

Pettie

# **Close Communion**

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A Sermon Delivered by

**Rev. A. S. Pettie, D. D.**

In the First Baptist  
Church, Shepherds-  
ville, Ky., May 22nd,  
1910.

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# CLOSE COMMUNION

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BY REV. A. S. PETTIE, D. D.

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I will read from the Word of God: “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you; that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:

“And when he had given thanks, he brake it and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me.

“After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

“For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.” I. Cor. 11 :23-26.

I speak tonight, by request, on the subject of communion. The subject is large and important. On it much has been spoken and written. On it much more may be said. But in the time at my

command, I cannot discuss it broadly. I can not discuss it in its relations to, and its bearings upon, other subjects.

Of late years nothing has engendered more cordial dislike of, or more bitter resentment against, Baptists than their practice in the observance of the Lord's Supper. Their practice is called "Close Communion." The word "close" is spoken with a hissing emphasis. Issuing from hostile lips, it has an unpleasant sound. Pulpits denounce Baptists as bigoted, illiberal and selfish. The pews take up the cry, and around the world the unfriendly clamor goes. Have not you been told that Baptists are bigoted, illiberal and selfish? Those who assume that they are models of liberality and unselfishness seem to think that such abuse is in perfect harmony with the broadest charity. But if Baptists speak in defense of their own theory and practice, the cry of "persecution" is raised. "These selfish Baptists are persecuting us." Ahem! ahem!

Some of those who are loudest in their clamor, and most bitter in their denunciations, are sentimentally the descendants of those who in former times fined, whipped and imprisoned Bap-

tists because they would not practice infant baptism. In those days of persecution nobody desired to commune with the poor and suffering Baptists. Where were the advocates of open communion then? But times have changed. Now Baptists are numerous, intelligent, wealthy, highly respectable and very influential. Therefore, many whose sentimental ancestors fined, whipped and imprisoned Baptists are now frantically seeking for Baptist recognition. Times change and men change with them. Some people used to fine, whip, imprison, and burn Baptists. But now they go to the Baptist house a-courting. But I don't like their style of wooing. "Bigoted," "illiberal," and "selfish" are not the words to strike the right spot in the Baptist heart.

There are others who are more kind. They sometimes say: "We like the Baptists, and would be Baptists if that close communion were out of the way. But that is abominable." Such words would seem to indicate that the speakers accept all other Baptist doctrines. If they do, they do not believe in sprinkling or pouring for baptism. They do not believe in infant baptism. They do not believe in the total apostasy of God's children. There are many other doctrines

they do not believe. Is it not strange and very inconsistent for them to have membership in an organization which holds all of these objectionable doctrines, when only one objectionable doctrine is enough to frighten them away from a Baptist church?

But such people appeal to my sympathy. Their prejudice may be great. It cannot be greater than that which dominated my own heart and life in the long ago. I was not born in a Baptist home. I did not grow up under the influence of Baptist teaching. I heard "close communion" denounced. With the impetuous haste of youth, I decided that Baptists were very bad people, and that "close communion" was a sin, stupendous in its enormity, the greatest crime in the catalogue of iniquity. But when I began an earnest investigation of the Scriptures, I quickly discovered that there was no point in the Baptist line of teaching and practice, at which they were more strongly entrenched. My present conviction is that the Baptist position is impregnable. Most gladly would I assist in emancipating others from the bondage of an unholy prejudice.

There are two kinds of communion. They

are "open communion" and "close communion." Open Communion is where people differing in creed and practice meet to eat bread and drink of the fruit of the vine—to observe the Lord's Supper.

Close Communion is where people holding the same doctrines and the same practices meet to observe the Lord's Supper.

Between these there is no room for a third theory, a middle practice. It can not be that both are right. In the very nature of things, one of these practices must be right and the other wrong. Which is Scriptural and right?

