

The fear of God and the love of God

**As we walk on the King's
Highway**

Peter Michell

Introduction

Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life' - here we have some new perspectives on His saying.

We don't hear too much about the fear of God. Maybe it's gone out of fashion. It is a subject which rightly should apply to all those who are not born again - for they have not been cleansed of their sin and so face righteous judgement

Should born again believers fear God? It is a narrow road and few find it. We will come to a conclusion.

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Chapter 1

Sheer Terror

And all the people who lived on the earth were so terrified that they called out to the rocks and to the mountains, *'fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.'* Revelation 6:16

This period of future history is known as the Tribulation and is spoken of in many places in the scripture. Here it is in the Gospel of Matthew;

'For then there will be great tribulation such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved.' 24:21-22

Jesus warned that tribulation would be our normal experience here on earth, and some suffer much more than others – but nothing on the scale of what is yet to come.

Clearly it would be expected to have fear of God with this future event on the horizon.

The event, the Tribulation, is also named as *'the wrath of God.'* God's wrath is the result of righteous judgement.

The good news, for those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, is quoted by Paul to the Thessalonians in his first letter, '

'you turned to God from idols, to serve the living God and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers from the wrath to come.' 1:9-10

The wrath of the Lamb for unbelievers.

No wrath for born again believers.

Chapter 2

Righteous judgement and it's penalty

But isn't God a God of love?

Of course God is a God of love – also He is described as being a God of light. So these attributes have to work together.

Why was man created? To have fellowship with Almighty God. At the very beginning, man and God actually walked together in the Garden of Eden – until man's disobedience spoilt the party. Darkness and death entered into an otherwise perfect world. Genesis 2 and 3.

Man's disobedience is seen all through the scripture. Especially so in relation to the actions of His chosen nation, Israel. Numerous scriptures speak of God's anger being kindled as Israel worshipped other Gods. Sin in all its forms is an abomination to God. As God is entirely righteous we find that Israel were very clearly warned about their behaviour and it's consequences from the beginning:

In Deuteronomy 26 we find Israel have proclaimed the Lord to be their God and that the Lord has proclaimed Israel to be His special people. As Israel live in obedience to His voice, the Lord will raise them up above all other nations.

Deuteronomy 27 and 28 go on to speak very clearly of the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience.

Sin, Israel's sin, our sin, any sin is an abomination to the Lord - it is detestable. God hates sin it makes Him righteously angry.

So now God has to make judgements.

'Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteousness are Your judgements.' Revelation 16:7 - (The words spoken by an angel in the middle of a period of God's judgement during the Tribulation.)

So what is righteous judgement? The Greek word for righteous is "*dikaios*." The Oxford dictionary defines righteous as being morally right and judgement as considered decision.

God's judgements are made in love and in light. Light demands that darkness is dealt with as darkness cannot exist in light. The result of man bringing darkness, sin, into the world through disobedience, is the coming judgement and the consequence is the penalty of sin.

In a world in which eventually man will dwell with God, sin and darkness cannot exist. Righteous judgement demands the penalty be paid and the abomination of sin removed.

God's love will come to the rescue of those who will believe as we will see in due course.

Chapter 3

Restrained judgement.

Though sin makes the Lord God righteously angry, nevertheless He restrains His anger - He is slow to anger. The prophet Nahum records, *'The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.'* 1:3

The Psalmist (David) has, in psalm 145, *'The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy.'* Verse 8

Nehemiah has, in chapter 9, *'You are God ready to pardon. Gracious and merciful. Slow to anger. Abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them.'* Verse 17 Context - *'they refused to obey and they were not mindful of Your wonders that you did among them but they hardened their necks.'*

God is slow to anger, His righteous anger is restrained - until it can be restrained no longer. We see this at the time of Noah. Sin had become so monstrously awful that *'the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually, and the Lord was sorry He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.'* Genesis 6:5-6

But Noah was a just man who walked with God, blameless in his generation. The righteous cannot be judged along with the wicked so Noah is instructed to build an ark to survive the judgement of the flood.

The Lord made a covenant with Abraham, his descendants would inherit the land the Lord would give.

When God spoke these words to Abraham he was in the land of the Amorites. But Abraham could not at that time inherit the land because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full – it would be the fourth generation who would return to inherit.

