their scriptural argumentation. However, what their argumentation could not do (not because it was faulty, but because I refused to listen) was accomplished by my experience of “full and complete unity” with the Independent Christian Church.

The congregation with which I have been working is quite “conservative,” as compared to most Independent Christian Church congregations. Nonetheless, my whole time with them has been a time of almost constant struggle, both with the congregational “leaders,” as well as with the majority of the members, over their erroneous concepts and teachings. These include grace (Swindoll, rather than Paul, is emphasized), baptism (they do not believe that it is necessary for a person to understand that baptism is “Into” the remission of sins, and thus will accept just about any person who has been immersed, regardless of the reason), premillennialism (the Persian Gulf War has caused this to surface and most of the members seem to be tainted by it), woman's role in the church (they have no problem with women leading prayers, leading singing, or even addressing the assembly), divorce and remarriage (they seem basically to hold the typical liberal views that Olan Hicks and others espouse), the qualifications of elders (a divorced and remarried man with no children has been an “elder” here within the past year), the Holy Spirit (typical denominational views concerning the direct operation of the Holy Spirit are held), the observance of Christmas and Easter (and even Halloween), and such like.

Now please remember, this is a “conservative” congregation about which I am talking. Based upon my knowledge gained from what I have read in Independent Christian Church publications, and from my dealings with area congregations, conditions are much worse than these in most Independent Christian Church congregations!

The result of all of this is that my eyes have really been opened to the extent of my doctrinal digression, especially my denial that the silence of the Scriptures does indeed forbid instrumental

music in worship, as well as the **grave error** of both my advocacy and practice of fellowship with the Independent Christian Church! You see, I have heard them justify various erroneous things which they advocate on the basis of the silence of the Scriptures. Their use of that very argumentation to justify the instrument is what finally caused me to see and **admit** to myself that my argumentation in favor of instrumental music was **wrong**. This realization, as well as some of the other areas wherein they advocate that which I firmly believe to be incorrect doctrine, has in turn caused me to realize that there is just no way that I, if I want to be true to God's Word (and I do), can continue in fellowship with the people of the Independent Christian Church.

Therefore, having come to myself (Luke 15: 17), and realizing that I have digressed into a "far country" (Luke 15: 13), my soul is in travail. Clearly, I am out of place among a people who really do not give much thought to Bible authority. Of course, I realize that I have no one to blame but myself. Quite clearly, I **have sinned**, and now bear the consequences of my sin. However, I publicly acknowledge and confess my sin, repent of it, and ask for the forgiveness of God as well as for that of my brethren. I have been the prodigal, but I want to come back home and truly once again be in fellowship with those who seek to "speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent."

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IMPORTANT DISCUSSION

Keith Mosher and Rubel Shelly will discuss the subject of "Grace Only" on April 14, 1992, at Harding Graduate School of Religion in Memphis, Tenn.

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I explained to brother Music just this morning (July 27, 1991) that if I were involved in a situation wherein I would be teaching a class on 'Current Liberalism,' dealing thoroughly with the persons and the places and the false doctrines, and needed the best textbook (under these circumstances available), *I would choose this book.*

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CORRECTION: In the December, 1991, issue of *Seek The Old Paths*, we printed an article by Ben Vick on pages 6-7 entitled, "We Are Going To Have To Defend The Truth Among Our Brethren." He quotes from brother **Dan Rogers** as an illustration of the point he was making. We printed that article unaware that brother Rogers had repented since that article was written. We wish to make this correction known to all and publicly apologize to brother Rogers. He is a student at Memphis School of Preaching and doing very well. We highly commend him and the work in which he is engaged. Found below is an excellent article by brother Rogers concerning what he found in the so-called "Conservative Christian Church."

A Journey Into A "Far Country"

Dan Rogers, III

It has been correctly said, "You are what you eat." Likewise, it may well be also said, "You are what you read." I should know, for as a result of a reading diet of too much *Restoration Review*, *One Body*, and similar liberal ink, and not enough Bible, I became, in the late 1980's, quite disillusioned with the churches of Christ. Reacting to what I perceived to be unChristian attitudes among my brethren (and not even recognizing at the time that my own attitudes were rotten), more and more I began, especially in published articles, to take a militant stance against the churches of Christ.

Coming under the insidious influence of the recent unity movement being propagated by the Independent Christian Church and certain liberal brethren, I became an advocate of "full and complete unity" with the Independent Christian Church, as well as embracing the concept that the silence of the scriptures does not forbid the use of instrumental music in worship. Thus it was, in the summer of 1989, and at the height of my disillusionment with my brethren, that I made, in spite of the protests of my wife, the transition (digression) into the Independent Christian Church, moving to Northeast Ohio to work with an "instrumental Church of Christ."

(Continued on page 6, FAR COUNTRY)

Seek The Old Paths Lectureship
 (Formerly Annual Miss. Lectureship)
July 26-30
Most Needed Lessons For Today
East Corinth Church of Christ

FROM OUR READERS

"Thank you for your paper"...*Hattiesburg, MS*. "Please take my name off your mailing list"...*Jackson, MS*. "I am a junior (teenage) Christian and I want to receive your newsletter "**Seek The Old Paths**" because when I read a copy of a friend's, I felt that it gave me a better insight on God's Word. I would truly appreciate it"...*Osyka, MS*. "Will you please put me on your mailing list. I like your title and true to the Book publications. They are getting hard to find"...*Morrison, TN*. "A friend back in my home town in KY recently introduced me to your paper. I thought it was simply wonderful! Could you please add me to your mailing list? A teaching tool like yours would be a big help to me in trying to talk to others about the gospel. I am very thankful to you for your help. Please keep putting out such a sound clear message"...*Chattanooga, TN*.

Seek The Old Paths is a publication of the **East Corinth Church of Christ** and is under the oversight of its elders. Its primary purpose and goal in publication can be found in: Jude 3; II Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:13; Titus 2:1; II Peter 1:12.
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