Did you ever hear a sermon delivered in advocacy of open communion? If you did, I suspect you were surprised by the absence of all citations from the Scriptures, or by the paucity of such citations. Those who advocate open communion do not find a basis for argument in the Scriptures. Their alleged arguments are little more than frantic appeals to ignorance, prejudice and blind sentimentality. That this is true will appear from a brief review of the so-called arguments commonly used in this service.

Several years ago, by invitation of the Baptist church at Hickory Grove, Graves county,

Ky., I met Rev. J. T. Pender in a public oral discussion of the communion question. Mr. Pender was the affirmant. He was an experienced and able polemic. His first argument for open communion was about as follows: "A man was sick unto death. During his sickness he was converted. He was too sick to be immersed and received into the Baptist church of which his wife was a member. But he desired to commune with his Christian wife before he died. He sent for a Baptist preacher. When the preacher arrived he declined to officiate. His theory would not permit him to officiate. Then a preacher of another denomination, an open communionist, came and gave the bread and wine to the dying man and his wife. How broad and liberal, how beautiful is open communion."

In reply I said: "'The Scriptures teach,' are the opening words of the proposition my friend affirms. The very form of his thesis calls for proof from the Scriptures. That was a pathetic story he told. It was recited well. It almost made me cry. But I don't believe he can give us chapter and verse for it. I don't believe it is in the Bible. Why didn't he read or recite a text from the Scriptures? I suspect his col-



lection of death-bed stories is large. I know he can not present a passage from the word of God which sustains his affirmation. I suppose he should not be censured for using that which he has, or for failing to do that which can not be done.

“My brother reveals another fact. He is not entirely free from the meshes of Romanism. A Roman Catholic priest will celebrate mass for a dying man to prepare him for death. But where is the authority for it? Where is the text which authorizes the carrying the Lord’s Supper to a dying man? You have read the story of the dying thief. He was converted the last day of his life. The Saviour was near. The Lord did not become excited and command the disciples to carry the bread and the wine to the dying thief. There is no intimation that the disciples thought of such a thing. There is no record that such a thing was done or thought of at any time during the life of Christ, or in the apostolic age. It takes a Papist or an Apist to think such a thought or perform such an act. I admire that Baptist preacher. He did right. He did not presume to be so broad and liberal as to do that for which he could find no warrant in the Bi-

ble. What text did the open communionist preacher use to justify his procedure? Brother Pender, what text would you give in justification of his act?"

Another plea for open communion is like this: "It is so beautiful for people of different creeds and practices to meet and observe the Lord's Supper to show their love one for the other."

The answer is easy. Are there not other ways to show their love? But it is said this way is "so beautiful." Well, what of it? I have seen people who were beautiful, and as depraved as beautiful. To say that a thing is beautiful is not a conclusive argument for its morality. Many may, and many do, deem practices beautiful which are unscriptural. I have not read in the Scriptures that the design of the Lord's Supper is to show our love one for the other. He said: "This do in remembrance of me." He repeated it. "In remembrance of me." He also said: "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." The supper is a memorial institution. Its design is to direct our thoughts to the Christ whose body was broken and whose blood was shed for us. In it we are to remember him and "show"

his death. Who said "show our love one for another"?

That reminds me. A man is preparing to leave home for a time. He presents his picture to his wife and says: "Wife, here is my picture. While I am absent, look at it, and as often as you look at it, think of me." She answers: "All right, my dear husband, I will do that. I will look at it often, and as often I will remember my beloved." The husband departs. He is happy, confident that he shall be fondly remembered by his tender wife. But no sooner has he gone over the hill and out of sight of home, than the broad-minded, liberal, great-hearted wife looks upon his picture and thinks of every other man in the neighborhood. That is open communion. Such a wife is too broad and liberal for a sensible husband. The Saviour says: "This do in remembrance of me." Open communions do this to show their love to neighbors and friends. Their broadness and liberality is an insult to the Saviour. Open communion is a perversion of a Christ-given institution. It is licentious in principle and wicked in practice.