So we understand:

**The Lord God has righteous anger against man's sin.
His anger is restrained.
However, when iniquity is full His righteous
judgement follows.**

**How long before, in this present age, man's iniquity
becomes full?**

**We note that His judgement and His righteousness
anger is not for those who are just. His perfect love
makes a way for those who are justified, by belief in
Jesus blood sacrifice.**

Chapter 4

Fear of God for unbelievers.

Of course if one does not know the way of salvation, then fear would be the result – because of God’s coming wrath when iniquity in the earth becomes full.

We don’t often think of God as having wrath, we prefer to think of the goodness and kindness of God. But wrath is the result of man’s sin. The Lord is intensely displeased by sin, which then results in judgement and its penalty.

Can’t God just overlook sin? If there is no consequence, no penalty for sin, then evil would be totally rampant on the earth - we saw that in the days of Noah. Even when it was very well known to them that there would be penalties for sin, the nation of Israel continually fell into sin and disobedience.

Those who do not believe in God should be very fearful of what is to come - but then they don’t believe so they don’t perceive and are not fearful. Until such time as the eyes are opened.

Sin is not to be denied, *‘all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.’* Romans 3:23. Yet when one speaks with unbelievers the response, ‘I’ve not done anything really bad,’ is not uncommon.

The final consequence for the unbeliever is to be subject to the wrath of God – that is His ‘hot anger.’ Their unbelief together with their sin provokes Him to anger.

(Read the Old Testament to see how many times Israel provoked the Lord to anger!)

It is not God's desire that any should perish and be lost. However He does not over ride man's free will - He won't stop mankind from following unbelief - the way of destruction. 2 Peter 3:9

Because mankind uses its own judgement many do not recognise that they are born in sin, live in sin and will die in sin unless they are born again and receive God's gift of righteousness. The final reckoning will be 'did you believe - were you born again.'

Chapter 5

Bring in perfect love – God’s Son

‘God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.’ John 3:16

God is perfect in all His ways – so He is perfect in justice. Justice demands the payment of the penalty for sin.

Perfect love led Jesus to the cross to bear the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2) – as a sacrifice acceptable to the Father. (That is acceptable in payment of the penalty of sin – which is why we who believe are said to be *‘bought with a price.’* 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23)

Justice and wrath are the inevitable consequence of mankind’s continuing sin. Now the Lord God offers a way of redemption which is open to each and every human being – all it requires is belief. The perfect, sinless sacrifice has been made.

Time to change paths -

‘Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it.’ Proverbs 4:16-17

Chapter 6

Come through the door - be born again

Jesus said, *'I am the door. If anyone enters by Me he will be saved and go in and out and find pasture.'* John 10:9

Understanding, and believing that Jesus is the acceptable sacrifice, that paid the penalty so that my sin could be cleansed, sees Him as the door through which I can and must enter in order to come to the Father.

Jesus said, *'I am the door,'* and *'No one comes to the Father except through Me.'* John 14:6

Its all about opposing kingdoms!

Jesus is the doorway from one kingdom to another. One kingdom loves darkness and the other light. One kingdom exhibits darkness and death, the other light and life.

Here is the problem, *'For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and **men loved darkness rather than light** because their deeds were evil.'* John 3:17-19

All mankind are born into the kingdom of darkness and death – ever since the 'fall of man' in Genesis 3.

Mankind were, and are, dwelling in the kingdom of death and darkness until such time as they come through Jesus the door to the kingdom of life and light. A new or second birth is required.

'Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God..... unless one is born of water (natural birth) and the Spirit (rebirth of the human spirit), he cannot enter the kingdom of God.' John 3:3 and 5

Come through Jesus the door and one is born again - the human spirit is re-energised, born again, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Now we can go in and out and we will find pasture - sustenance for life.

So we are enabled to live in two dimensions - the physical world with which we are familiar and now the spiritual world, the kingdom of God. We go in and out, so to speak, between the temporal and the eternal. In both cases we are called to be walking with Jesus, as aspects of the temporal mirror the eternal.

God's provision, pasture, is fully available in both dimensions.

'I am the door. If anyone enters by Me he will be saved and go in and out and find pasture.' John 10:9

Chapter 7

Walk on the way.