Another plea for open communion: "It is the Lord's table. Therefore all of the Lord's chil-

dren, by virtue of the fact that they are his children, have the right to eat and drink at his table.”

Well, that has a plausible sound. But the merest tyro in logic knows that it has no standing as a valid argument. There is a premise lacking. Perhaps it has gone with the lost tail of Halley's comet. It may be that it never existed.

“It is the Lord's table.” Very good. Baptists believe that. But is the new birth the only Scriptural qualification for coming to the Lord's table? Who affirms? Baptists deny.

That reminds me. I have a table. I have a son. He things he has some rights there. I have some rights there. I have the right to prescribe the terms of approach to it. One of the terms is that my son shall wash his face and comb his hair. Anything wrong in that? One cold morning he leaps out of his bed and into his clothes. He walks into the room where other members of the family are eating and begins to climb into a chair. I interpose. “Son, you can not eat. You are not ready for breakfast yet.” He is an open communionist, and therefore quite prepared to ignore my rights. How rapidly he dis-

charges questions at me. "Am I your child? Is this your table? Have I a right to eat at my father's table?" Can any open communionist plead his cause more adroitly? My answer delays not. "You are my child, this is my table, and my child may eat at my table, but he must first wash his face and comb his hair. You must comply with the terms prescribed by your father. You must respect the law of your father's house, in which your father's table is set." Is there anything wrong about that?

If I have the right to prescribe the terms of approach to my table, surely the Lord has the right to prescribe the terms on which his children may come to his table. Who will deny it? In the denial of it is the spirit of rebellion. Has the Lord prescribed the terms of admission to his table? If so, is more than the new birth included?" We shall see as we proceed with the discussion.

Another plea for open communion: "We will commune together in heaven, why not now?" Well, let us see. "We will commune together in heaven." Is that true? Where in the Scriptures is it written? Shall the Lord's table be set in heaven? What text in the Bible teaches

it? The Saviour said: "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." "Till he come." The supper is to be observed during the Lord's absence, while we are separated from him. When we shall be with him in heaven, there will be no need of it. Then we shall have the original and will not need the picture.

But for the sake of the argument, I will grant that the Lord's table shall be set, and the Lord's children shall eat at it in heaven. What then? Will it be open communion? Certainly not. Listen to me. If all people believed the same things and practiced the same things and observed the Lord's Supper together, would not that be close communion? It could not be open communion. Open communion is communion at the Lord's table by people holding conflicting doctrines and practices. Do the saints in heaven hold conflicting doctrines and practices? No sane man believes it. Therefore, there can be no open communion in heaven. Nothing can be plainer. If there is any communion in heaven, it must be close communion. This popular plea for open communion turns against those who make it.

Such are the unscriptural pleas for open communion. Unscriptural? Certainly. Listen to me. For about fifteen years, I was pastor in Mayfield, Ky. While there, I made a very broad and liberal proposition. I repeated it, many times. It was made publicly from my pulpit. I said: "I am like other preachers. I have no money to burn, or to throw at birds. But I desire information. I am willing to pay for it. Open communion is popular. I desire to be popular. If open communion is Scriptural I desire to practice it. I do not ask for forty passages from the Word of God. I do not ask for two. One will suffice. Therefore for one passage from the Scriptures—one command for, or example of, open communion, I will pay twenty-five dollars. This offer is made to every man in Mayfield, in Graves county, in Kentucky, in the United States, in America, in the world. I will do more. I will practice open communion in this church, if the church will consent. If the church will not consent, I will leave it and go where I can follow the teachings of the Word of God. In my youth, I left those I loved most to become a Baptist. Now I am ready to leave the Baptists, if it be necessary, to obey the

Scriptures. But I must have a text, at least one text, to justify my procedure. Who will find it for me?"