We have stepped through the door and we have come onto the way, the road, the thoroughfare. Now we meet Jesus as, *'I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me.'* John 14:6

When Jesus said, *'I am the way,'* the text uses the word for a highway, a road, (*hodos* in Greek) Whilst the use here is metaphorical, Jesus is not made of tarmac, we must retain the concept – the way to go, the way to walk. Not just a signpost, more than that a pathway to walk on.

Now to understand more let us consider the gospel of Matthew. In chapter 7, verse 14 we find, *'Narrow is the gate (or door!) and difficult (thlibo – narrow) is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.'*

Two narrows! The gate or door is narrow because it is the only way in. No one comes to the Father except through Him. Then stepping through the gate or door onto the way we find that is also described as narrow (difficult.)

Back to Matthew – *'enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and there are many who go in by it.'* 7:13.

As we go in and out we should be aware that we will face choices all the time . Do we go by the narrow way or shall we take that 'nice looking' broad way that is always in view in the temporal world.

For believers, as for unbelievers, the broad way leads to destruction or ruination or waste.

For an unbeliever the destruction is total - that is both temporal and eternal. For the believer the situation is very different. The broad way will lead to waste and to loss in this life only, because we have been promised, and guaranteed, eternal life - it is part of being born again.

Fortunately when Jesus said, '*I am the way, the truth and the life,*' He told us the how to walk on the way and where we are going.

Chapter 8

How to walk - the way of truth

Jesus is the pathway and He is the truth - conclusion the narrow way is to proceed in truth. We started our journey when we entered through the narrow door and we continue our journey on the narrow way.

Truth is not what we determine to be true. Truth is what Jesus determines to be true. With that describing the narrow way, what help and guidance do we have?

Jesus has given us wonderful guidance for this very important subject.

1 *We have - the scriptures.*

'All scripture is given by inspiration of God (literally God breathed) and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete (perfectly fitted), thoroughly equipped for every good work.' 2 Timothy 3:16-17

The scripture details two covenants - the Old Covenant of Law and the New Covenant of grace. We are to understand and live by the New Covenant of grace brought in by Jesus blood. *'This cup is the new covenant in My blood.'* 1 Corinthians 11:25

The important question is this, do we accept the narrow way of the scripture or do we pick and choose and ignore bits we don't like? Today the scripture is under great attack and much of it from Christians who do not want to be limited, but prefer their own thoughts - the wide way to destruction is always attractive to the flesh.

2 *We have - the indwelling Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit is described as the Spirit of Truth and we have Him dwelling in our human spirit. He will lead us and will bring us the words of Jesus.

However, we need to be very certain - nothing the Spirit says to us or any way He seems to lead us to will contradict the scriptures. The devil is very, very keen on saying 'did God really say?' as he seeks to lead us off the narrow way.

The pathway is described as 'the highway of holiness,' and we are urged to be holy because He is holy. It is a high calling which is always under pressure - Jesus said few are they who find it because of opposition from -

The world. The ways of the world in which we dwell are founded in darkness - making the way of light stand out. Thus we are frequently opposed and challenged by things of the world, which are attractive to our flesh. (Flesh is our physical body and our soul, our mind will and emotions.)

The enemy. Is always seeking those he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8) Getting us to disobey the scripture is his favourite tactic. He tried ever so hard with Jesus, and failed, he tries it with us.

Our own desire. Probably the most dangerous source of coming off the pathway. We want something - maybe position even in the church, frequently money or power.

With Eve, becoming wise appeared to be good but was the opposite. We may want to be a teacher, or a prophet, or a church elder or leader – it all seems good, but unless called by the Lord to such a position it will be the opposite producing bad fruit. And unless in line with the scripture it will also produce bad fruit.

So when the world or the enemy or our own desires are trying to press us into a direction we can look to the Spirit. Does the direction agree with the truth of scripture and do we have that internal peace of the Holy Spirit or have we persuaded ourselves otherwise?

'A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called, 'the Highway of Holiness.' Isaiah 35:8 speaking of the restored Zion when Jesus reigns on earth in the Millennium. It is the ransomed, the redeemed of the Lord.

The Highway of Holiness is a description of Jesus as the Way – it is for us now. We walk it by choice.

However, we fool ourselves if we say we don't sin. We all do. We make wrong choices. We convince ourselves that we are right when our actions are contrary to scripture. We get things wrong -we are human! We step off the Highway.

The wonderful news is that Jesus knows all about it and has provided regular complete cleansing –*'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'* 1 John 1:9

Just like the example of Jesus washing the disciples feet. They got dirty from contact with the road -Jesus washed their feet. We get dirty, sometimes, from our contact with the world – our ‘feet’ are washed by confession, as we have just read.

Back on the Highway where the word of the Lord is a lamp to our feet.

‘Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.’
Psalm 119:105

‘The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.’ Proverbs 4:18

Surely this is the way to walk!

Chapter 9

Destination - God always leads us in triumph

Jesus said, *'I am the way, the truth and the life.'* This is a way of Jesus saying I am the destination, I am life. Life!

When seeing Jesus as the way, that is likened to the highway upon which to walk, we are led to consider the destination. Where does this pathway lead?

'Whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.' John 3:17

Our destination is eternal life! It is also described as our inheritance:

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept (guarded) by the power of God through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.' 1 Peter 1:3-5

Many scriptures directly say that our inheritance is guaranteed by God or strongly imply or support that: For example - 2 Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5. Ephesians 1:13-14 and 4:30, Philippians 1:6, Romans 8:31-39, Hebrews 13:5

Destination Eternal life - guaranteed.

But, what about the journey, our time on this earth before we reach our final destination?

Paul wrote in his second letter to the Corinthian church, *'Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ.'* (2:14)

This is Paul - who suffered all sorts of troubles, tribulations and difficulties, including continuous attacks from the enemy. Yet his testimony is of God always leading him in triumph!

Our experience will include tribulation - for Jesus expressly warns, *'These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'*
John 16:33

We are described as sojourning here on earth - that is *'paroikia'* in Greek and it means to live as a stranger, as a resident alien! Just like Abraham was called to leave Haran so that he could receive his inheritance - but had, by faith, to sojourn in tents in the land of promise whilst he waited for the city whose builder was God.

Here we see God's promise at two levels - Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, but that was not the end. He waited for the inheritance. We dwell on earth and have all God's promises as we too wait for the glorious inheritance to come. We will dwell with the Lord in a renewed earth for His 1,000 year reign and finally for eternity in the New Jerusalem.

Whilst we sojourn here on earth by faith God will always lead us in triumph. The throne of grace is open for us.

Chapter 10

What goes wrong?

Paul instructs the Philippians, *'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.'* (2:12) (He advised the Galatians, *'each one shall bear his own load.'* (6:5))

This does not deny the fact that we can and should support one another. Nevertheless the salvation of our souls is ultimately up to us. Please note this is not the salvation of our human spirit, which we have already seen is God's business and is guaranteed by Him.

The scripture confirms the three fold nature of us humans as Paul write to the Thessalonians, *'Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.'* 1 Thessalonians 5:23

So - the human spirit is born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit -job done and guaranteed.

The human body will be changed in the twinkling of an eye and we shall receive new incorruptible bodies at the coming of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 15:50-54)

We are left with the human soul - the mind, the will and the emotions - here is where we are called to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

It is worth noting that the Greek word for salvation *'soteria'* means deliverance, that is deliverance from danger.

Meet the vacuum cleaner

It is a metaphor for the mind. The mind will suck up everything going. It is up to us to make sure that the input is good spiritual food such as worship, scripture, prayer and so on. It is also up to us to take captive, as prisoners of war, all thoughts that are contrary to our faith and contrary to holiness.

Romans 12:1-2 and 2 Corinthians 10: 3-5 are our key passages:

'I Beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.'

'though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.'

One cannot overstate how important it is to keep the mind focussed on spiritual things and spiritual truth – this is a vital part of the narrow way.

Keep on the narrow pathway.

It is very easy to slip off the pathway of truth. Our own desires, when they are contrary to scripture, will take us off the pathway. The pull of the world and its ways will try to get of the path and our enemy will be trying to push us off the path.

The scriptures are the God breathed safe pathway. Some may seem to us to be irrelevant and some may appear to us to be unwanted – especially if they speak against the thing(s) we want to do. Here is danger!

Take a passage which can seem to be out of date or irrelevant:

1 Corinthians 11:3-16: 'I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonours his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head, for that is one and the same as if her head was shaved. For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved let her be covered.

For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but a woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman but woman from man.

Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man comes through woman: but all things are from God.

Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonour to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is glory to her, for her hair is given to her for a covering. But if any one seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.'

This passage has caused difficulty in many churches – usually through wrong interpretation! Women are told they must wear a hat in church. That is not what the passage teaches – it teaches that the normal God-given covering for a woman is her long hair.

I have underlined 'because of the angels' for a specific reason. Ultimately our behaviour on earth is being watched by the angels and the fallen angels (demons). It is very important that our behaviour aligns with God's truth – that is where fallen angels went wrong.

The passage is about authority (also underlined) and the God-given scheme of authority is very important to Him. Hence Michael did not bring a reviling accusation against the devil, but said, '*the Lord rebuke you!*' Jude 9 So we too must respect all God-given authority, just as Michael respected the fact that God had given Satan (Lucifer) great authority.

How easy it is for a man to grow his hair long and a woman to cut hers very short – we see it all the time in the world and frequently amongst the brethren in churches. One foot off the pathway!

The passage is not about the culture of the day but it is about God's authority which is particularly relevant to fallen angels. The passage is not irrelevant or out of date.

The further we stray from the narrow way of truth the more at risk we are of all sorts of problems. James put it like this: *'But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death.'* James 1:14-15

Seek after the truth - 1

As Jesus is the truth, and He describes the way as being truth leading to eternal life, therefore it is important to have a good understanding of scripture and to apply it in everyday life. Unfortunately even most of our churches have ignored the scripture and set up their own way of doing things. Meetings are not held in accordance with 1 Corinthians 14, which leads to weakness in the body because the congregation just sit and listen and are not expected to listen to, and contribute as led by, the Spirit.

Priests are appointed individuals often given highly decorated robes following Old Covenant ways which do not apply now - whereas scripture clearly states we are all priests.

Even in some churches and groups women are appointed as elders or as the ruling authority in disobedience to the scripture's very clear teaching. (1 Timothy 2:12-15)

It is all explained away one way or another - weakening the church and leading to increasing irrelevance.

Prayer; 'Holy Spirit please lead me into all truth - more and more.' (Fulfilling John 16:13)

Seek after truth - 2

Scripture constantly urges us to be led by the Spirit – yet it is so easy to live life just by our own desire and our own initiatives. Yet we do not own ourselves, we were bought with a price – so we call Jesus Lord. But if we do not do what the truth of scripture requires, then are we faithful to our Lord?

In this world you will have tribulation

This is Jesus warning to us - there will be all sorts of troubles in the world. But He also said, *'I have overcome the world.'*

'These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.' John 16:33

This saying of Jesus comes just after He has told His disciples that He is leaving them, and that the Holy Spirit will come, as another comforter just like Him, to lead them into all truth.

So where will we find the peace Jesus promised, in a world full of tribulation? Clearly it is in Christ, who is the truth and we are led into truth by the Spirit of truth. Our peace is to be found on the difficult and narrow pathway - that is Jesus, He is the way.

Why do so many suffer loss of all sorts, health, provision, peace etc in this life? Could it be that they have slipped off the pathway of truth, the highway of holiness?

There is always a way back. Paul suffered very greatly whilst in the world. But he found sufficient grace through it all to be able to testify that God always leads us in triumph. Paul, of course, knew the truth better than any of us, as he explains in his writings. – so victory was always available to him.

As we walk on the highway of holiness victory is always available to us also.

Prayer: 'Holy Spirit fill me with more and more love for Jesus.'

Conclusion

The fear of God for believers

No - perfect love casts out all fear. We are not subject to judgement because we have been judged already, found guilty and covered by the blood of the Lamb. The Lord God is our Father and His intentions toward us are all together good. Our human spirit, born again cannot sin - I John 3:9 Our eternal inheritance is certain.

Yes - on our travel along the way we should have a fear of displeasing the Lord by stepping off the pathway of truth. The more we appreciate the holiness of God, the more we will be in awe of Him. Stepping off the pathway exposes us to danger and we are urged to work out our salvation, deliverance from danger, (that is of our body and soul) with fear and trembling.

Let us, who have entered by Jesus, the narrow door, walk in truth along the narrow way- so receiving the promise of 'life' both now as we sojourn as strangers on earth and eternally when we enter into our inheritance - the final destination of the 'way.'

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