This proposition has been made in other cities and in other States. It has been made in written and in public oral discussion. No man has demanded the reward, or claimed to have discovered the text. On the contrary, more than one learned opponent has frankly admitted that there is no such text. Here and now in Shepherdsville, I repeat the offer. Let him find the text, who thinks he can.

Let me recite a little history. In 1901, I was pastor in Columbia, Tenn. The evening of July 7th, I preached in my pulpit a sermon on "Close Communion". I made my oft-repeated offer of twenty-five dollars for one text teaching open communion. Rev. F. J. Tyler, an able and affable Cumberland Presbyterian pastor in the city, made reply to my sermon. His reply was published in the local paper called the *Daily Herald*. In his reply, Bro. Tyler said: "Our dear brother Pettie has offered twenty-five dollars as a reward for a verse in the Bible in favor of open communion. I do not wish the twenty-five dollars, but I do wish that the public should



know something concerning the other side of the question. . . . Let me say furthermore, that it is not so much a question of open or close communion, as it is of exclusive immersion. They stand or fall together. Close communion is the logical sequence of exclusive immersion. Remove the one, and the other goes necessarily.” Bro. Tyler then gives a long quotation from a Baptist author in an effort to show that Baptists did not always practice exclusive immersion. He did not pretend to present the verse for which a reward had been offered.

In my reply published in the *Herald* of the following day, I said: “ ‘Close Communion.’ Under this caption, in yesterday’s *Herald*, my good brother, Rev. F. J. Tyler, has an article. It professes to be a reply to a sermon preached in the Baptist church in this city Sunday evening. I have known Bro. Tyler for several years. . . . He is my friend. . . . But he is unfortunate. He replies to a sermon he did not hear and therefore scarcely touches the sermon delivered in the Baptist pulpit. My theme was ‘Close Communion.’ I did not mention baptism, except in quoting a passage of Scripture. That passage was quoted, not because it mentioned baptism,

but because it contained a reference to communion, the subject under discussion. But Bro. Tyler devotes his space almost entirely to baptism. . . . I suppose the reader has observed that Bro. Tyler does not produce the one verse. If such verse can be given, would not the presentation of it be a very effective way to make the public know something concerning the other side of this question? Until that verse is produced, I shall continue to believe that open communion is something discovered out of the Bible—not in it.”

In his reply in the *Herald* of July 12, Bro. Tyler makes this noble confession: “In regard to the verse demanded by Brother Pettie, I am frank to confess that *I can not give a verse in favor of open communion.*”

I closed this discussion in the *Herald* of July 20, with these words: “As a parting shot, Bro. Tyler fires two questions at me.

“1. Will you deny that there are saved people in the various denominations who do not believe in exclusive immersion, and what you call close communion?

“2. Was not your own father a Methodist . . . and would you have communed with him should

you have had an opportunity to do so? If not, why not?

“To the first question I answer, *No*. But why does my brother ask it? Certainly not for information. He knows what I and all Baptists believe on that point. There are many saved people in the other denominations. Is Brother Tyler pleading for sympathy? I don't quite understand his purpose in this question.

“In answer to the second question I will say: My father and my mother were Methodists and godly people. My father died when I was three years old. Of course, I had no opportunity to meet him at the Lord's table. But I did not commune with my mother. But why this question? . . . Is my Brother Tyler again begging for sympathy? He ought to be able to answer his own question. But I will assist him. Now, Bro. Tyler, if I had communed with my mother, she a Methodist and I a Baptist, that would have been open communion. Well, you being judge, there is no Scripture—not even one verse—for open communion. Then why should I practice it—even with my mother? Bro. Tyler, why will you appeal to a blind prejudice, to unreasoning sentimentality, in favor of a

practice which you admit is not in the Bible? If open communion is not in the Bible, why will you practice it? Why will you censure others for not practicing it?"

I would be pleased to hear an answer to these questions from any man who believes in and practices open communion.

But, is Bro. Tyler's confession justified by the facts in the case? Is it true that the Scriptures contain no text for open communion? A little honest, unprejudiced thinking will convince you that it is so.

There could be no open communion so long as Christ's people were one in doctrine and practice. Open communion is communion between people of different denominations. Therefore open communion could not be until the people of God were divided—until denominations were formed. But, in the days of Christ and the apostles, in the age when the New Testament was written, there were no denominations. Therefore open communion was impossible in the first century. It could not be practiced in New Testament times.

Now, let me read a passage from the word of God, which is so plain that it ought to put an

end to all controversy on this subject. "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper." I. Cor. 11:18-20.

Instead of "This is not to eat the Lord's Supper," the marginal reading is, "Ye can not eat." The Revised Version reads: "It is not possible to eat the Lord's Supper." These Corinthians could eat bread and drink of the fruit of the vine. They could go through with the motions. They could perform. But they could not eat the Lord's Supper. Why? Because there were divisions among them. Listen to me. They were members of one and the same church—the church in the city of Corinth. They did not form several denominations. But they were divided. One said: "I am of Paul"; another, "I am of Cephas," and another, "I am of Apollos." Paul says that with these divisions among them, it was "not possible" for them to eat the Lord's Supper.

Does Paul speak the truth? If so, when one says, "I am of Luther," another, "I am of Calvin," another, "I am of Wesley," etc., how is it possible for them to eat the Lord's Supper? They can meet and eat bread and drink wine. They can meet and perform. But they "can not eat the Lord's Supper." "It is not possible." More. It is wicked to try to do that which the Holy Spirit says "can not" be done. The case is plain. Where there are no divisions, open communion is not possible. Where there are divisions, "it is not possible to eat the Lord's Supper." Nothing can be clearer. According to the Scriptures, there is no place for open communion.

But let us, if only for a moment, look at another text. In the seventeenth chapter of John we have Christ's great intercessory prayer. In it is a petition for the oneness of his people. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me, and the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one

even as we are one." John 17:20-22.

He prays that his disciples may be one. He prays not only for those then with him, but for all disciples of all ages. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." His words are marvelous in their strength. "*Even as we are one.*" There is no confusion in the Godhead. There are no antagonisms between the persons of the Trinity. The Father and the Son are one in doctrine and practice. Therefore the Saviour prays that his disciples may be one in doctrine and practice. "That they may be one even as we are one."

Divisions among the people of God, warring sects with conflicting creeds and practices, are out of harmony with the spirit of this prayer. They are sinful. But if you destroy these sinful divisions you destroy open communion with them. Open communion is not only related to these wicked divisions, but it is sympathetically related to them. It fosters them. It is accessory after the fact. It is wicked.

Those who advocate open communion and profess to practice it are always demanding of Baptists Scripture for the Baptist theory and

practice. The demand is reasonable. But they seem never to think that they are under any obligation to give Scripture for their practice. You may, in your moderation, ask them for only one text. They will not produce it; you can not drive, coax or bribe them to make the attempt. It does seem to me that if Baptists need chapter and verse to justify their practice, open communionists also need a "Thus saith the Lord" to justify their practice. Don't you think so? They should not take offense, if we make demands of them equal to those they make of us.

But *are there Scriptures which teach close communion?* Certainly. There are only two kinds of communion. One is open, and the other is close communion. It is admitted that there is no Scripture for open communion. Therefore it inevitably follows that all Scriptures which teach communion, teach close communion. It must be so.

We will begin at the beginning. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said: Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them,



saying: drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Matt. 26:26-28.

This is the history of the institution of the Lord's Supper. Here for the first time it was observed. Who were present? Who participated in it? From the twentieth verse we learn that "when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve." Whether Judas left the company before the supper was instituted is a matter about which, so far as the present argument is concerned, I am wholly indifferent. Jesus and eleven or twelve of his disciples were present. They were the celebrants. Did they constitute a dozen denominations, representing as many conflicting creeds? You know they did not. They were not part Lutherans, part Presbyterians, part Methodists, part Congregationalists, and part Campbellites. Though I know, I am not now saying what they were. But I do say this: If one of them was a Presbyterian, all were Presbyterians. If one was a Methodist, all were Methodists. In short, what one was, all were. If one believed in immersion, all believed in immersion. If one believed in infant baptism, all did. If one believed in the doctrine

of apostasy, all did. They were one in doctrine. Therefore that was a plain case of close communion. Nothing can be plainer. And Jesus was there authorizing it and taking the leading part in it. Therefore, to speak against close communion is to speak against Christ.

I will give you another text: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." Acts 2:41-42.

This is the record of the second observance of the Supper. Who were engaged in it? Were some of them Lutherans, some Presbyterians, some Episcopalians, some Methodists, some Adventists, and some Campbellites? You know they were not thus divided. What one was, all were. The inspired historian is careful to guard against mistake at this point. He says: "They continued *steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship* and in breaking of bread." Those who broke bread at this communion service "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." The apostles were one in doctrine.

Those at this communion were one in doctrine with the apostles. Another plain case of close communion.

The Scriptures put much and strong emphasis on oneness in doctrine. "Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them." Rom. 16:17.

"If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." II. Thess. 3:14.

"Have no company with him." "Avoid them." Surely these words do not teach open communion. They prohibit it. They teach close communion. Why "have no company with him"? Why "avoid them"? Because of "divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned." Steadfast continuance is the apostles' doctrine is required of those who would commune together at the Lord's table. But here are several religious organizations. One is Presbyterian, one is Methodist, one is Episcopalian, one Campbellite, one Adventist, and one Congregationalist. They differ in doctrine. If one of these is steadfast in the apostles' doctrine, the others are not. This is

obviously true. Of its truth there can be no honest doubt. Therefore, they "can not eat the Lord's Supper" together. When they pretend to do it, they are disobedient. "Have no company with him." "Avoid them."

The Lord has the right to prescribe the terms of admission to his table. This right he has exercised. One of these is self-examination. "Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." I. Cor. 11:28. But this is only one. No difference how often, or how rigidly a man may examine himself, there must be unity of doctrine--credal oneness with those with whom he proposes to commune. One term prescribed by the Lord is not intended to set aside another term, or other terms prescribed by the same Lord. Therefore Baptists teach that, to commune together Scripturally, men must not only examine themselves, but be of "the same faith and order." This is true, no difference what the act, or who the subjects of baptism may be.

I believe in close communion. Some of the reasons for this belief I have placed before you. To me these are conclusive. I have offered a

reward of twenty-five dollars for one text, only one text, which teaches open communion. The oft-repeated offer has failed to procure the coveted text. I have freely given texts which plainly teach what is commonly called close communion. These are easily discovered. For them I ask no reward.

I have spoken plainly. Bible themes demand such treatment. But I have spoken the truth in love. I hate false doctrine. "I hate every false way." But I love people. I love you. I desire that all shall believe the truth, love the truth, and practice the truth. Error can not benefit us in this world. It can not benefit us in the world to come. "Buy the truth and sell it not." "The truth shall make you free." But I must close. God bless you.

# Church Discipline

—BY—

**J. D. Maddox, M. D.**

Secretary Baptist Minister's Aid Society of Kentucky.

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A tract of 47 pages, by Dr. J. D. Maddox, of Owensboro, Ky., came to me this morning. As I was planning a big and busy day's work, I read the preface and first paragraph, intending to take a taste and read it at a more convenient day. But I did not stop till I had read the last word. My judgment is, while the spell is on me, for I have just finished the reading, that it is the best document on the subject that I know anything about. I wish every pastor would take the best Sunday hour and read it, with a little comment, to the church and to the world assembled with it. In the present and general condition of things, it would do more good than any sermon he could preach, and the church and cause is entitled to the best service he can give. Get 'Discipline' before your churches ere they die."—J. B. Moody.

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